

HOT: the three levels of cooperation that every manager should master

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The HOT model shows that sustainable cooperation relies on three complementary levels: human, organizational, and technological. An effective manager learns to diagnose the right level of action before adding a tool, ritual, or process.

Strengthening cooperation is not about adding a tool or a meeting. A team cooperates sustainably when three levels are supported: the quality of human relationships, the clarity of the organization, and the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms.

THE HOT MODEL

H for human, **O** for organizational, **T** for technological. None of these levels suffice on its own. Cooperation appears when they are strong enough and coherent with each other.

Cooperation cannot be decreed

In many organizations, collaboration is presented as a behavioral expectation. Teams are asked to better share information, work more cross-functionally, and help each other more. Then a new tool is installed, an additional ritual, or a matrix organization.

These decisions can improve collective functioning, but they do not alone create cooperation. A Teams channel does not make one want to respond to a colleague. A weekly meeting does not resolve a conflict of responsibilities. A reorganization does not automatically create trust between people who know each other little.

Take an IT services company where Business Managers and recruiters work on the same needs. The company can deploy an efficient ATS, create a daily check-in, and formalize a transmission process. If each considers that the other slows down their work or protects their own area, information will remain partial and decisions will be avoided.

The problem does not necessarily come from the tool or the process. It comes from the level on which the organization tries to act. Before choosing a solution, it is necessary to identify what really prevents people from working together.

H for human: the desire to team up

The human level is based on respect, trust, and acceptance of differences. It determines how collaborators interpret each other's intentions, dare to ask for help, and agree to spend time on a subject that is not strictly within their individual goals.

In a team where trust exists, a Business Manager can say they do not master a sector and ask a colleague's opinion without fear of being judged. A recruiter can point out that a need is poorly qualified without their remark being perceived as a refusal to search. A manager can acknowledge a decision error without undermining their authority.

Conversely, when the relationship is degraded, every interaction becomes defensive. The Business Manager passes on minimal needs to avoid questions. The recruiter protects their time by asking for additional criteria. Everyone can formally respect the process while cooperating as little as possible.

Trust does not mean that everyone must be friends. It means that disagreements can be expressed, commitments have value, and mistakes are not immediately used against the one who acknowledges them.

THE FIRST TEST

A team begins to cooperate when its members can say, "I don't know," "I disagree," or "I need your help" without fearing losing their legitimacy.

Informal relationships are not wasted time

Human bonds rarely build during production meetings alone. They also arise in informal exchanges, lunches, coffee breaks, and moments where one discovers a colleague's way of thinking beyond their function.

These moments are sometimes suspected of diverting teams from their objectives. Yet they create mutual understanding that speeds up work later. A recruiter who understands a Business Manager's business constraints will know when to alert them quickly. A BM who knows the recruiting difficulties will formulate a more actionable need and avoid promising the client an unrealistic timeline.

Personal connection also creates a reserve of goodwill. When an emergency arises, one is more willing to step aside for someone whose commitment is known and with whom a balanced relationship has already been built.

The manager does not have to artificially organize friendship. They must avoid removing all spaces where people can get to know each other. A team that only meets to comment on indicators often reduces its relationships to the pressure associated with those indicators.

O for organizational: knowing who decides and who is accountable for what

The quality of relationships does not indefinitely compensate for a fuzzy organization. Collaborators can genuinely appreciate each other and lose a lot of energy because roles, responsibilities, and decision areas remain ambiguous.

In an IT services company, managing the end of a consultant's mission illustrates this well. The Business Manager maintains the relationship with the consultant and the client. The sales manager protects the revenue. Human resources oversee the social framework. Management can intervene on risks. If no one knows who decides, everyone gives an opinion and the situation extends until it becomes an emergency.

A useful organizational framework does not consist of writing exhaustive job descriptions. Instead, it specifies expected contributions, the decisions each can make, matters requiring consultation, and the person who assumes the final decision.

This clarity also protects human cooperation. When responsibilities are explicit, a disagreement is more easily about the substance of the issue. When they are not, it quickly turns into a territorial conflict or an accusation of lack of involvement.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL QUESTION

On a cross-functional subject, everyone must be able to simply answer four questions: who contributes, who decides, who should be consulted, and who accounts for the final result?

Accountability should not become a search for blame

Cooperating assumes that commitments are visible and assumed. But accountability loses its usefulness when it serves only to identify who did not do their part.

Imagine a client need not being fulfilled. The Business Manager claims recruitment did not propose enough profiles. The recruiter responds that the need was incomplete and criteria changed. If the review consists of assigning blame, each party will mainly prepare their defense for next time.

A mature organization examines the entire chain: quality of qualification, launch timeline, market availability, return on profiles, client decision speed, and internal decision-making. Each party assumes their contribution, but the goal remains improving the shared system.

Cooperation progresses when individual and collective responsibility coexist. The recruiter is accountable for the quality of their search; the Business Manager is accountable for the quality of the need and client relationship; the team is collectively accountable for the relevance of the response provided.

T for technological: making coordination smoother

The third level encompasses digital tools and social technologies. Teams, Slack, Notion, Trello, CRM, or ticketing tools organize information. Meetings, stand-ups, activity reviews, and sync points organize interactions.

