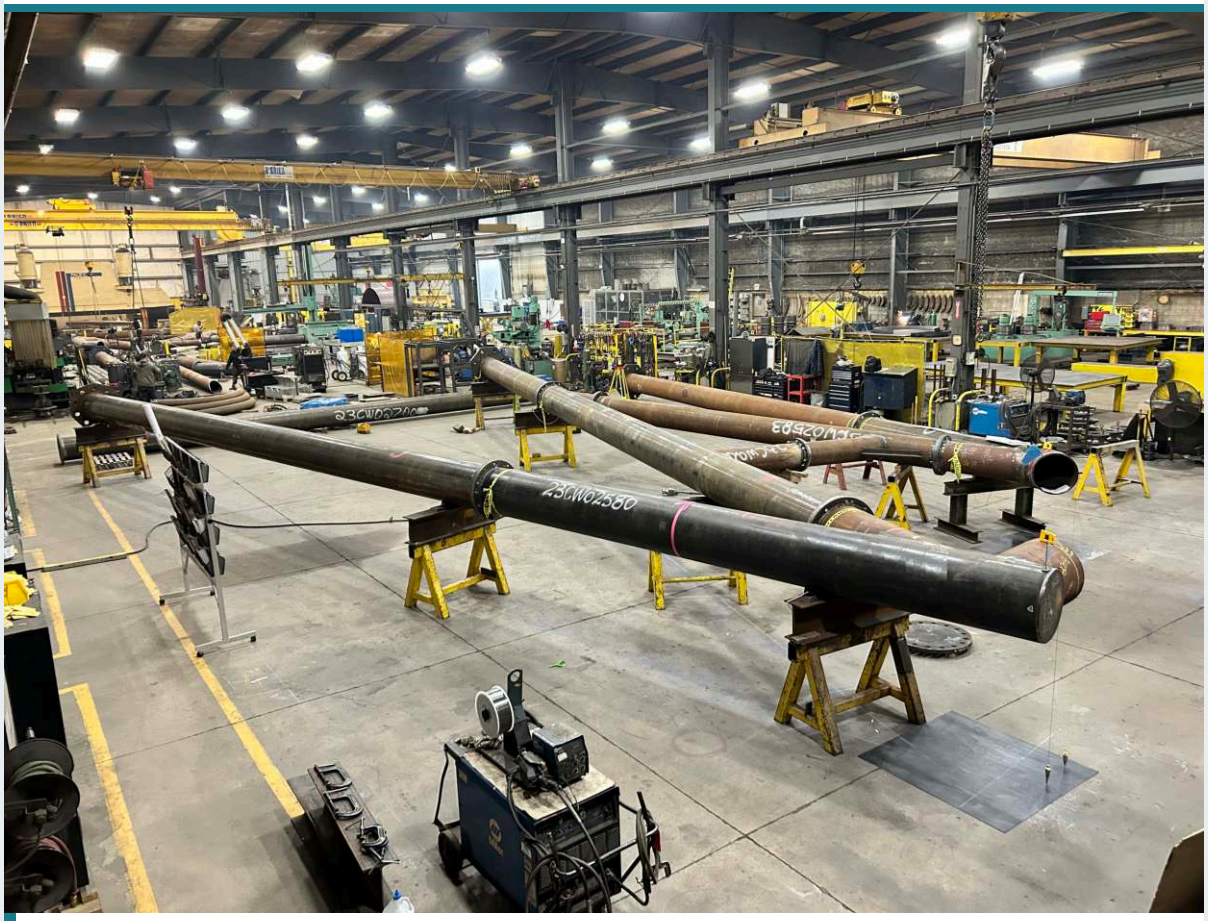
KUBES STEEL

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YOUR SHOP CAN'T DO EVERYTHING

The Good News: It Doesn't Have To.

The smartest call a fabricator can make is sometimes the one that sends work somewhere else.

Not every steel fabrication shop can do everything. The ones that know their wheelhouse — and know who to call when a job steps outside it — consistently outperform the ones that try to be all things to all customers. In a market where demand is running ahead of capacity, knowing your partners is as valuable as knowing your equipment.

WHAT FABRICATION COLLABORATION ACTUALLY IS

This is not subcontracting in the traditional transactional sense. It is something more organic than that — a living ecosystem of shops that have built relationships over years, understand each other's capabilities, trust each other's quality, and know without having to ask twice who does what best.

It typically starts between owners — two people in the same industry who have known each other long enough to pick up the phone without an agenda. But in the best partnerships, it moves well beyond that. Project managers start calling project managers directly. Estimators compare notes. Shop foremen coordinate logistics. It becomes second nature — not a transaction you have to think about, but a reflex that happens at every level of the organization.

These partnerships are almost always local. Not because distance makes collaboration impossible, but because trust is built face-to-face over time, and proximity makes the practical logistics — material transfers, site visits, schedule coordination — manageable. The shops that collaborate best are usually within an hour of each other and have been in each other's orbit for years before the first job is ever shared.

TWO REASONS TO COLLABORATE — AND ONE IS BETTER THAN THE OTHER

REASON 1 — CAPACITY

The most common reason. The shop is full. A job comes in that fits your capability perfectly but your floor, your equipment, or your people simply don't have room for it right now. You can turn it away, delay it, or find a trusted partner who has the capacity to take it on.

This works in both directions. During busy periods, knowing where to send overflow work is what separates shops that honour their commitments from shops that don't. And during quieter periods, being the shop that receives that overflow is what keeps your floor productive.

REASON 2 — CAPABILITY

The better reason. A project scope includes elements that fall outside your core competency — not because you can't do them, but because another shop does them better, faster, or more cost-effectively. Sending that work out is not a concession. It is intelligent allocation.

