CHAPTER 1

What Is True Collaboration?

Gravity is one of the most pervasive forces in the universe. Physicists classify it among the most unique phenomena ever discovered, essential to shaping planets, stars, and solar systems. We recognize the impact of gravity everywhere—its pull on water coursing through riverbeds, its mastery of the wind whistling across sheer mountain slopes, and its ability to hold buildings, cars, and people on Earth's surface.

Gravity's more subtle properties, however, have caused it to be less studied. Gravity is relatively less understood by the scientific community than other forces.[1] When compared with the awesome power of fission, vividly demonstrated in an atomic bomb or an exploding star, gravity works softly, and with a more velvet hand.

Collaboration has shared a similar fate. Like gravity, collaboration is a pervasive force. It lies at the heart of what uniquely shapes teams and organizations. It connects people

1

to the vast power of their own knowledge and shines a light on the purpose of their work and their lives. Collaboration holds the power to link teams with diverse skills and traits, urging them to come together in an aligned way and yielding breakthroughs that can impact hundreds—even millions—of people.

Yet collaboration as a business force remains less visible than others dominating today's headlines. It feels less tangible than gyrations in stock or bond prices, less sexy than deals hammered out in a corporate merger. It doesn't rivet our attention like the jaw-dropping price tag of a hot Internet start-up.

But that is about to change.

In the next decade, as the planet absorbs the impact of a population topping 8 billion, we will see the entry on the global stage of a new, young workforce totaling in the hundreds of millions.[2] As cellular phones and smart technologies come within reach of more young minds in Brazil, Russia, India, Indonesia, China, and Africa, as well as the United States and other developed economies, unprecedented levels of connectivity will exist across the planet.[3] Like a giant pulsing brain, a new kind of collective intelligence will become possible by the end of the decade, redefining how knowledge networks operate and how microcosms of people drive value-creating activity across vast geographies as well as entire organizations. Rather than being an afterthought, *collaboration will underpin virtually every business practice that exists today*.

Rishad Tobaccowala, vice president (VP) of innovation at global media group VivaKi, puts it this way: "Among the top three things organizations must focus on right now are (1) staying relevant, (2) innovating, and (3) attracting and retaining talent. Collaboration is crucial to all three."[4] Greg Cox, president of the third largest network for Dale

Carnegie's vast global leadership training operations, echoes this view, emphasizing that collaboration is a surging phenomenon that will newly balance the skills of the individual with the power of collective action. "The future will not be based on individuals, but on extraordinary combinations of people."[5]

Are *you* ready to collaborate? Do the teams within your organization understand what it means to collaborate? Can you describe how you would harness collaboration to tap the emerging power of what has been termed the "next billion workers," or how you would position collaboration as a driver of value creation in your business? What structures are required to accelerate collaboration and link it to other practices? What barriers to collaboration exist that beg your attention?

This book addresses these questions, revealing the core skills and strategies you can begin using to master "true collaboration." *True collaboration*, a new term that embraces the research revealed throughout *Midnight Lunch*, can unlock the potential that lies not only within yourself but within every team in your organization. True collaboration can revolutionize the culture of your workplace or your community, connecting people through new types of team experiences that create collective knowledge and a commitment to shared purpose.

> Almost all important decisions are now made in teams, either directly or through the need for teams to translate individual decisions into action.
>
> **—*Peter Senge*, The Fifth Discipline**

True collaboration can transform the way you grow as an individual, the way teams in your organization innovate, the way teams connect with customers, and the way value is delivered in your operation both now and for the long term.

IS IT TRUE COLLABORATION, OR IS IT A TEAM?

Part of where we go astray in our basic understanding of collaboration itself lies in our diverse definitions for *team*. At the most basic level, we recognize teams as groups of two or more people, working toward a shared outcome or common goal. But teams seem to be everywhere today. They pervade the world of sports. We see teams operating in local clubs, urban communities, and professional associations. Are they all really functioning the same way?

Part of our confusion surrounding teams also traces to an expanding ability for groups of people to operate remotely from one another. Today, people who don't live or work in the same geographic area can operate as a team by connecting online. Virtual team members can be 3, 30, 300, or even 3,000 miles apart from one another. In fact, a major 2011 study conducted by Forrester Consulting revealed that more than one-third of US companies are using virtual teams, with 40 percent of employees involved in some type of virtual team structure—a percentage expected to rise to 56 percent in the next three years.[6] However, many organizations are finding that distance becomes a relevant—and limiting—factor when team members are separated by more than three time zones, after which extensive use of smart technologies and social networks is needed to mitigate the gap.[7]

With team members operating in so many different environments, *are people actually collaborating?* Are they con-necting in ways that magnify their individual skills? By having a Skype conference with colleagues halfway around the world, is true collaboration being engaged? If I'm using social media, am I collaborating?

And what about committees or task forces? What about new product development teams or accounting groups?

Or the fluid relationships between people in social networks? Do these teams represent true collaboration—or could they?

This book addresses these diverse questions and seeks to create a distinction between what we commonly understand as teamwork and the broader role of true collaboration as a core practice within an organization. It also lays out step by step how you can begin recalibrating your approach to collaboration itself, designing powerful teams that deliver deeper levels of creativity and productivity for the long term.

TEAM A VERSUS TEAM B

To illustrate some of the key differences between teamwork and true collaboration, consider the example of a pair of two-person teams: Team A and Team B. Imagine they each have one member who is 5 feet tall and another who is 6 feet tall. Team A has been tasked with traveling together from one end of a football field to the other in less than 10 minutes. Team A's members respond by simply clasping hands and running side by side from one end zone to the other, easily achieving their goal of reaching the opposite end zone within the allotted time.

