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ABSTRACT

A collaborative environment raises the bar for teamwork by allowing colleagues to share their skills, talents, and ideas to achieve a common goal. When practiced correctly, collaboration in the workplace can have a positive impact on your team and organization. Collaboration can increase efficiency and innovation and improve team relationships. In this chapter, the authors cover the benefits and challenges of a collaborative work environment, the skills needed in a collaborative team, and how you can help your team create a positive and innovative work environment.

INTRODUCTION

We can think of collaboration as the fuel that makes teamwork work. It is one of three strategies needed to encourage team synergy, the other two being communication and setting group norms. Collaboration in the workplace is the foundation for great teamwork: by collaborating, teams work together to brainstorm new ideas, complete ambitious projects, and achieve goals. In its simplest form, a collaborative team is one that does more together than team members could do individually (Alvarez & Caregnato, 2021; Aunger et al., 2022).

Depending on your position, team collaboration in the workplace may look a little different:

- **For Team Leaders**, collaboration helps assign jobs while giving direct subordinates their due, expanding their skill sets, and supporting career advancement (Crain et al., 2021; Lawrence et al., n.d.).
- **For Individual Team Members**, collaboration helps them communicate more effectively with the team and work together to accomplish great initiatives (Aslan et al., 2022; Crain et al., 2021; Lawrence et al., n.d.).
- **For Employees from Other Disciplines**, team collaboration is key to moving work forward without friction. Without a clear way to work together and communicate, your team may end up isolated, and work may end up getting lost along the way.

So, these are some examples of what collaboration can look like in the workplace (Reed & McDermott, 2020; Schmid et al., 2016):

- **Group Brainstorming:** A perfect example of effective collaboration is the good old brainstorming session. This practice allows everyone on the team to contribute their ideas and further the project with innovative solutions to complex problems (Jones, 2021; Yano et al., 2021).
- **Diverse Teams:** Every member of your team is different and contributes in unique ways. Building an inclusive team with a diversity of talents, skill levels, and personal and professional backgrounds strengthens collaboration on your team (Jones, 2021; Yano et al., 2021).
- **Open Communication and Open Discussions:** for teams to work together effectively, they need to show a willingness to ask questions, delve into specific points, and even disagree to move forward. While open and frank communication is not always easy or comfortable, being a collaborative team means creating together to develop better solutions, listening to others' opinions, and working together to achieve goals (Albrecht et al., 2020; Best et al., n.d.).

Successful collaborative teams rely on the following values:

Clarity: clear communication is key. Your team may not agree on everything, but it is essential that you communicate opinions, ideas, and priorities clearly to avoid unnecessary conflict or misunderstanding (Albrecht et al., 2020; Allamsetty et al., n.d.; Best et al., n.d.; Magen-Nagar et al., 2019).

Efficiency: The level of team collaboration doesn't necessarily have to do with the amount of time you spend together. It all depends on how that time is used. Have

shorter, more objective meetings or reports to help your team get the job done on time (Albrecht et al., 2020; Allamsetty et al., n.d.; Best et al., n.d.; Magen-Nagar et al., 2019).

Positivity: not all team projects will run smoothly. Teams that know how to overcome failure and start a new project with a positive attitude make collaboration a lasting success (Albrecht et al., 2020; Allamsetty et al., n.d.; Best et al., n.d.; Magen-Nagar et al., 2019).

Confidence: Team members need to feel safe to contribute their individual ideas and skills. Show your team that you care about them and believe in their ability.

Accountability: Check with your team to make sure everyone is exercising their job responsibilities. If a member is missing deadlines or failing to deliver work to the expected quality, try to identify the problem and provide the necessary support so that they can achieve their goals in the future (Albrecht et al., 2020; Allamsetty et al., n.d.; Best et al., n.d.; Magen-Nagar et al., 2019).

