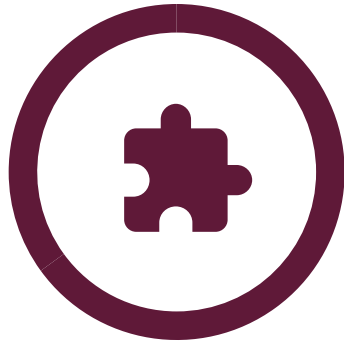# From Cross-Functional to Cross-Purposes: Why Collaboration Falls Apart Over Time

Mihaela Draghici

Engineering Manager @Volkswagen Digital Solutions
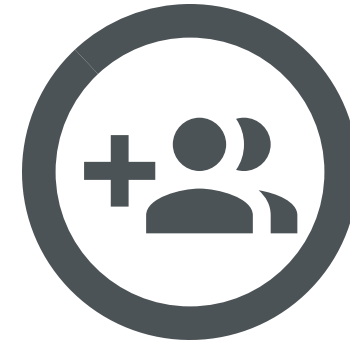
Where the story begins

Breaking down silos and the vision we set

Why teams drift back into silos

Even though they do their best

A bit of optimism

Practical strategies to sustain collaboration
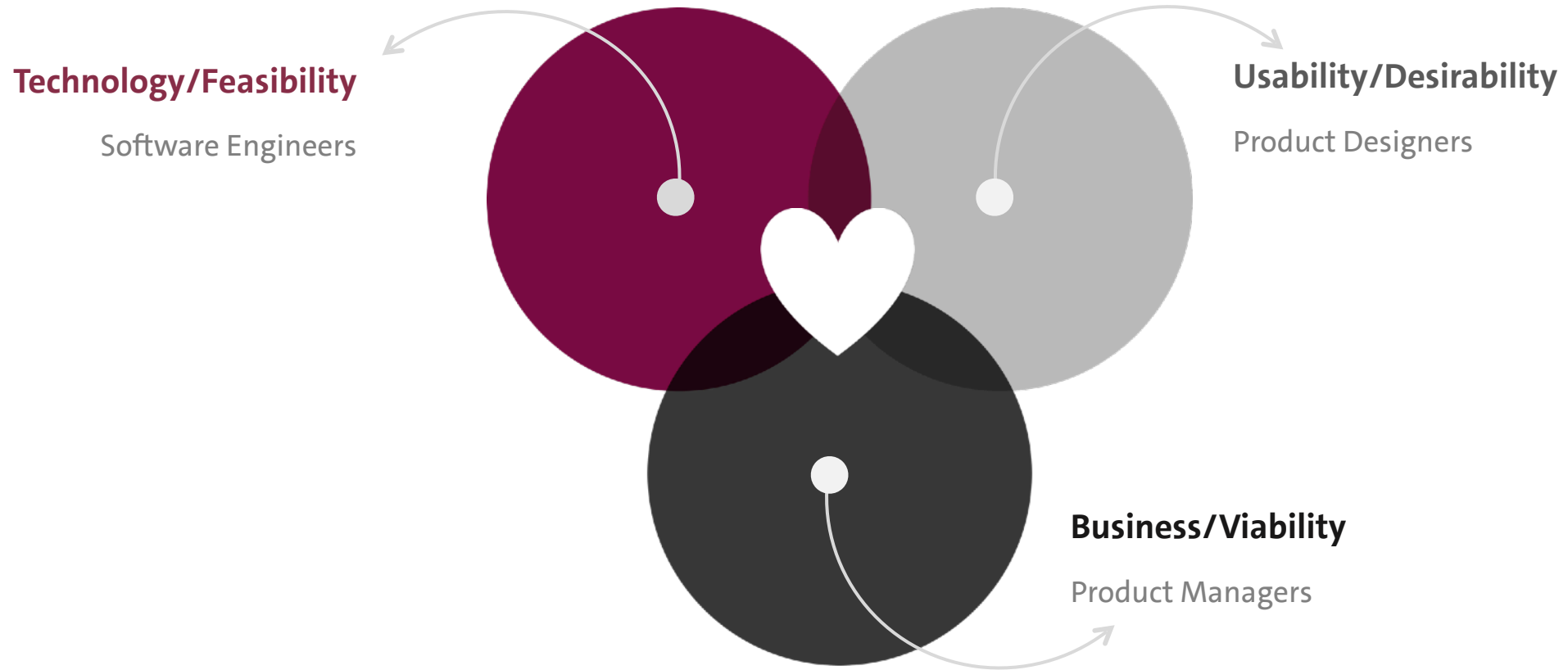
The problem