These tools are useful when they reduce friction. A CRM can enable the recruiter to understand an account's history without soliciting the Business Manager. A staffing review can make visible consultants soon available and prevent multiple teams from working simultaneously on the same searches.

But each tool also adds rules, notifications, and an update burden. A poorly defined discussion channel scatters information. A meeting without a clear decision clogs agendas. A CRM filled only for reporting becomes an administrative obligation rather than a cooperation support.

The correct criterion is thus not the tool's modernity. It is necessary to verify what it simplifies: finding information, requesting a contribution, deciding, tracking a commitment, or learning from a past situation.

THE GOOD USE OF TECHNOLOGY

A cooperation tool should reduce the cost of coordination. If it adds more entries, searches, or meetings than it removes, it shifts the problem instead of solving it.

The most common mistake: starting with the T

The technological level is the most visible and easiest to purchase. It quickly gives the feeling of acting. A license can be deployed, a ritual added to the calendar, and a process presented to the entire team.

That is why organizations often invest in T to compensate for weaknesses in H and O. They multiply meetings because people do not spontaneously talk. They strengthen reporting because commitments are poorly defined. They open new channels because no one knows where information should live.

Take a sales team that shares little of its opportunities. Adding a collective pipeline review may seem relevant. But if Business Managers think a colleague or manager can take over their account, they will present minimal information. The meeting exists; cooperation remains absent.

Similarly, a project management tool will not resolve a permanent disagreement on priorities. It will simply make this disagreement more visible, sometimes in the form of a long list of blocked tasks.

The three levels reinforce or weaken each other

The HOT model is not a succession of independent steps. Each level acts on the other two. A trusting relationship allows responsibilities to be discussed more easily. A clear organization reduces personal tensions. A well-designed tool makes commitments visible and supports trust.

The reverse is also true. A fuzzy organization wears down relationships because the same people must continuously negotiate their boundaries. An opaque tool fuels mistrust when some have information others do not see. A degraded relationship pushes everyone to use the process as a shield rather than a support.

A Business Manager-recruiter team functions, for example, when the two people respect each other, know who must qualify and validate needs, and have a shared space to follow searches and client feedback. Removing one of the three elements weakens the whole.

If the human relationship is good but roles are unclear, cooperation relies on personal efforts and exhausts itself. If the organization is clear but trust is lacking, each applies the minimum. If the first two

levels are solid but the tools are poor, the team still cooperates, but at the cost of excessive time and energy.

THE HOT DIAGNOSTIC

When cooperation deteriorates, do not immediately ask which tool is missing. First, search whether the difficulty comes from trust, clarity of roles, or coordination cost.

How a manager can act on the human level

The manager influences the human level through their behaviors. They show whether helping a colleague is recognized, whether a disagreement can be formulated, and whether an honestly exposed mistake triggers a solution search or an immediate sanction.

They can also create opportunities for mutual understanding based on work. Asking a recruiter to explain a skills market's reality to Business Managers and then inviting BMs to share their client constraints improves mutual understanding without falling into artificial animation.

During a team meeting, the manager can highlight precise cooperation: a BM who shared useful information about an account, a recruiter who helped another team, or a consultant who facilitated a transition. What they make visible indicates what the organization actually considers important.

How to act on the organizational level

The manager should make responsibility areas sufficiently clear for teams to act without negotiating basic functioning each time. They can start with real situations generating friction: launch of recruitment, proposal validation, consultant follow-up, idle time, or mission end.

For each situation, the team clarifies the expected result, necessary contributions, the decision-maker, and timelines. For example, the Business Manager qualifies the need and obtains client feedback; the recruiter defines the search strategy and alerts on feasibility; the manager arbitrates when business constraints and the market prevent honoring the initial commitment.

This clarification must remain alive. If decisions are systematically made outside the planned framework, adjust the functioning rather than maintain a rule no one applies.

How to choose the right technological level

Once relationships and responsibilities are sufficiently solid, the manager can choose tools that will support functioning. They start from usages and not available features.

If the team wastes time searching for the latest client feedback, it needs a clearly maintained reference space. If decisions dilute after meetings, it must better formalize commitments, their owners, and deadlines. If requests constantly interrupt work, it can distinguish urgencies from asynchronous requests.

For example, a thirty-minute weekly review may suffice if the CRM contains reliable information and disagreements are openly addressed. Without these conditions, even a daily meeting will see the same topics recur week after week.

THE CONSTRUCTION ORDER

Start by making cooperation humanly possible, then organizationally clear, before making it technologically smooth.

A good team leaves a trace that surpasses its tools

Tools change, organizations evolve, and rituals eventually get replaced. What remains in the collaborators' memory is how they worked together: the trust received, the difficulties overcome, and the feeling of being able to rely on each other.

This does not mean the human level suffices. A friendly team may remain ineffective if responsibilities are confused. But a high-performing organization that systematically sacrifices relationships rarely produces sustainable cooperation.

The manager must therefore maintain all three dimensions simultaneously. They nurture the human conditions for mutual assistance, clarify the framework within which each contributes, and choose mechanisms that genuinely simplify exchanges.

Years later, former colleagues will probably not remember the name of the Teams channel or the CRM version. If they joyfully reunite and say they formed a great team, it will not be a nostalgic detail. It will often be proof that they had truly learned to cooperate.