Skillful Collaboration

Working Successfully with Others to Achieve a Common Goal

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Course Objectives

After you've completed this course, you'll be able to:

- Understand when collaboration is an effective and beneficial approach to a project—and when it isn't.

- Establish and communicate expectations to group members to ensure a successful collaboration.

- Recognize the inward attitudes and outward behaviors necessary to collaborate well.

- Implement communication strategies that foster collaboration and avoid those that hinder it.

- Build your network to increase your ability to collaborate.

- Identify non-collaborative behaviors and implement strategies to cope with them.

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Introduction

The old expression says "two heads are better than one." That's certainly true when collaboration runs smoothly—when everybody involved gets along, contributes unique perspectives and skills, and works together to resolve problems productively and meet deadlines. But what about when people argue, work gets stalled, and contention is prevalent?

Successful collaboration involves far more than just working side-by-side. It's a process that requires attitudes, skills, and practices that can be learned and strengthened—and mastering them will not only make your job easier, it will help you become more successful professionally.

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Introduction (cont.)

A 2003 survey by the Level Playing Field Institute found that American employers and employees think that being a team player is the most important factor in getting ahead in the workplace.[1] They ranked this factor higher than others including "merit and performance," "leadership skills," "intelligence," "making money for the organization," and "long hours." By working well with others to achieve a common goal, you can become a sought-after resource and team member, and maximize your value to your organization.

This program will focus on how to structure and implement an effective collaboration process so that working with others will be a productive and enjoyable experience.

[1] Refer to the "References" slide for all citations.

Benefits of Collaboration

Let's take a look at how collaboration benefits both organizations and individual employees.

Benefits to the Organization	Benefits to the Individual
• Promotes creative and effective problem-solving. • Increases productivity, efficiency, and cost savings. • Helps achieve common goals and shared purpose. • Enables organization to draw on individual employees' specialized skills regardless of location.	• Leads to increased job satisfaction. • Creates high-trust relationships. • Increases network of "go-to" colleagues that he/she can count on for help. • Offers exposure to new projects and experiences.

According to a study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*[2] in 2007, "Frequent interaction with others, office friendships and emotional support were strong predictors of job satisfaction."

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Skillful Collaboration

Module 1:
Establish a Purpose for Collaboration

When to Collaborate—and When Not To

As a general rule, it's best to **collaborate when the involvement of other people adds value to a project**. Here are some guidelines to consider when you're deciding whether or not to collaborate.

Collaborate	Don't Collaborate
• When you can't achieve the desired outcome by yourself.	• When an individual approach will achieve the desired results.
• To solve complex problems or address complicated issues.	• When you can't invest the extra time it will require.
• To reduce costs or allow the project to run more efficiently.	• When the specific purpose is not clearly defined.
• To increase visibility of the project.	• When the organizational culture is unsupportive.

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Self-Assessment

For each statement, choose the number that best reflects how often you practice the behavior described. Use the following scale: *1 = seldom*, *2 = occasionally*, *3 = frequently*, *4 = always*. The assessment continues on the next slide.

Statement	Frequency			
1. I take personal responsibility for the quality of my relationships at work.	1	2	3	4
2. I go out of my way to convey personal warmth.	1	2	3	4
3. I practice positive intent by assuming that my co-workers and I both want what is best for the organization.	1	2	3	4
4. I am an effective listener, and people can tell that I'm listening to them.	1	2	3	4
5. I ask questions to find out what other people know and what they are thinking and feeling.	1	2	3	4

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Practice Outward Behaviors

The inward attitudes that support collaboration translate into outward, observable behaviors. Let's explore these behaviors and how you can start using them.

Convey Personal Warmth

- Greet others; be the first to say "hello."

- Maintain a relaxed and open posture.

- Make eye contact—be direct but not too intense.

- Smile!

- Give the other person your full attention.

- Show your (appropriate) sense of humor.

- Encourage others with supportive words.

- Show concern for others—pay attention to what is going on with them, offer to help out, and express your appreciation.

Practice Outward Behaviors (cont.)

Be an Active Listener

In addition to conveying personal warmth, active listening is a vital skill for collaboration. An effective listener seeks to understand the speaker's message as well as the feelings behind the message. Follow these tips to be an active listener:

- Practice positive intent. Assume that you both want what is best for the organization.

  - Listen first, then talk.

  - Acknowledge the speaker's point of view. Repeat key words, phrases, or ideas he/she shared to show that you understand.

  - Express a desire to achieve your common purpose.

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Practice Outward Behaviors (cont.)

Turn Conflict into Cooperation

Conflict is inevitable. Fighting isn't. Being skilled at turning conflict into cooperation is crucial to successful collaboration. Use these tips to help ensure that you resolve conflict productively.