Working in silos

For the **Product team** it's hard to:

- be included in **vision** and **strategy** decisions
- give visibility on the work progress
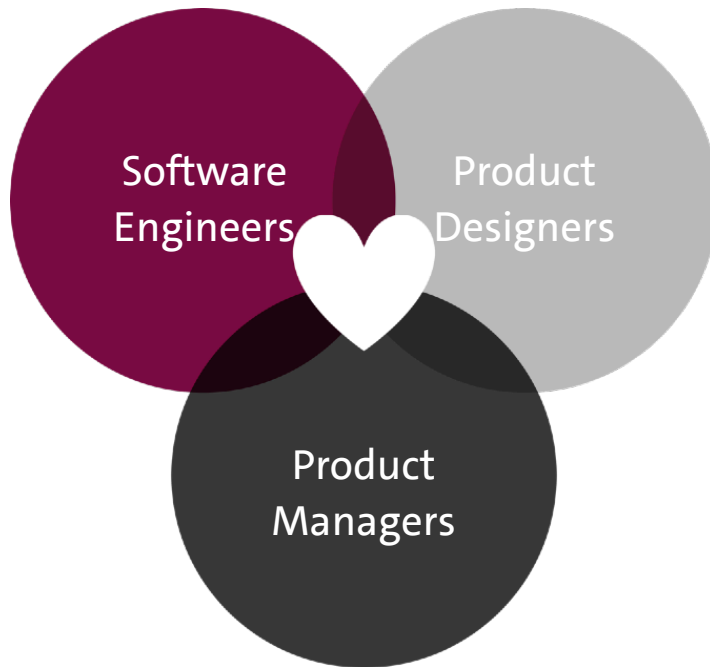- advocate for our **values** & **practices**

For the **Business team** it's hard to:

- align on **product decisions**
- get visibility of and understanding of our product process
- **shift mindset** towards agile & user centricity

Product team

Technology/Feasibility

Software Engineers

Usability/Desirability

Product Designers

Business/Viability

Product Managers

Product team

Business team

Software Engineers

Product Designers

Product Managers

Business PO
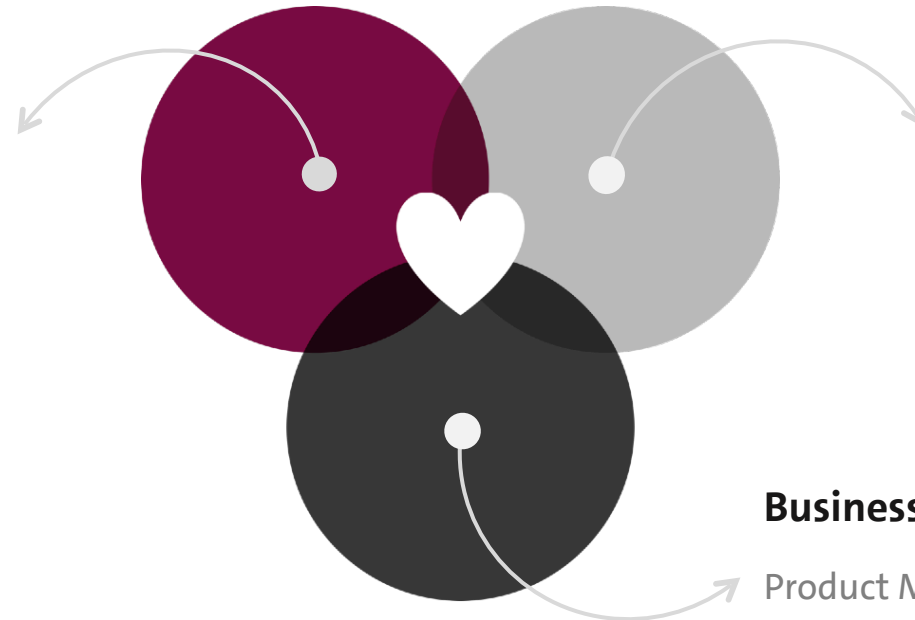Architects
Marketing
Legal
Domain
Specialists