Now, imagine that Team B is given the same assignment. But Team B elects to travel the length of the field side by side in what is called a three-legged race. The left leg of one person must be bound to the right leg of the other person. Suddenly, unlike Team A, the members of Team B face a different context for running the length of the field. They must grasp each other's shoulders just to keep their balance. They must determine the best place to bind their legs together so that they can move in unison. Simply making a left-right-left-right running motion doesn't make sense any more. Even the height of the two individuals now becomes a factor in traversing the football field without falling down.

5

The members of Team B must actively talk, strategize, and use trial-and-error methods to move a mere 15 yards.

However, by the time Team B reaches the 50-yard line, they've discovered how to move more efficiently. They've learned how to leverage the resources of both the taller and the shorter team member. Picking up speed with each three-legged stride, Team B streaks to the finish line within the 10-minute time allotment.

What are the differences between how Team A and Team B operated in these two races? The teams each had identical goals—traveling 100 yards in 10 minutes—but they accomplished their objectives in completely different ways.

In Team A, the pair handled their assignment as a task. Each person's role was relatively uncomplicated and straightforward. Team A realized they could complete the challenge of running down the field with little additional thought or strategizing.

But Team B had to engage, to deeply connect, and verbally motivate each other just to make it to the 50-yard line. Although the goal of reaching the opposite end zone was spelled out just as it was for Team A, the specific steps needed to navigate their way to the opposite end zone weren't crystal clear. Team B had to discover the steps, learning as they progressed.

Although Team A indeed functioned as a team, each member "did his or her part" and no more. But Team B truly collaborated. Team B engaged in a discovery learning process that united them in a common, shared experience. Their efforts required motivation and determination. Team B encountered unexpected complexity in shifting the context of their thinking about what it meant to run or walk in a coordinated way, especially when two people of differing heights were bound together. Keeping their common goal in mind as they struggled to determine the best course of action, they

created a unique coherence in their efforts, a kind of alignment that could actually be repeated the next time they had to run a three-legged race or coach someone else on how to do it.

> Collaboration is not the same thing as teamwork. Teamwork is simply doing your part. Collaboration involves leveraging the power of every individual to bring out each other's strengths and differences.
>
> —*Greg Cox, president and chief operating officer at Dale Carnegie, Chicago*

How can we harness the deeper learning generated by the shared experiences we see in Team B? Can this type of learning be developed on a larger scale? How can we engage a handful of people—or even scores of teams working together—in running their own form of the three-legged race? What would be the impact on an entire group of employees equipped with the skill sets to drive true collaboration, all working shoulder to shoulder?

Collaboration has been a tricky beast for organizations to tame. Operating as the "invisible glue" that brings together *discovery learning and performance in an environment of shared experience*, collaboration as a core practice has proved challenging to embrace. More than just "doing your part," Greg Cox, president of Chicago's robust Dale Carnegie training operation, comments that "collaboration involves leveraging each other's strengths and differences" when team members come together.[8]

In a world now absorbing the next billion workers, true collaboration will not be optional. Going forward, understanding how to capture the essence of the exchanges we saw in Team B rather than Team A will serve as the bedrock for the way people come together to innovate, develop new products and services, or design new business models or manufacturing

capabilities. On a crowded planet, the collaboration skills of Team B will also be essential for governments and communities to function effectively.

A unique "superskill," true collaboration pairs the power of discovery learning with diverse relationship-building and leadership skills now gaining new prominence in today's business environment. As you will read further in Chapter 2, following the "global reset" that took place during the Great Recession of 2008, huge forces that operated within discrete domains we once described simply as research and development (R&D), marketing, and strategy are rapidly merging. They are taking new shape in the form of open innovation, customer-led development processes, and "smart" networked feedback mechanisms that move faster than typical annual planning cycles or cumbersome product design cycles. In a global business environment that increasingly values speed and nimble thinking to deliver breakthroughs, true collaboration now represents a superskill that will be fundamental for you and a high percentage of the individuals in your organization to possess. Less visible, and traditionally less valued, skills that marry the talents of the individual with interlocking webs of capability, such as data synthesis, leading and inspiring others, perceiving and communicating progress, and facilitating debate, will surge to the fore. No longer the province of nice to have, the superskill combinations present in true collaboration offer a new backbone for organizations to achieve high-impact results in the digital era.

This book offers insights into how you can inject true collaboration superskills into your operations and your own thinking. In the coming chapters you will learn about a process that leverages the innate creative capacities of the brain for developing context as well as for addressing complexity. You will learn how to leverage qualities that distinguish true collaboration from the more task-driven approaches that often

