



## Collaboration and Privacy

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A few weeks ago *The New York Times* carried an interesting article called "[The Rise of the New Groupthink.](#)" It was by Susan Cain, who writes a blog called [The Power of Introverts](#) and who has just published a best-selling book "[QUIET: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking.](#)"



The theme of the article is that the pendulum has swung too far in the direction of teamwork and collaboration even though research and experience show that greater creativity and productivity are linked to solitude. “Virtually all American workers now spend time on teams and some 70 percent inhabit open-plan offices, in which no one has ‘a room of one’s own.’” Cain argues that brainstorming is a widespread collaborative practice despite decades of research showing “that individuals almost always perform better than groups in both quality and quantity, and group performance gets worse as group size increases.” (For a contrary view [see this recent blog post by Bob Sutton](#), a faculty member at the Stanford Business School). She argues that privacy makes us creative and productive, and that “we need to move beyond the New Groupthink and embrace a more nuanced approach to creativity and learning.”

It may be the case that some places have gone overboard with teamwork and collaboration, but I don’t think we are one of them. There clearly are times when working alone is the best way to get something important done, whether writing an article or preparing to teach a class. You need a place to concentrate when developing a program budget, editing a manuscript, or designing a brochure. Everyone needs quiet time to reflect, not just Picasso and Steve Wozniak. And not just introverts.

We have spent time working on communication and collaboration because there also are times when good work depends on partnering with other people. Faculty members in local government budget, finance, and tax collaborated to create a curriculum that is more effective and efficient than their past independent efforts. It made sense to collaborate and so they did.

Everyone’s work at the School depends on the efforts of many other people. We need to recognize when working together collaboratively is the best way to advance the School’s mission. We also need to preserve time and space for work that depends on quiet concentration. This is not a case of either collaboration or privacy?it is a question of doing both at the appropriate time. I think we do a reasonably good job of balancing the two. What do you think?