The solution

Product team

We have **shared ownership** and take over **responsibility** together to discover
a solution that works for our **users** and the **business**.

Technology/Feasibility

Software Engineers

IT PO

Software architects

Data scientists
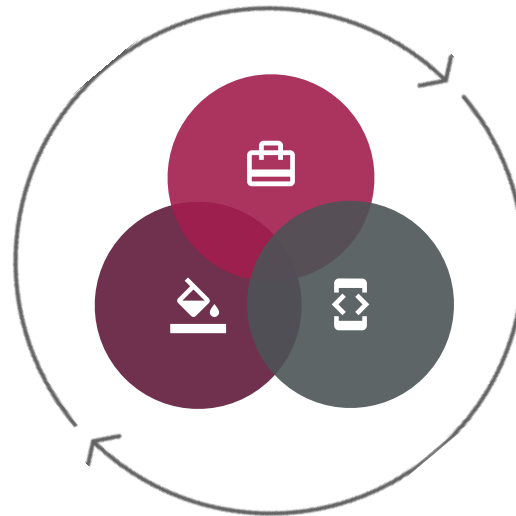
Usability/Desirability

Product Designers

Product Owner

Sales/Marketing

Business/Viability

Product Managers

Product Owner

Sales/Marketing

At which stages are we working together?

Product discovery

User research, Problem prioritization, competitor benchmarking, technical research, ...

Solution ideation

Solution ideation workshops, wireframes and prototypes creation, user validation, defining success metrics, technical POC...

Product delivery

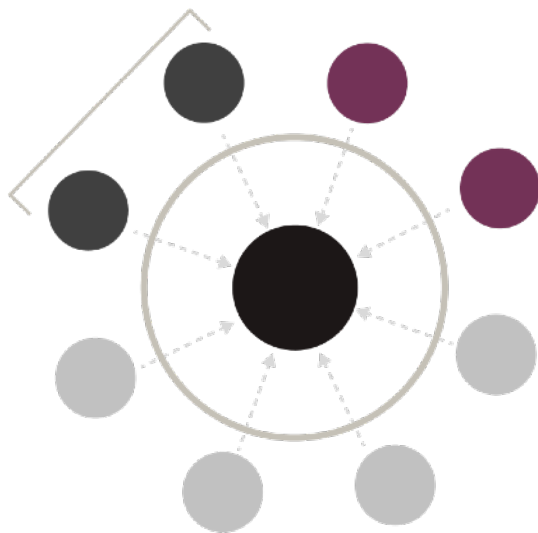Design reviews, prioritisation, estimations, infra setup...

