

Skillful Collaboration

Working Successfully with Others to Achieve a Common Goal

When to Collaborate

You likely have a strong case for collaborating when working with others will:

- Allow you to achieve the desired outcome, which you can't accomplish by yourself.
- Increase the likelihood of solving complex problems or addressing complicated issues.
- Reduce costs or boost efficiency.
- Increase visibility of the project.

Establish Expectations

With your fellow collaborators, be sure to:

- ✓ **Determine the objective.** What outcome do we want the collaboration to achieve? What does success look like? How will it be measured?
- ✓ **Define roles and responsibilities.** Ideally, each person should be allowed to define his or her own role in the collaboration.
- ✓ **Agree on operating norms**—rules of behavior that guide interactions. Common issues include participation, communication, decision-making, support, leadership, and conflict resolution.

Develop Inward Attitudes

The following traits reflect a collaborative mindset:

- **Sense of personal responsibility for the quality of your relationships.** Be someone that others want to work with.
- **Concerned with "What's in it for us?"** Focus on how you *and* the others involved can benefit.
- **Keeping an open mind.** Suspend judgment and avoid making assumptions.
- **Willingness to share.** Sharing data and experience is vital to successful collaboration.
- **Willingness to trust others.** Trust someone unless he or she has given you a reason not to.

Practice Outward Behaviors

Translate your inward attitude of collaboration into observable actions and behaviors:

- Convey personal warmth.
- Be an active listener.

- Be trustworthy—reliable, competent, and sincere.
- Turn conflict into cooperation.
- Commit to completion.

The Power of Words

Words are powerful—and permanent. Being careful with your language can greatly support collaboration.

- **Use "I" messages.** "I feel/felt ____ when you ____ (behavioral description). I'd appreciate it if you would ____ (behavioral description)."
- **Present ideas as questions.** "What if we...?"
- **Avoid destructive communication.** For example, sarcasm, questioning integrity, dismissing people and ideas, and acting incredulous.
- **Rephrase negative messages.** Say what you *can* do, not what you *can't* do.
- **Minimize misinterpreted emails.** Be clear and succinct, and don't say anything that you wouldn't say face-to-face.

Building Group Collaboration

Increasing collaborative efforts can increase the effectiveness of the entire organization.

- ✓ **Build your internal network.** Focus on connecting with people who have different skills and experiences.
- ✓ **Demonstrate collaborative leadership.** Redefine success by rewarding group achievement.
- ✓ **Create a community of practice**—a group of people who share a concern or interest and come together to fulfill a common goal.

Non-Collaborative Behaviors

These behaviors create obstacles to collaboration and require specific strategies to handle:

- Protecting their turf
- Nay-saying
- Being indecisive
- Wanting their own way
- Needing excessive help
- Acting uninterested