

Collaboration is king



by **Chris Murphy**, Automotive Director - Americas, DuPont Automotive Performance Materials



Engine water-jacket spacer made of DuPont Zytel



Thermoplastic valve cover

Trying to predict the future is like trying to drive down a country road at night with no lights while looking out the back window."

Building on the insights of noted management book author Peter Drucker, I would add that the headlights illuminate the future and the back window frames the learnings from the road behind. But a crystal ball on the dashboard...there's the key to predicting the future.

In all seriousness, though, we in the auto industry need to develop and embrace a futurist strategy that draws from insights learned in the past to attain sustainable growth—especially in the current automotive industry climate where the only constant in "future" is change.

Collaboration throughout the value chain—early in the design phase—is the epicenter of our strategy for sustainable growth; it's a mantra whose time has come. If you consider the circular nature of business strategy, you could say the 1980s was a time of innovative, collaborative development while the 1990s and into the new millennium marked the reign of "cost down." Looking ahead, we believe the industry needs to embrace these themes with paralleled emphasis. By focusing on targeted collaboration as the most effective means to achieve systems cost reduction, the industry can attain truly sustainable growth.

And that viewpoint is corroborated through **DuPont's** annual survey of **SAE** members. For the third year in a row, fewer respondents picked cost as the top challenge facing the industry. Meanwhile, respondents say collaboration to deliver customer-facing innovation is a key to growth.

Collaboration can make the difference between getting a new application to market on time and program failure. It can mean achieving a better cost position vs. wasted time, cost overruns, and reinventing the wheel. It can also lead to a more functional component or system with improved reliability.

Take, for example, a recent development with the **Chrysler Group** and **Bruce** on North America's first high-volume thermoplastic rocker cover. In just 22 weeks, the team went from "art to part." All players credit the

engagement and drive of the global, cross-industry team.

In another, we were brought in early as a **Chrysler Group** engineer had a breakthrough idea to displace metal with thermoplastic in a structural mirror-housing bracket. Pulling in our materials and processing team to fully understand the program's objective and help determine what the material could and could not do, the new design saves nearly \$5 million dollars over four years.

And recent, close collaboration globally with **Toyota**, molder **Uchiyama Manufacturing**, and Tier 1 supplier **Aisan Industry** led to a water-jacket spacer for the **Toyota Crown** engine block that delivers significant fuel savings and environmental benefits while extending engine life.

While we hear the mantra and we can all identify some great examples, I challenge us to consider how often we practice the act of collaboration. How often do we step back and establish a cross-industry team early in a program's life? How often do we find ourselves lost in the fog of information while searching for real knowledge?

Consider your business and development model. Make sure it captures collaboration, drives to a focus, and provides fair compensation for strategic, collaborative partners who help deliver valuable innovation.

These are exciting times, to be sure. Global markets are opening, consumer buying patterns are predictable only in their unpredictability, and the only constant in the world is change.

If we look to the future—and if you admit you cannot accurately predict the future—then the next best thing is to be prepared to deal with various possible futures, in part armed with lessons from the past. Also, surround yourself with others with a similar belief while fostering an atmosphere that is hospitable to the unexpected.

History teaches us that some of the most exciting, dramatic breakthroughs occur in the face of the unexpected or during a crisis. Hold true to reason and core values, align with others who can help, and enjoy the ride.

After all, according to Drucker, "the best way to predict the future is to create it." **aei**