Common team activities & ceremonies

- Daily stand-ups

- Retros

- Iteration planning

- Ideation workshops

- Quarterly planning

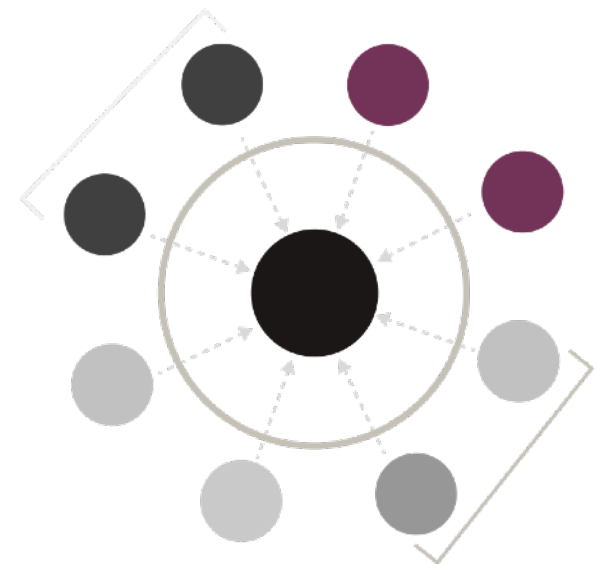- Strategy meetings

Pairing

Hybrid Product Teams

PM + PO Pairs

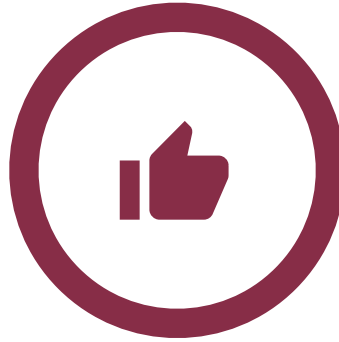**Product Designer Pairs**

Dev Pairs

How do we measure success?

Team feedback

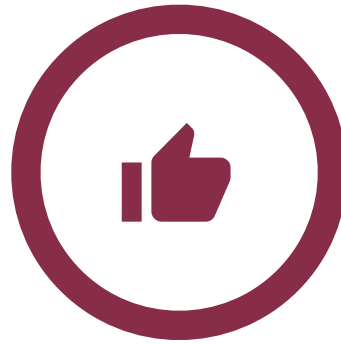**Product success**

Future investments

Our wins

Product success

5 Products Launched

Sales, Procurement,
Production & Logistics

**Continuous
discovery practices**

**Experiments driving
business results**

Team satisfaction

"Our relationship with the stakeholders is good; they are generally responsive and collaborative; they provided a lot of insightful info.

"Big thing to learn how VW factories work, which departments and processes you have and why certain things work like they do.

"Everyone is able to empathize to where others are and also listen to one another; we debate topics in a constructive way.'

Why collaboration falls apart over time

Why collaboration falls apart over time

Structural legacy

Different business processes

Mindset and habits

Different ways of working

Language used

Different working languages

Unfamiliar terminology

Different meanings

Structural legacy

Business processes

Budget approvals

Planning rounds

Go-live software approvals

Role assumptions

Organisational structure

Role overlaps

Roles & responsibilities unclear

Marketing

Management

Supply chain

Production

Importers

Dealers

Mindset and habits

Team rituals
Team rituals and ceremonies that become obsolete, if not revisited.

Time & availability
Effort & time required to sustain new practices > easy to revert to old habits.
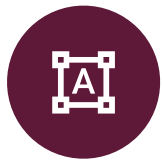
Project management mindset
Supported by certain business processes.

> Here's the list of planned features, you deliver it and that's it, we move on to the next project.

Language misalignments

Unfamiliar terminology
Business department specific.

Domain specific

(automotive vs digital world).

Legacy vocabulary
Words that carry baggage

and influence our thinking.

Meaning of words
Same words meaning

different things for different

people.