8

Shared Experience

Discovery
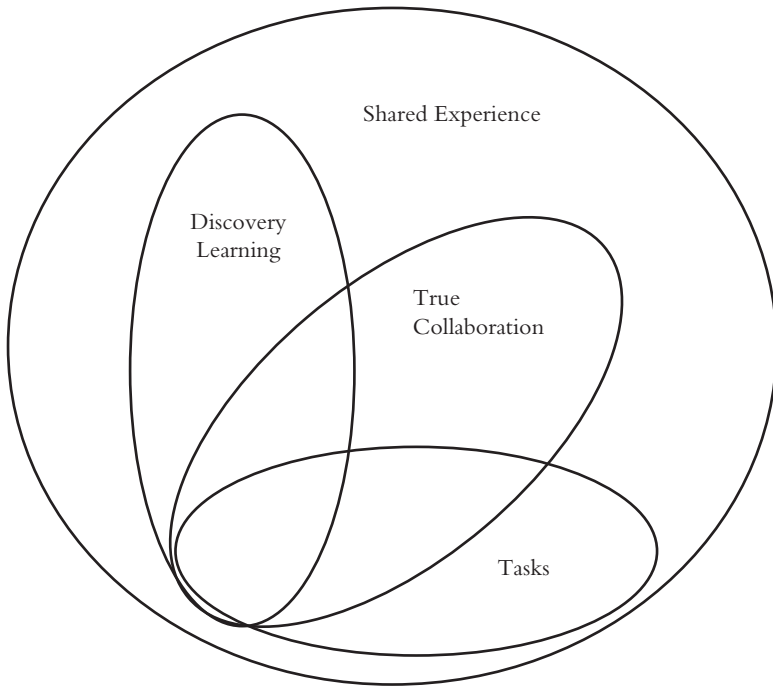Learning

True
Collaboration

Tasks

**Figure 1.1 True Collaboration Is the Nexus between
Discovery Learning and Performance**

Note: True collaboration embraces a broad array of skills that leverage
discovery learning and doing within a context of shared experience.

dominate team efforts. Figure 1.1 offers a visual illustration of
how collaboration relates to discovery learning and shared
experience, moving beyond the mere performance of tasks.
In essence, rather than continuing to function like the mem-
bers of Team A, you'll learn how to function like the members
of Team B. True collaboration embraces:

- A discovery learning mindset versus a pure task orientation
- A belief in anticipating and creating rather merely
  reacting and responding

9

- Presence of inspiration across multiple facets of both individual and team endeavors

- Coherence of purpose

- A dedication to elevating the performance of every team member

- Connections to human and social networks of influence

Do these qualities sound different from the ones valued by your team? Do they draw upon ideas that feel new or seem broader than your current concept of what teamwork embraces?

True collaboration will allow you to reframe qualities that may have characterized many teams you've worked with in the past. It will also help you develop a new understanding for how collaborative groups can become a unique operating force within your enterprise. Whether you are part of a large, tradition-rich company with hierarchical layers or a small entrepreneurial endeavor, whether your organization is public or nonprofit, whether you are serving in an aging governmental body or an entrepreneurial operation still in its formative stages, *Midnight Lunch* offers a step-by-step guide for bringing true collaboration to the center of your efforts.

> Collaboration allows us as individuals to understand something we didn't have the background knowledge to grasp before.
>
> *—Art Fry, 3M Fellow and Technical Scientist,*
> *Inventor of Post-it Notes*

The uniqueness underlying the backbone for true collaboration stems from its source: the world-changing teams of Thomas Alva Edison (1847–1931), one of history's foremost

inventors and innovators. The recipient of an astounding 1,093 US patents and 1,293 international patents, Edison's vast innovation empire commanded an estimated $6.7 billion in market value by 1910, or roughly $100 billion today. Pioneering iconic products and services that we now view as central to the infrastructure of modern life—such as lighting, power, recorded sound, and storage batteries— the value of the markets and industries built on the shoulders of Edison's contributions exceeds an estimated $1 trillion globally.[9]

Consider the value-creation engines within your organization right now. From a standing start, could it drive billions of dollars in revenue annually . . . and continue to do so for 40 years? Does it have a backbone like Edison's true collaboration process to sustain it?

While Sergey Brin and Larry Page of Google along with leaders of Global 50 companies such as Apple would no doubt answer "yes" to this question, consider that Edison managed to drive billions of dollars in market value with fewer people and fewer resources than a Global 50 operation. A flat organization with an employee base that, at its height, numbered a few thousand rather than tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands, Edison's ability to deliver value has much to teach us about collaboration and value creation in an era when resource constraints represent the norm for many organizations, both public and nonprofit.

Like the connective tissue in the human body, Edison's true collaboration methods gave backbone, sinews, muscles, and tendons to his world-changing innovation process. Today, we can examine this connective tissue for timeless, value-driving approaches that bring new perspective to the growth and innovation efforts we seek in our digital world. With true collaboration as a force within your enterprise, you can build new capacity for capturing productivity growth from

the next billion workers as well as achieve many other goals you envision for your organization.

THOMAS EDISON MASTERED COLLABORATION AS A FORCE FOR SUCCESS

When you call Thomas Edison to mind, what mental image do you see? A man in a lab coat? An inventor toiling away, surrounded by disassembled machine parts and half-read books? An entrepreneurial guy who worked by himself? *Mindset* author and psychologist Dr. Carol Dweck, an expert on the role of images and their impact on our thought patterns, comments on the reaction she frequently gets when asking audiences this question: "What comes to mind when you think about Thomas Edison? What is he doing?" The standard response Dweck receives is revealing:[10]

> He's in New Jersey. He's standing in a white coat in a lab-type room. He's leaning over a light bulb. Suddenly, it works! . . . He's kind of a reclusive guy who likes to tinker on his own.

And yet, contrary to the perceptions we commonly hold of Thomas Edison, he was not a lone wolf inventor. Dr. Paul Israel, the world's leading expert on Thomas Edison today and director of *The Thomas A. Edison Papers* archives at Rutgers University, comments, "From the earliest days of his inventing endeavors, Edison worked collaboratively with others. Even before he became a world famous inventor through his achievements at the Menlo Park laboratory, Edison sought out like-minded colleagues who could aid him with materials, prototyping, and the invention process itself."[11] Edison fostered a spirit of true collaboration among the prototypers

12

and machinists he sought out in his young adult years as a budding telegrapher and inventor. Throughout his career, he carried the belief that working in teams magnified the skills of each member, yielding results that exceeded the individual capabilities of any single contributor.