Want to build a collaborative team, but don't know how? Fostering team collaboration is not as simple as pushing a button: the ability to manage projects requires dedication and focus. But if the time has come to start enjoying the benefits of team collaboration, check out these 11 tips for creating a collaborative culture in your company (Albrecht et al., 2020; Allamsetty et al., n.d.; Magen-Nagar et al., 2019; Oliveira et al., 2018):

1. Foster Collaboration as a Core Value

This tip may seem obvious, but it's crucial to affirming the importance of collaboration for you and your team. Not all teams value collaboration - some are driven by competitiveness and intrepidity. Take the time to make it clear that team collaboration is important and explain how your team will achieve this quality (Sanga & Brogdon, 2021).

2. Establish Communication Conventions

In part, you can create and promote team collaboration by creating guidelines for your team to communicate and work together. In the beginning, collaboration will not be easy. It will take some time working together for members to feel fully comfortable working with each other - and that's fine. However, you can make the process easier by sitting down and creating the team communication plan with them.

Take some time to think about these decisions:

- What should be communicated by e-mail?
- What kind of message should be sent over direct messaging platforms?

- What types of information should be shared via project management tools?
- Are there preferred days or times for meetings?
- What kind of communication and discussion guidelines or rules should we establish as a team to create an inclusive environment?

Knowing when not to communicate can be just as helpful. Take care to make time to focus deeply on work and encourage employees to do the same by indicating when they are busy or setting aside times on the calendar to avoid having their days interrupted by meetings. At Asana, we have a practice of not scheduling meetings on Wednesdays, which sets aside time for everyone from the newest team member to the executive leaders to focus on work.

3. Invite Co-Creation

The central tenet of team collaboration says that teams can do things better together than they could do individually. So, one of the best ways to promote team collaboration is to invite co-creation. Don't just ask team members to work together; also brainstorm, promote dialogue, and make room for disagreement. Co-creation means developing an idea together, not working toward a goal separately. Co-creation does not have to take place face-to-face. Asynchronous brainstorming can prove surprisingly beneficial. A simple way to co-create with a virtual team is to invite everyone to collaborate on a file in Google Documents: just open the file and complement each other's ideas.

4. Encourage Open Communication

Lead by example. Collaboration happens when team members feel they can put their heart and soul into the work. They should be encouraged to participate, innovate, and communicate. Instead of keeping their thoughts to themselves or stubbornly insisting on their own opinion, they should be able to express themselves freely and bring out all the brilliant ideas that result. However, open communication also implies occasional disagreements between people. Disagreements do not nullify team collaboration. In fact, healthy disagreements and open conversations are crucial to successful team collaboration.

SO HOW TO GIVE AND RECEIVE CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM?

5. Lead by Example

It's hard to create a collaborative team without a cooperative leader. Collaboration comes from the top, so make sure you always invite co-creation by encouraging open communication and taking the time for your team to innovate and collaborate. Encourage team members to contact you if they have questions or schedule an individual meeting in addition to team conversations (Albrecht et al., 2020; Katane et al., 2015; Romero-Garcia et al., 2020).

6. Take the Time to Encourage Team Bonding

When was the last time your team got together just to talk? Team-building activities are not only a great way to relax. More than that, these activities are also an opportunity for team members to get to know each other better outside the work context. What are your co-worker's life goals? Where was your boss born, and how has that contributed to her life experience?

WHERE DID YOUR TEAMMATES WORK BEFORE THEY GOT HERE?

Teams that know each other inside and outside the work context understand each other better. So, when they are busy with the next project, they can communicate more easily and collaborate more effectively.

7. Highlight Successful Teamwork

Everyone loves to receive recognition for a job well done - and that includes congratulating employees on successful teamwork. If two team members work together to realize a new idea or lead a particularly difficult initiative, dedicate yourself to giving a commendation. Ask team members to share their impressions of the experience: what worked well? How did they collaborate and work together to achieve the goal? Not only does this give them a well-deserved moment in the spotlight, but it can also serve as an example for other team members to collaborate with in the future.

8. Provide Mentoring Opportunities

Developing team collaboration is a socio-behavioural skill: it's really about the combination of interpersonal and communication skills. Each team member can work to improve these skills, but sometimes an outsider's perspective can be surprisingly helpful.

There are some intangible aspects that only come with work experience, company time, and familiarity with the market or job function, and new employees may be eager to learn more. Encouraging mentoring opportunities within your company can help the entire team improve.