Unfamiliar terminology

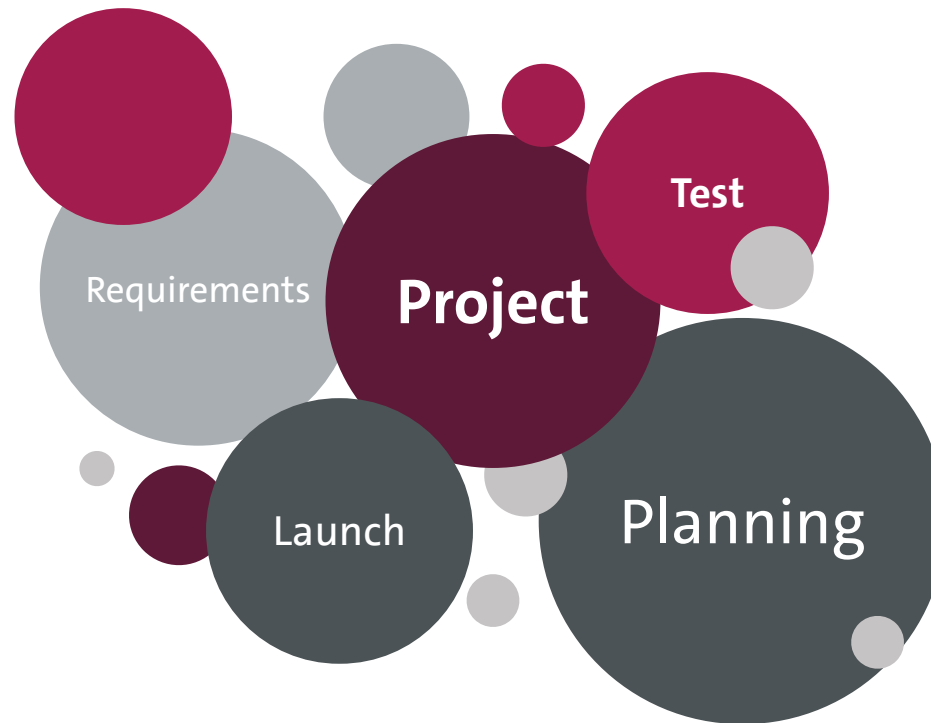Different realities

Agile product development

Design thinking

Extreme programming

Test driven development

Continuous Integration

Car manufacturing

The shop floor

Bill of Material (BOM)

Materials Resource Planning (MRP)

Plant monitor

Thousands of abbreviations

(OEM, DMS, SOO)

Legacy vocabulary with waterfall baggage

Same words mean entirely different things

The **Product team** means:

Learn quickly, reduce risk

Core outcomes achieved

A way to reduce uncertainty

Balance discovery, feasibility & value

Iterative cycles of design, testing & feedback

MVP

Feature Done

Experiment

Prioritization

Agile

The **Business team** means:

Full version, with all functionality

Everything in the requirements is done

Why aren't we building yet?

Prioritizing my requirements or not

Increments

Same words mean entirely different things

The **Product team** means:

Problem identification

Assumption validation

User interviews

Prototypes

User experiments

Discovery

The **Business team** means:

List of requirements

Validation of our ideas

Start building complete solution

Same words mean entirely different things

The **Product team** means:

Problem definition

Business goals

Research alignment

Let's do a 'Scoping' workshop

The **Business team** means:

Scoping of requirements
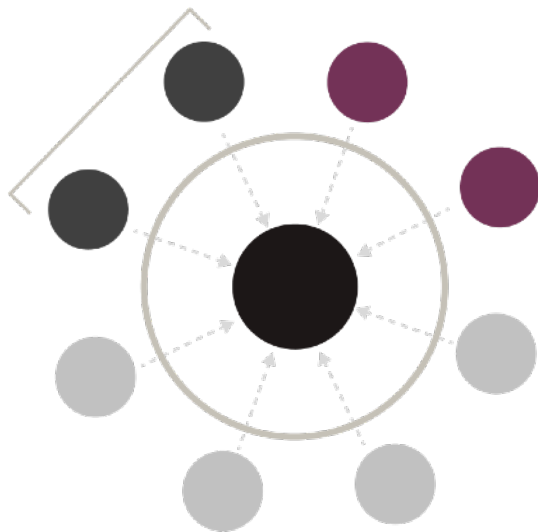
Same words mean entirely different things

" Problem introduction

" Problem overview

Let's do a 'Scoping' workshop

" Problem alignment

" Pre-project alignment

A bit of optimism…
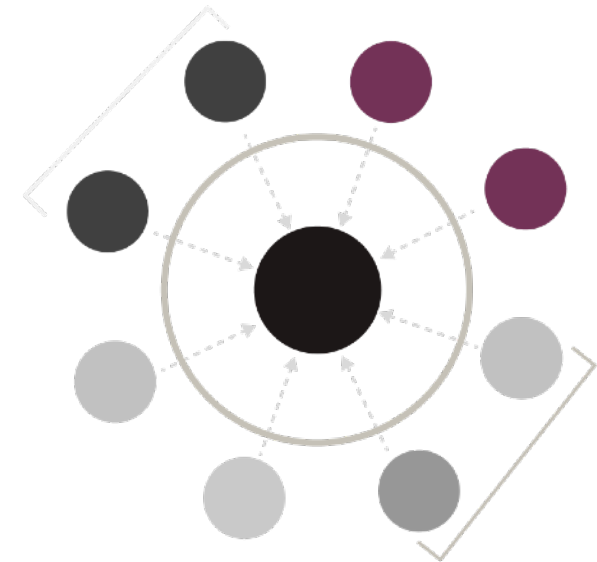
Strategies to Sustain Alignment