Edison held wide-ranging passions that surfaced early in life, and remained with him for decades. Following a few frustrating months of traditional schooling, young Thomas's mother, Nancy—a retired schoolteacher—allowed Edison to indulge his passions by homeschooling him for several years. His love for chemistry, mathematics, physics, telegraphy, the building of small motors, and the design of motorized equipment were fostered at a young age, ultimately spurring Edison to construct a large, independent laboratory—the storied Menlo Park, New Jersey, facility—in 1876. Israel notes that, via this world-changing facility, Edison "grafts an electrical and chemical laboratory onto a machine shop . . . creating a new kind of invention institution."[12] What Edison dubbed an invention factory, today we know as the world's first managed research and development facility.

During a brief stint as a Western Union employee, various managers created hurdles for Edison in regard to his telegraph inventing efforts. Seeking a freer environment for developing his ideas, Edison's Menlo Park lab enabled him to bring teams of skilled workers together in a collegial environment with few hierarchies and restrictions, encouraging small groups of employees to move freely from area to area devising products and prototypes spawned by Edison and his teammates. Figure 1.2 shows Edison surrounded by several of his Menlo Park colleagues. Although Edison generally served as the catalyst and primary driver of these inventing efforts, his small teams at Menlo Park yielded dozens of individuals who rose to become masters of the collaboration and innovation philosophies Edison modeled. A networked community where communication

13

Figure 1.2 Edison, Seated at Center Holding a Hat, Developed a Highly Collaborative Culture at His Menlo Park Laboratory

Source: National Park Service, Edison National Historic Site.

flowed with great regularity through frequent verbal exchanges as well as notebook sharing across teams, *Menlo Park operated as a collaborative ecosystem with few equals.*

The collegial environment of the Menlo Park lab ultimately became a petri dish for an even larger-scale vision Edison held for the scope of research and development itself. In 1887, Edison designed a three-story laboratory at West Orange, New Jersey, but also added extensive manufacturing capabilities clustered on a multiacre campus. At West Orange, Edison also built specialized outbuildings dedicated to specific forms of research, each within walking distance of the large, primary laboratory. The three-story laboratory combined machine-making equipment alongside small, no-frills offices where employees could

14

gather to work in solitude or to meet jointly for experimenta-tion. Edison also dedicated portions of this larger central facility to a massive library that housed 10,000 volumes, making Edison's West Orange collection one of the top five largest libraries in the world at the turn of the century. Edison's vision for true collaboration at West Orange uniquely combined a discovery learning environment with the resources needed for prototyping, scale testing, and then launching new prod-ucts and services. Embracing a workforce drawn from diverse disciplines, "Edison recognized the importance of placing Ph.D. chemists and trained engineers alongside machinists and fellow inventors to realize his creations" inside this huge industrial laboratory complex.[13]

Importantly, not only did Edison demonstrate a penchant for collaborative engagement of teams within his laboratories, he brought true collaboration principles to many of the new companies he founded. A global thinker and businessman, one of Edison's most famous collaborative endeavors—the formation of the Edison General Electric Company—remains a thriving organization more than 125 years later. Now known simply as GE, the company ranks as one of the top 50 largest public companies in the world. Edison ultimately founded more than 200 domestic and international compa-nies during his lifetime, many specifically designed to man-ufacture his inventions. His collaborative efforts in research and development yielded dozens of commercially successful products for businesses and consumers.

> The Edison laboratory worked as a collaborative organiza-tion. Laboratory employees were assigned to work on many projects while Edison supervised and involved himself, sometimes intensively, sometimes at arm's length. Ultimately, Edison was the guiding force for the fruits of his laboratory.
>
> **—Mary Bellis, science writer and historian**

15

Decades ahead of his time, in an age when most Industrial era companies were creating layers of supervisors and clerks, Edison instead built flat organizations and flat teams. Eschewing layers of management titles or fancy corner offices, Edison valued a combination of discovery learning and hands-on engagement as a means to train workers in a broad array of skills and disciplines. As you will read in more detail in Chapters 3 through 6, the depth and diversity of the collaborative project work he offered enabled Edison to attract, and cross-train, a rich talent pool. In a very real way, the underpinnings of Edison's true collaboration approach served as the backbone to sustaining his innovation success.

Offering insights that can inform our modern notions of talent deployment, team design, employee engagement, and approaches to project complexity, Edison's collaboration practices offer a framework for how organizations today can drive value through flatter, more streamlined structures now gaining traction in the digital age.

In addition to its reliance on flat team structure, another distinguishing feature of Edison's true collaboration approach lies in its emphasis on discovery learning, an approach that galvanizes common goals and shared purpose. Decades later, we recognize Edison's zest for discovery learning in the passion of leaders like Bill Gates, who created software that could unlock the vast potential of computers, and Steve Jobs, who sought to discover new ways for people to relate to technology. Like these modern-day innovators, Edison, in his time, unleashed in his workers the power of discovery learning to yield new knowledge and new processes. Tackling meaty challenges that held potential to touch the lives of millions, Edison awakened in his teams a thirst to dare something bold, the fruits of which still resonate in our world today.

Edison's Legacy: The Fruits of True Collaboration

The world's first document duplication technology

The world's first phonograph and record

The first practical incandescent electric light

The world's first central power station

The world's first comprehensive system for distributing electrical power

The world's first movie studio

The world's first motion picture camera

The world's first motion picture projector

The world's first films

The first commercially viable fluoroscope

The world's first alkaline storage battery

As the next billion workers transform our understanding of the nature of organizations themselves, we can draw upon Edison's bold collaboration methods in modern times, contemporizing his approaches for the twenty-first century.