- Always maintain your composure and show respect.

- Find common ground. Acknowledge your differences, but focus on your common goals.

- To resolve task-based conflict:

  - Search for root causes, such as poorly designed work processes.

  - Focus on "what," not "who." Rather than blaming others, concentrate on what needs to change.

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Read the question, then click on the answer.

Which of the following examples is an effective "I" message?

a. "I felt embarrassed when you undermined my work. I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't disrespect me like that."

b. "I feel frustrated when you are late to our meetings. I'd appreciate it if you would be on time."

c. "I feel you are always getting your own way."

d. "I wish you would stop telling me what to do all the time."

QUIZ

How to Build Your Internal Network

Networking with colleagues within your organization is just as valuable, if not more so, than networking with people outside of it. Connecting with people throughout your organization leads to more productive and collaborative work. Here are some tips to build your internal network.

- Focus on connecting with people you wouldn't ordinarily work with.

- Aim for variety, not sheer numbers. Strive to build a network of people who possess different skills and experiences.

- Talk to a veteran employee and ask that person to introduce you to new contacts.

- Get involved in your organization's activities to gain acquaintances.

- Offer your unique skills and experiences to others in your network.

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Collaborative Leadership

Group collaboration can't happen unless the organization's top leadership supports the concept. Collaborative leadership takes a non-traditional approach toward managing others. Collaborative leaders:

- Redefine success by rewarding group achievement as well as individual efforts.

- Involve others by soliciting different perspectives and cultivating an atmosphere where respectful debate is welcomed.

- Hold themselves and their employees accountable for reaching their own decisions and goals and working well with others.

- Attempt to minimize detrimental personal traits, such as defensiveness, lack of humility, arrogance, or a need for power.

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Case Study: Procter & Gamble

Collaboration across business or functional units can result in innovative new products and processes. Many organizations work hard to develop and maintain collaboration. A strong example of collaborative leadership is Procter & Gamble (P&G)[4]. The company:

- Created 20 communities of practice with 8,000 participants. These groups solve specific problems and share best practices.

- Has a feature on its intranet where employees can describe a problem, which is then directed to those with relevant expertise.

- Continually creates cross-unit networks by rotating employees through business units and countries.

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Case Study

Read the case study and answer the questions that follow in order to put your critical thinking skills into practice.

Organization: Up in the Air, an online gallery selling artwork and decorative objects.

People: Sara, customer service manager; Derek, accounting manager; and Warren, manager of custom order fulfillment.

Situation: Sara has been working hard with her team to improve customer service. Her staff attended customer service training workshops on how to handle difficult customers, and Sara has followed up by listening in on calls with customers. Customer satisfaction ratings have nudged up, but not as much as Sara had hoped.

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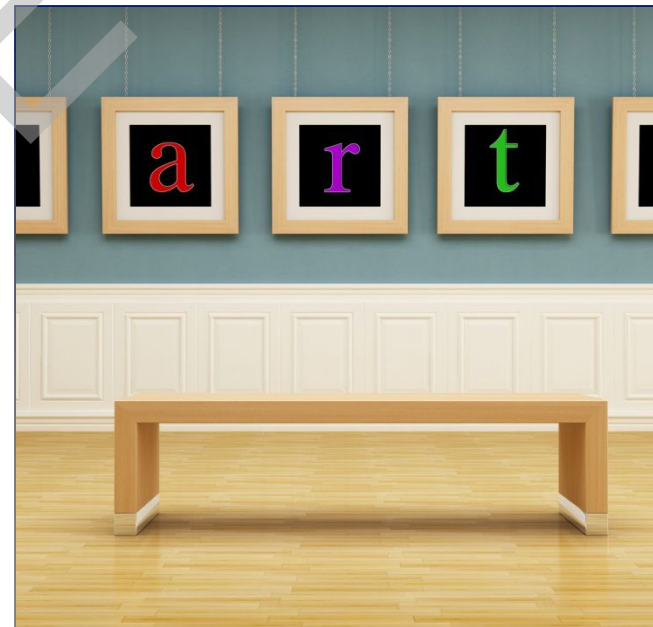
Questions to Consider

1. What was the objective of the collaboration? How could it have been articulated more effectively?

2. An important step in the collaboration process is establishing expectations. What did the group do well in this step, and where did they fall short?

3. Which collaborative behaviors and words were demonstrated? Which were absent? Give specific examples.

4. Which non-collaborative behaviors were exhibited? What did the others do (if anything) to deal with them? Give specific examples.

Review the ideas and suggestions provided on the following slides.

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