The value of Pairing

PM + PO Pairs

Product Designer Pairs

Dev Pairs

Making the implicit explicit

Do not assume everyone has the same understanding

Glossr

+ Add a word...

Find a word... 🔍

Bill of Material (BOM) ✏
BOM is a comprehensive list of all the materials, components, and instructions needed to manufacture or assemble a vehicle. It's a structured document that outlines the hierarchy of parts, from the finished product down to its individual components.

MRP (Materials Resource Planning) ✏
Materials resource planning is the function of the manufacturing planning department to ensure that sufficient quantities of raw materials are available to support manufacturing operations.

Product Development Cycle ✏
The defined steps within an automotive company to develop a product from the initial concept phases through design and development all the way to production.

Shared vocabulary
Create and continuously refine your "team glossary".
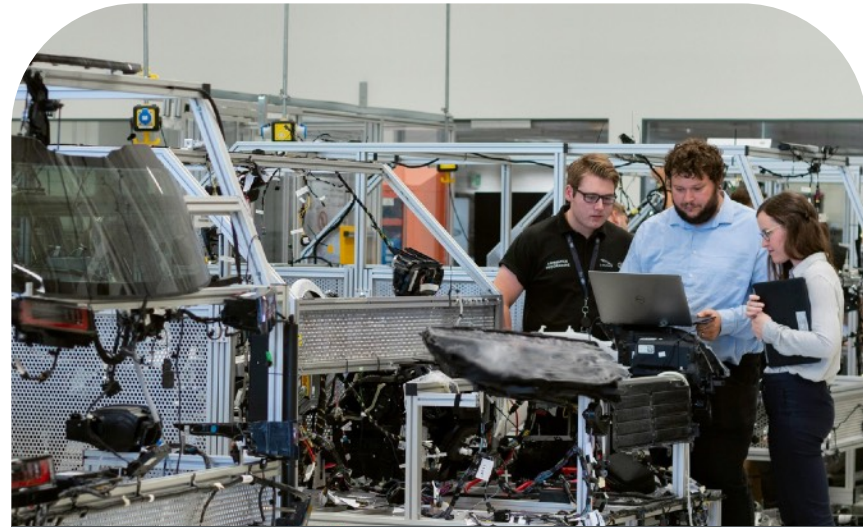
Revisit frequently
Make sure information is easily updated and easily accessible.

Rotations and work exchanges

Learning more about the realities 'on the ground'

Different locations

Different departments

Regular recalibration

Collaboration requires active maintenance

Practice. Practice. Practice.

Check-ins
Get the pulse of your teams. Regularly collect feedback on what works and what doesn't.

Working model agreement
Re-visit regularly. Especially when people change, goals evolve, or external pressure increases.
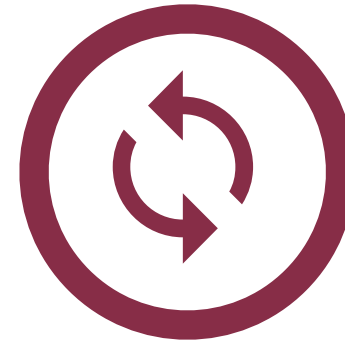
Role clarification
Re-clarify roles at every new stage or team change.

Not one size fits all

Different teams/ products/ stakeholders

Continuously measure, collect feedback, and iterate

The best cross-functional teams
aren't those without collaboration challenges,
they're those who address them faster.

What are your challenges?

Thank you!

in Mihaela Draghici