TRACING EDISON'S COLLABORATION BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Although we do not have specific statements or individual documents describing Edison's collaboration philosophies, his views on collaboration are widely evidenced in rich archives tracking Edison's personal, scientific, and business activities. A treasure trove of information about Edison's life and work is publicly available through the Edison National Historic

17

Park at West Orange, as well as *The Thomas A. Edison Papers* archives at Rutgers University. Through these records, it's possible to view thousands of Edison's notebooks, his business correspondence, patent documents, court testimonies, personal letters, and other historical papers, together exceeding 5 million pages—enough to afford a lifetime of reading. Detailed records of Edison's invention efforts log the extensive experiments he undertook with colleagues in his laboratories over more than 50 years. It is even possible to trace the royalty payments Edison shared with colleagues appearing on dozens of his patents, as well as profit sharing with laboratory employees, a practice well ahead of its time in the late 1800s. Frequent shoulder-to-shoulder gatherings between Edison and his employees reveal a unique and uncommon commitment to collaboration that can refresh our modern view.

EDISON'S FOUR PHASES OF TRUE COLLABORATION

Unlike what Doblin Group chief executive officer (CEO) Larry Keeley calls the *bumper sticker practice* of collaboration—simply sharing facts or making task assignments within a team—Edison viewed true collaboration as a value creation continuum. He saw it as an ongoing, holistic practice rather than a linear, stop-start process. It embraced both the uniqueness of the people who engaged in Edison's team efforts as well as their deeper, shared experience in laboring toward a common purpose. True collaboration was nourished by the presence of diverse physical environments—some open and flexible, such as bare-bones offices with no equipment, and some highly structured and sophisticated, such as Edison's machine shops. Whether operating on a massive scale by joining teams together or simply working

18

with small clustered cadres of workers, *Edison organized his true collaboration endeavors with the recognition that complexity was a norm that all employees needed to understand and nimbly address.* This held true for interaction between Edison's workers with partners operating beyond the walls of the laboratory as well, such as supplier teams and other external parties.

If one were to find a single notebook entry capturing Edison's definition of true collaboration, I believe it would read something like this:

> Applying discovery learning within a context of complexity, inspired by a common goal or a shared purpose.

Vastly different from Webster's rather bland definition of collaboration, which reads simply, "The act or process of collaborating," Edison's definition colors collaboration with a much brighter palette. Operating within a framework that recognized collaboration as a continuous force operating within an environment of complex interactions, Edison created a fluid yet phased process that combined discovery learning with hands-on, practical applications. True collaboration for Edison operated like an invisible glue that fused learning, insight, purpose, complexity, and results together in one continuous effort. This fusion offers a unique mélange we can leverage in establishing true collaboration in teams today.

Edison's true collaboration process is composed of four phases:

Phase 1: Capacity

Phase 2: Context

Phase 3: Coherence

Phase 4: Complexity

19

These four facets of true collaboration are structured as successive and overlapping building blocks, with Phase 1 feeding into Phase 2, Phase 2 feeding into Phase 3, and Phase 3 feeding into Phase 4. All the processes within each phase are designed to link together, becoming an intertwined and self-referencing system. Unique to Edison's belief that individuals served as core linchpins for collaboration success, emphasis is placed on the contributions of each team member as a point of magnification and multiplication of the team's joint efforts. Designed to activate the innate creativity Edison believed was hardwired into the human brain, an individual's capacities for breakthrough problem solving and "out of the box thinking" expanded through the very act of true collaboration itself.

The four phases within Edison's collaborative approach also allowed teams to iterate back and forth between steps, reworking any parts that required more intense focus as progress was made. When Phase 4 was reached, initiatives either advanced forward to completion, connected with related initiatives under way in other teams, or served as the seeds for an entirely new project. Some, if they were unable to deliver short- or long-term value, were shelved.

Explored in depth in Chapters 3 through 6, each of Edison's four phases of true collaboration have two parts. The phases and their components can be summarized as follows, with a core question serving as the launching point for the exploration of each phase:

Capacity: How do we create the foundation for true collaboration to flourish?

Phase 1—Capacity: Select small, diverse teams of two to eight people who will thrive in an environment of discovery learning and collegiality.

20

Part i, Engage diversity: Formulate a team representing a meaningful cross-section of expertise, thought styles, and backgrounds, maximizing the depth of perspective available to the team as a whole and expanding the range of discovery learning experiences for each member.

Part ii, Assemble small teams: Build teams ranging from two to eight people, fostering a small-group experience characterized by nimble communication and genuine collegiality.

Context: How can our collaboration team reframe the problem at hand, driving the greatest range of creativity and breakthrough solutions?

Phase 2—Context: Focus the outlook of the team toward development of new context that broadly frames the problem or challenge under consideration. Use a combination of individual learning plus hands-on activities to drive perspectives for potential solutions.

Part i, Solo meld: Each individual prepares for true collaboration outside of team meetings by engaging in a discovery learning process which includes questioning existing assumptions, reading broadly, and using analogies to spur new connections. Individuals prepare insights without locking down on any specific idea or direction.

Part ii, Group meld: The team comes together as a group, discussing insights on the problem at hand based on their Solo meld efforts, then reframing and morphing ideas within a broader, expansive context as team sessions progress. The team experiments with a range of solutions, developing rough prototypes, including stories as a form of narrative prototype. Group meld

21

yields new insights that multiply results beyond the mere sum of each individual's efforts.

Coherence: Can the collaboration team stay the course and continue forward despite disagreements?

Phase 3—Coherence: Maintain collaboration momentum, creating frameworks for progress through inspiration and inspirational leadership even though disagreements may exist. Newly discover, or reemphasize, the shared purpose that binds the team together.

Part i, Presence of inspirational and emergent leaders: Members collectively inspire one another when gnawing feelings of negativity or doubt arise. The team creates coherence by engaging in a common, positive purpose, elevating the performance of each member. An inspirational leader may already be present, but others can emerge.