9. Set Goals Collaboratively

How does your team set goals? This is a key step for any team, which can help define what's important and act toward those goals. Often, goals are set from the top down, meaning that leadership sets the goals and the metrics for how to achieve them. This may help your team or company achieve a common goal, but it doesn't give you the opportunity to collaborate and innovate on how that goal is achieved. Consider setting hybrid goals, where the team or company leadership sets the main goal, and team members are encouraged to set their own individual key results or KPIs and consider how they will achieve the goal. One possibility is to hold workshops or brainstorming sessions to define these metrics.

Making space for team members to engage with the goals can further pique their interest in achieving them.

10. Be Flexible

The leader of a collaborative team needs to constantly adapt to the different needs and practices of their colleagues. Don't expect people with different backgrounds to follow the same path; instead, recognize and support each person's style. Implementing collaborative work will be much easier for your team if your strategies are flexible.

11. Use Shared Tools

The best and easiest way to work as a team is to use a single shared tool. When you have a central hub of information, all your teams' work takes place in the same place. It's easy to find any news, shared files, or additional context. By reducing the obstacles to working together and collaborating, you empower your team to do more together, with less effort.

THE BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION

When practiced correctly, collaboration in the workplace can have a positive impact on your team and organization, increase efficiency and innovation, and improve team relationships. Greater innovation, by bringing teammates together, you encourage the creation of innovative ideas and solutions to complex problems that they might not be able to think of on their own. Recall an exceptional creative brainstorming session in which you participated. The team probably had an abundance of new ideas, which complemented the ideas proposed by others, to polish a brilliant plan. That is the magic of team collaboration: individually, the team members could not have come up with the proposed solution. It took bringing everyone together and engaging them-and making room for co-creation-to get to that point. How to use idea boards for effective team collaboration to make happier teams alignment of distributed teams?

Collaboration can be more difficult when teammates are not working in the same location. But it's still important. The right collaboration tools can help your team members feel less isolated and more integrated into the organization. Use collaboration software to get team members up to speed with colleagues on a daily basis and actively participate in decisions, discussion sessions, and the distribution of work. Even if they are not in the same location, these collaborative experiences can make them feel more connected.

Shared knowledge among team members, is very important when team members work together, they often get involved in each other's work. When contributing to joint initiatives and solving problems collaboratively, team members need to share ideas and talk about their work, which gives visibility to the whole team. Although the production-line concept is not very well-liked, it has proven to be highly efficient. Successful team collaboration can improve company-wide processes and individual workflows. Collaboration can make your team more productive and with more time to accomplish other tasks. This can impact your customer's experience, who will get more responsive service from your team when they need it. Teams that collaborate well are more satisfied. By collaborating on projects, team members have the opportunity to bond and highlight their individual strengths and talents, plus they feel valued as part of the whole. Team happiness also directly influences the quality of work, which has an impact on the success of your organization.

THE CHALLENGES OF COLLABORATION

We address the benefits of team collaboration and how to get your team to the point where collaboration happens effortlessly. While there are no disadvantages

to implementing collaboration correctly, there are some pitfalls you may encounter when implementing strategies, namely, team leaders who know the difficulties will find it easier to assist their colleagues when obstacles arise.

Problem: Your Team is Unmotivated to Implement the New Policies and Use the New Collaboration Tools

Solution: Make sure you start slowly. It is recommend implementing a new workflow or project to figure out how the new processes and tools look. It also helps to have internal collaborators who can guide others through the adoption journey.

Making Room for Everyone

Problem: Team members who are shy or less confident may have difficulty in collaborative work environments. Although their opinion is valued, they may feel less willing to share or contribute their ideas because they fear failure or being rejected by the group.

Solution: leaders can address this problem by establishing inclusive meetings and guidelines for communications to make room for people who tend to be quieter. The team should also be aware that failure is not something to be feared, but rather an opportunity for growth. This can take some of the pressure off colleagues who feel less confident about their ideas, abilities, and talents.