Miscellaneous steel — platforms, stairs, ladders, handrail — is a classic example. It is necessary, it takes floor space and manhours, and it can crowd out the more complex work that is your real differentiator. A partner shop that specializes in misc steel will do it faster and cheaper than you will. Everyone wins.

A REAL EXAMPLE — THE SMART CALL, NOT THE FORCED ONE



MACHINED FRAME WELDMENT · CAPABILITY-DRIVEN COLLABORATION

We Could Have Done It All In-House. We Chose Not To.

This machined frame weldment is a recent Kubes Steel project. The assembly required a beam-line — a dedicated automated welding system for structural beam fabrication that produces consistent, high-quality work at a pace that manual fabrication simply can't match for straight structural components.

Kubes Steel could have fabricated the beam components in-house. We have the capability. But a partner shop in our network operates a beam-line, and routing that scope to them was the right call — better suited equipment, faster production, and it freed our floor to focus on the more complex precision weldment work that is squarely in our wheelhouse.

The result: the customer received a complete, fully integrated assembly — delivered on time, to specification — without ever needing to know or care that two shops were involved. That invisibility is the mark of a mature collaboration. When it works well, the customer just sees a project that went smoothly.

> *The measure of a good collaboration is not that two shops were involved. It is that the customer never had a reason to think about it.*

THE ETIQUETTE — WHAT MAKES IT WORK AND WHAT BREAKS IT

Fabrication partnerships are built on trust and sustained by fairness. When those two things are present, the relationship compounds over time — each successful collaboration makes the next one easier. When either is absent, the relationship erodes quickly and is very hard to rebuild.

- ✓ **Everyone needs to make a margin.** The fastest way to end a partnership is to send work out at a budget that doesn't allow your partner to earn a profit. It might work once. It won't work twice. A partner who feels squeezed will either decline future work or find ways to cut corners. Neither outcome serves you or your customer.
- ✓ **Be consistent.** A partner who only hears from you when you're overloaded and never when you have capacity to spare is being used, not partnered with. The best relationships are balanced over time — work flows both directions and both shops benefit from the arrangement across multiple cycles.
- ✓ **Be clear about what you need.** Scope, schedule, quality standard, documentation requirements — a partner shop should receive the same clarity you would want if the situation were reversed. Vague handoffs produce vague results.
- ✓ **Protect the relationship above the transaction.** Individual jobs have tight margins and difficult moments. If you manage every collaboration purely on the economics of a single job you will make short-term decisions that damage long-term relationships. The value of a trusted fabrication partner over five years is worth far more than any single project's margin.
- ✓ **Don't go around them.** If your partner introduces you to their customer in the context of a collaboration, that relationship context matters. Using it to pursue that customer directly is the kind of move that ends partnerships permanently and damages reputations in an industry where everyone knows everyone.

THE CAPACITY MULTIPLIER



Here is something that surprises people who haven't experienced it: when you have a strong network of fabrication partners and work is flowing both directions, your

effective capacity is significantly larger than your shop floor suggests.

In the current environment — with nuclear, defence, infrastructure, and construction all moving simultaneously — work is going both in and out of Kubes Steel. We are sending scope to partners whose capabilities complement ours. We are receiving rolling and bending scope from fabricators whose strength is in structural assembly but who don't have our equipment. Both directions are active at the same time.

The result is that projects get done that wouldn't get done if every shop tried to contain everything within its own four walls. Customers who might otherwise face extended lead times or incomplete scope coverage get their projects completed on schedule. And the shops involved each get to do the work they are best at — which means better quality, better efficiency, and better margins than trying to stretch into areas where you are not at your best.

The simple version:

Your shop's capacity is not just what's on your floor. It is your floor plus your partners' floors, minus the friction of the relationships between you. Strong partnerships reduce that friction to almost nothing. Weak or non-existent ones leave all that capacity sitting idle on the other side of a phone call nobody has made yet.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD FABRICATION PARTNER

COMPLEMENTARY CAPABILITY

The best partnerships are between shops that are strong in different things. Overlapping capability creates competition. Complementary capability creates collaboration. Know what you do well and find partners who do the other things well.

COMPATIBLE QUALITY STANDARDS

You are putting your name on the finished product regardless of who made the parts. A partner whose quality standards are lower than yours will cost you customer relationships. Visit their shop before you commit to a collaboration. You will know within an hour.

GEOGRAPHIC PROXIMITY

Local partnerships work better. Material moves easily, site visits happen naturally, and the informal relationship-building that sustains these partnerships — running into each other at suppliers, trade events,

COMMUNICATION THAT WORKS

A partnership that requires constant follow-up to get basic schedule and quality information is not a partnership — it is a management burden. The right partner communicates proactively, flags problems

industry lunches — is only possible when you're in the same market.

early, and treats your deadline as their own.

Not everyone can do everything in the business of steel fabrication. When you partner with others in your ecosystem, it pays off.

The shops that will benefit most from the investment cycle underway are not necessarily the biggest ones or the ones with the most equipment. They are the ones with the strongest networks — the ones that know what they are best at, know who covers the rest, and have built enough trust with their partners that the handoffs are seamless.

At Kubes Steel, rolling and bending is one of those calls. If you have a project that needs curved structural sections, large diameter pipe bending, or precision heavy rolling as part of a larger fabrication scope — that is our wheelhouse. We are a reliable partner, we work both directions, and we understand the etiquette. Give us a call.

Need a Rolling & Bending Partner?

Send us your drawings. We'll tell you what we can do and when we can do it.

SEND YOUR DRAWINGS →

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