Part ii, Communication of progress toward shared goals and purpose: Team members must feel that progress toward shared goals is taking place, even if this comes in the form of small wins. Shared goals must be realized for internal team members as well as external partners to align around project-related efforts. All team members and partners must develop an ability to handle conflict.

Complexity: How can our collaboration team leverage internal and external networked resources nimbly and with speed?

Phase 4—Complexity: Equip and reskill teams to implement new ideas or new solutions using internally and externally networked resources, rapidly accessing or managing complex data streams the team must navigate.

22

Leave a footprint that contributes to a broader collective intelligence.

Part i, Organize for complexity through development of smart layers: Identify what types of internal and external complexity have greatest impact on your team, organizing in fluid patterns that allow you to adapt to rapidly shifting conditions. Reduce dependence on hierarchies by building "smart layers" that expand the reach of your decisions, creating virtual and social networks of influence pushing beyond the boundaries of your team.

Part ii, Footprint your team's collective intelligence: Consider the work of your team a knowledge asset, a kind of collective intelligence that links to a broader realm of meaning and purpose. Create a unique footprint for your endeavors that other teams can follow using notebooks, videos, sound recordings, prototypes, stories, and other media to capture the heart and soul of your project.

Within the four phases of capacity, context, coherence, and complexity lies the invisible glue that linked Edison's true collaboration practices to the success of his innovation empire. Without the coherence and alignment created through true collaboration, it's likely that Edison's innovation efforts would have been scattered like beautiful bones that lacked a skeletal frame. Figure 1.3 reveals a visual framework for the interconnection between the four phases.

Regardless of how your own true collaboration effort may originate, it's crucial that as many facets as possible within each of the four phases are engaged to prevent costly project breakdowns. Dr. Jean Egmon, executive director of the Ford Center for Global Citizenship at Northwestern University, and past director of the Complexity in Action Network, notes the

23

Project completion
or
launch

Complexity — Phase 4

Coherence — Phase 3

Context — Phase 2

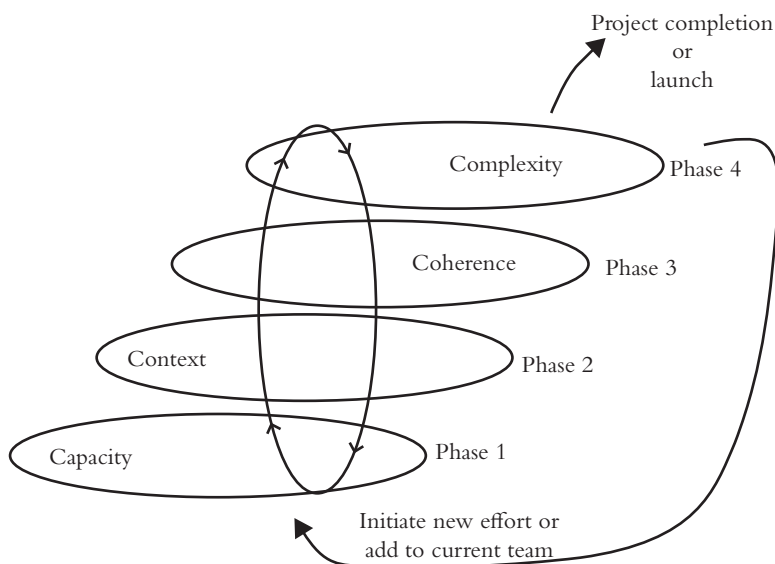Capacity — Phase 1

Initiate new effort or
add to current team

**Figure 1.3 Thomas Edison's Four Phases of
True Collaboration**

Note: Thomas Edison's comprehensive approach to collaboration
embraced four interlocking phases.

seduction of fast-tracking true collaboration by shortcutting steps. Egmon warns, "Skipping steps can come back and blind-side you. If you have a group tasked with complex challenges, the temptation can be to just start in Phase 4 and proceed without a deeper understanding of the problem itself. That can be a recipe for failure. Ensure that the entire team has developed a thorough grasp of the context for the challenge while also setting out its goals. Engaging in all four phases is crucial."[14]

Chapters 3 through 6 reveal the nature and structure of each true collaboration phase, using historical examples from Edison's era as well as modern-day illustrations from leading companies such as Apple, Intel, Amazon, Facebook, Procter & Gamble, W. L. Gore, Ford, Emerson, Whirlpool, and 3M. You'll read how true collaboration efforts within these

24

organizations are driving inspirational and emergent leadership, shifting workplace structures, driving value creation, and embracing social networks as well as other unique forms of Metalogue. The applications you find will accelerate your own collaboration success.

Midnight Lunch also offers examples of how nonprofit and government operations can increase the power of their value creation efforts through true collaboration, with applications from the Mayo Clinic and the pioneering Village of Oak Park, Illinois. Harnessing the power of true collaboration in resource-constrained environments offers a range of insights for your team efforts.

Hands-on exercises are included for each of Edison's four phases, offering you a chance to begin practicing many of the skills you'll read about in the coming chapters. Creative ideas for gaining experience with each phase are included at the end of Chapters 3, 4, and 5 and are embedded directly in the body of Chapter 6. As Edison would desire, the structural design of each phase is also depicted visually through illustrations at the end of these same chapters.