Read: 19 unconscious biases to overcome in order to foster a culture of inclusion

Too Much Information

Problem: For the team to work together effectively, team members must know where to find what they need. Seamless collaboration in the workplace only works if all information is readily available and organized, rather than scattered across multiple platforms, or worse, stored in personal accounts.

Solution: Use a work management tool like Asana, which keeps all your files and applications in one place and lets you know exactly what everyone is doing and by when. A work management tool not only reduces switching between apps but also makes it easy for your team to find, comment, and collaborate on information or tasks.

Notifications of More

Problem: Now that everyone is connected, your inbox keeps “beeping” with new information, and you can hardly concentrate on work.

Solution: Make sure your collaboration software offers easy access to the relevant notification controls. Choose solutions that include a “do not disturb” mode and opt-out of notifications, so your team can more easily focus on the work that matters to them.

More Complex Decision Making

Problem: The more members are involved in the project, the more opinions will be received, and this can lead to a longer decision-making process.

Solution: A good leader can use his or her communication skills and influence to navigate the processes and lead the team to a solution acceptable to all.

Frictions Between People with Strong Personalities

Problem: Employees with strong personalities can be great for the organization, but when they are on the same team, it can lead to friction and resistance.

Solution: Try to create diverse teams with people who complement each other and work well together. As a leader, make sure everyone feels treated equally and supported by their colleagues. Find out regularly about your colleagues’ collaborative skills and lead them to work better as a team.

Slow Results

Problem: Team performance hasn’t improved, and the group dynamic doesn’t seem to have changed either. Or there are simply doubts whether workplace collaboration is improving the way your organization works.

Solution: When it comes to increasing team collaboration, you may not see results overnight, but helping your team gain clarity and visibility is unquestionably a positive outcome. Try to set clear and measurable goals as to where you stand initially, so that you can then look back and assess how things are progressing over time.

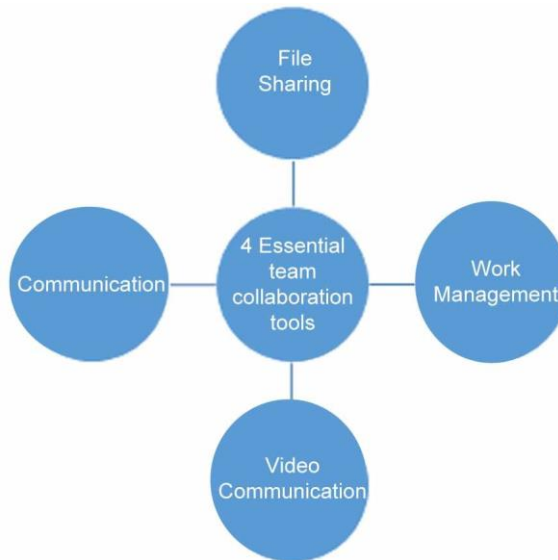
Not all teams will face the same challenges when working together, but the more prepared you are as a leader, the easier it will be to overcome them.

ESSENTIAL COLLABORATION TOOLS FOR THE TEAM

Collaboration apps can help your team by making it even easier to communicate, share files, and coordinate work.

These tools help your team promote effective collaboration, a file-sharing tool, such as Google Workspace, Microsoft Office, or Dropbox. One of the biggest barriers

Figure 1. Four Essential team collaboration



to team collaboration is having to search for documents or wait for an email response before you can access a file. With a centralized file sharing tool, your team has a shared knowledge base and a repository of files always on hand.

A communication tool, such as Slack or Microsoft Teams.

HOW DOES YOUR TEAM CURRENTLY COMMUNICATE?

Communicating quickly for simple tasks or having fun moments of bonding with colleagues can be key to teamwork. A good team stays in constant contact, even if they are not always talking to each other. This is especially important if your team is remote. While a meeting or huddle is a great way to communicate, a messaging tool provides easy access to all team members. A video communication tool, such as Zoom or Google Meet. In the case of remote teams, video conferencing is key to collaboration. Increasing contact time with your team can help create a collaborative environment - even when you're working remotely. Make sure everyone on your team has the ability to create video conferences and knows how to use the tool.

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