TRUE COLLABORATION FOSTERS A GROWTH MINDSET: BALANCING LEARNING AND PERFORMANCE

Importantly, the discovery learning and value creation continuum that Edison envisioned in his four-phase collaboration process is not applicable to every single endeavor a team undertakes. As noted by Herminia Ibarra and Morten T. Hansen in their recent research on collaboration, "Once leaders start getting employees to collaborate, they face a different problem: overdoing it. Too often people try to collaborate on everything and wind up in endless meetings, debating

25

ideas and struggling to find consensus. They can't reach decisions and execute quickly. Collaboration becomes not the oil greasing the wheel but the sand grinding it to a halt."[15]

It's a reality that some projects require raw implementation. Sometimes all the steps for completing a process have been fully laid out. Roles for individual team members have been pre-defined, and the process for achieving an outcome is already well delineated. In such instances, true collaboration may not offer the best approach. In Edison's operations, for example, task-driven functions such as shipping or distribution typically were not engaged in true collaboration efforts the way that laboratory and manufacturing operations were. Here are a few examples of task-based efforts where a discovery learning approach may not prove valuable to the results desired:

- Developing monthly or quarterly reports for your group or division
- Assisting customers with service requests that must be handled immediately
- Coordinating distribution of information packets for a sales conference
- Conducting annual contract negotiations with current suppliers
- Monitoring results from digital campaigns supporting a new product launch
- Identifying the products or services released by competitors in the past year

Initiatives like these often rely on performance-driven objectives, where individuals or teams are assessed on how quickly and effectively they complete a set of tasks. Much as

Team A simply joined hands and ran across the finish line without feeling a need to give the assignment a lot of extra thought, task-based efforts generally place low emphasis on broader learning objectives. The rapid and effective fulfillment of the task remains primary.

However, as Dr. Carol Dweck notes in *Mindset, sometimes organizations can become too reliant on task-driven efforts*. They forget that employee engagement today is increasingly driven by new learning employees can leverage to expand expertise both within their current position and within future positions, even ones that may entail working for other employers years down the road.

The danger in relying too heavily on task-driven structures is that *most people make trade-offs between performance goals and learning goals*. Dweck indicates that "when performance goals dominate an environment, people are motivated to show others that they have a valued attribute, such as intelligence or leadership. When learning goals dominate, they are motivated to *develop* the attribute they learn. Performance goals . . . induce people to favor tasks that will make them look good over tasks that will help them learn."[16]

If your team efforts consistently skew toward task-driven activities, you may be engendering what Dweck calls a fixed mindset, a collection of beliefs that holds your focus on the status quo. Dangerous for employers and employees alike, the fixed mindset fails to see the world as a continuum of changes. Instead, the processes around us are viewed as linear, stop-start functions. The fixed mindset is often unable to respond to fluid situations, where data may be incomplete and no clear direction is provided. The bearers of a fixed mindset are considerably hobbled in a fast-moving environment like the one we are living in today, where change occurs constantly—and new learning must flow along with it.

> Thomas Edison not only had a growth mindset, he could think divergently. He could put together unusual combinations of things, creating patterns that others frequently didn't recognize. Often, individuals who excel at collaboration are not only able to see modifications or improvements in something that already exists, they can generate ideas that are unique and unusual, developing breakthrough concepts which have never existed before.
>
> —*Dr. Jacqueline Byrd, codeveloper, Creatrix; author of* **The Innovation Equation**

In contrast, embracing a learning-based approach to your work, as Edison did, yields what Dweck describes as a growth mindset. Aligned with Edison's practice of true collaboration, a growth mindset fosters an ability to shift the context of your thinking and adapt to new sequences or patterns. The growth mindset embraces an attitude of "I don't know every step in advance," recognizing that discovery learning is essential to mastering complexity and challenge—while also delivering results. By embracing a growth mindset, you can most fully realize the fruits of true collaboration.

Here is a brief illustration of how you can begin making the shift from what may be a fixed mindset toward a growth mindset, using collaboration as a propelling force. This quick exercise helps frame what it means to move from a pure task-driven, performance-based orientation to one that also embraces discovery learning in your project results.

If we were to reexamine the same six task-driven activities listed earlier but place them in a context that includes discovery, we could begin expanding the range of options available to fulfill the tasks themselves while also driving new learning. Like Team B did in running a three-legged race to fulfill its assignment earlier in the chapter, we could look at the six tasks listed in the previous list from a different

28

angle, *newly reframing each item to engage learning and a growth mindset that actually delivers not only a desired result but knowledge to the team.* Here is one way to reframe the six performance-based tasks, placing them in a true collaboration framework:

1. Identify a distribution mechanism for releasing quarterly results, allowing more rapid access to data by internal and external stakeholders.

2. Identify an approach that allows more service representatives to knowledgeably assist customers with urgent requests.

3. Create a method for delivering sales conference content both live as well as digitally.

4. Determine what factors may be causing delays in annual contract negotiations.

5. Identify how a particular target audience prefers to receive digital communications for new products or services.

6. Identify factors that could vault a new product or service from your organization ahead of the competitive field.

Can you see the difference? The task orientation of the first list has been shifted to engage a discovery learning orientation. This second list of actions broadens the scope of collaborative activity compared with the first one, allowing for the *development of new knowledge versus mere completion of tasks.* Just as Team B fulfilled its objective of crossing the finish line in less than 10 minutes, it also learned a new web of skills. When thinking about how you can build learning-related activity into your efforts, performance-driven activity does not have to be excluded. As you think about how and where

29

to engage true collaboration in your team's endeavors using the four-phase process described in *Midnight Lunch*, consider how your project work can begin cultivating a growth mindset rather than a task-driven, fixed mindset.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 shed light on the interlocking lattice of benefits that flow from bringing a learning orientation to individuals and teams through Edison's true collaboration approach. Jay Scherer, managing partner for global executive development firm BPI Group North America, recommends these initial questions for examining how discovery learning can be balanced with performance requirements in a collaboration effort:

- Why is it valuable to bring a discovery learning approach alongside a task or performance-based approach for this initiative?
- What benefits will my group derive from undertaking a discovery learning effort that engages true collaboration?
- How does discovery learning improve the ability of the team overall, or individuals on the team, to also think strategically about their challenge?
- What expanded roles can individuals who participate in true collaboration efforts play in our organization over time?
- How can results of the team's learning efforts help deliver revenue or profit goals?
- Does this true collaboration endeavor transform our ability to compete?

In considering these questions, Scherer notes, "Leaders need to recognize that learning objectives can provide a straight line between the individual's goals and the

30

performance goals of the organization. Learning goals and performance goals are symbiotic, and need to be set up that way. One set of goals does not have to operate at the expense of the other."[17]

Here's what an individual can ask when thinking about true collaboration and its contribution to a growth mindset as well as learning objectives:

1. What new skill sets will engaging in a true collaboration effort offer me?

2. Will discovery learning lead to new knowledge that can positively impact my team's results?

3. How can a true collaboration endeavor impact my own current knowledge or open pathways to an entirely new mode of operating or thinking?

4. What is the contribution of a learning-driven effort to my sense of purpose?

5. Do I see a connection between the learning efforts I'd like to pursue and my performance objectives?

As you read further in *Midnight Lunch*, begin jotting down similar questions you can ask to reframe your own thinking—or your team's thinking—regarding learning versus performance. Think about whether you currently operate with a growth mindset, or if you may be locked into a fixed mindset. Consider teams you've been part of in the past, perhaps task forces, committees, or community projects, where the team did not fulfill its full potential. Was discovery learning absent? Did the members of the team line up around tasks rather than collaborating? If you are undertaking a new effort, use the five questions noted above as well as insights from the upcoming chapters to sew discovery learning into your approach. Part of the power Edison recognized in collaboration was its

31

ability to balance experiential forms of learning with tangible performance outcomes.

TRUE COLLABORATION IS A SUPERSKILL THAT BUILDS A NEW TYPE OF KNOWLEDGE ASSET

For Edison, not only did true collaboration create a unique connection between learning and practical results, it served as a superskill—a networked mechanism linking webs of crucial capabilities we often describe as soft skills. Collaboration as a superskill became equally as important in Edison's operations as areas of functional expertise, like proficiency in mathematics, chemistry, or a deep understanding of the scientific method. Edison's teams, valued the underlying web of soft skills that collaboration embraced, including intangible, tough-to-measure capacities such as seeing problems from the vantage point of a different discipline, being willing to question facts, inspiring others to go beyond their known capabilities, and navigating conflict productively. Almost impossible to teach in a classroom setting, these superskills became embedded in Edison's workforce through the hands-on, experiential nature of true collaboration itself. Explored in more depth in Chapters 3 through 6, Table 1.1 shows a few examples of how diverse soft skills will emerge through Edison's process of shared team learning and group experience.

The interlocking network of soft skills yielded by the four phases of collaboration became a signature unique to Edison's laboratory. Positioning collaboration as a superskill allowed Edison to adaptively combine and recombine an agile workforce that had a common denominator in its ability to drive inspiration across teams, ask new questions, and approach challenges from diverse angles. *Edison viewed the presence of*

32

Table 1.1 Interlocking Web of Soft Skills in True Collaboration

Phase 1: Capacity	• Seeing a challenge through the eyes of another discipline • Creating collegiality
Phase 2: Context	• Developing new context for framing a problem • Being willing to question facts and test creative hypotheses
Phase 3: Coherence	• Inspiring others to go beyond their perceived limitations • Navigating conflict productively
Phase 4: Complexity	• Recognizing how complexity impacts team effectiveness • Capturing the collective intelligence of a team

these superskills as a unique type of knowledge asset that could be regenerated over and over again with each team combination he created. Through his true collaboration process, he could drive the presence of these soft skills, whose value no amount of functional expertise could replace.

"Knowledge assets don't show up on balance sheets or financial statements," says Kent Barnett, CEO at KnowledgeAdvisors, whose research estimates that knowledge assets held within the human capital of an organization represent 1.5 times to 2.0 times the value of the fixed assets it owns. "Knowledge assets are intangible, but they are crucial to driving growth."[18] Edison recognized that the knowledge assets of his organization flowed from the support his true collaboration process provided to his innovation efforts.

Leaders who have scratched their heads over how to bring a deep yet relevant array of soft skills to their workers can

now, finally, turn to the superskills of true collaboration as a foundation. By establishing a collaborative work environment within his culture, Edison intuitively devised a mechanism that gave rise to a skill-embedding process that enhanced the competitiveness of his workforce—one that is translatable to employees today.

> We see the world of work moving from control to collaboration. An orientation to collaboration will in the future mark the difference between successful and unsuccessful companies. This "mega-change" is driven by shifts in generational attitudes and a rise in workforce diversity, as well as technology like smart devices and social media. Everyone's got a global playing field now.
>
> *—Jay Scherer, managing partner,*
> *BPI Group North America*

As Rishad Tobaccowala of VivaKi noted earlier, thriving in the global economy means that collaboration must be present in everything from innovation, to hiring and retaining skilled employees, to staying relevant. Workers and leaders alike need to cultivate a growth mindset, recognizing how new learning can be applied to the constantly shifting environment characterizing today's business climate. With the impending arrival of the next billion workers, the magnitude of the shift organizations as well as individuals, represents a "megachange"—a total recalibration of thinking that steps away from the control-based structures spawned by the Industrial Revolution toward collaborative structures that can ensure speed and competitiveness in the digital era. Edison's four phases of true collaboration offer unique insights into how we can begin the recalibration process crucial to the success of every organization and employee today.[19]

34