

FIVE KEYS TO COLLABORATIVE WORKING



In today's busy and demanding work environment, it's easy to lose sight of what, or rather who is around to help and support. It's important, however, not to forget that other people are there and they are (mostly) willing to help!

We've all heard the saying 'two heads are better than one'. Indeed, this is only the case if both heads are working collaboratively. Together people can achieve more in a shorter space of time, they can overcome more challenges and develop more creative solutions. But this is only the case if people work together and so often, I have found that, for various reasons people are not working as effectively together as they could, and this can impact negatively on all those benefits of being in a team.

There are, however, some things that leaders (and individuals) can do to help improve collaborative working within their team. The people involved need to take some time to consider things from a more holistic perspective.

This article contains some tips on developing more collaborative relationships so that you can achieve more, quicker and with success. These are my five keys to effective collaboration.

1. CREATE CLEAR END GOALS

Have you ever felt that people are all pulling in different directions rather than working to the 'greater good' of the task at hand? Do you think people are working against what you're trying to achieve, or perhaps that they are actively blocking you from achieving the end goal?

The chances are, when this happens, people are working towards different goals. If you are working to a different end to your colleague, and they are working to a different end to the next, how can you be expected to collaborate to help achieve something else?

There are steps that leaders can take to help define and communicate shared goals; this is the first key in creating a collaborative working environment. Individuals can also act on this by exploring with their leaders what the defined end goals actually are.

Steps to creating clear goals:

- I. Be clear of the goal(s) yourself, who they relate to and why
- II. Define the goal, review it and redefine it so it makes sense to everyone in the business
- III. Consider it from every perspective, what questions remain? Where can interpretation sneak in and destroy the shared goal?
- IV. Communicate it to everyone together if at all possible – this gives everyone the same message. Be open for questions and answers about the goal – although you give everyone the same message, there is still space for individual interpretation, therefore any questions need answering in front of everyone in the team, this helps reduce individual interpretation
- V. Where questions come up afterwards, try and get the question, and answer given, to everyone involved to keep information and communication flowing
- VI. If goals change, which they often do, make sure you repeat steps I to V

2. ESTABLISH ROLES AND BOUNDARIES

For people to work well together they need to know what their role is in achieving the end goal, so make sure you're clear about the roles in the team.

For whole company collaboration, this is where job design and organisational structure are absolutely essential.

For smaller teams, creating a RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) Matrix can be a real and practical help – get the key collaborators working on this if the team is small enough. This isn't practical for whole business collaboration, however where project teams and departmental teams are concerned, doing some work on this, that involves the team members, makes people's understanding of their role and the roles of others so much clearer.

Be clear on who does what, when and why. Who needs to be included, updated, consulted and how often? The more work you do on this at the start, the easier the team will find working together.

Establishing the experience within the team can also help with collaborative working – making people aware of the best person to involve or ask for advice at each stage, who needs to be in attendance at meetings and how the meetings are relevant to them, all support greater team work and collaboration.

3. GET TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER IN THE TEAM

People are different in how they prefer to communicate.

Do you find that some people you instantly click with, while others you find almost impossible to work with? There may be a quite simple reason for this and it comes down to style – how you like to work, and how they like to work can be similar (and you click) or very different (you don't).

By understanding styles of communication, how you like to work and interact versus how they like to, can significantly impact (for the better) how you work with others.

Do some work with a communication styles specialist to understand how and why people work the way they do. I have seen countless occasions where individuals and whole teams have improved working together simply through engaging in some form of communication styles workshop – awareness is key.

4. MEMBERS MUST DEVELOP A COLLABORATIVE MINDSET

Encourage team members to ‘think positive’ - it's OK to recognise limits and challenges to collaboration, however it's important to restrict any negative talk and encourage positive/success

talk. Recognise there are limits, then get the group looking to resolve or overcome those limits together, what do they need to do/say/think to make it successful?

The power of imagining success. By imagining the project/work being successful, members are more likely to achieve success. Get them imagining what does successful collaboration look like to them? How are they working with others? How does it feel to be successful in this team? Doing this in groups or as a full team and sharing how these interactions look to each individual helps them see how they personally can impact the success of the project or team.

Create a team charter – through workshops involving the whole team, this is an authorisation of how to work with one another. A team charter sets out expectations and agreement across the team around how they will work together to achieve success.

5. LEADERSHIP MUST REINFORCE COLLABORATIVE WORKING AND LEAD BY EXAMPLE

By setting shared goals and linking individual goals into the shared goals you become an enabler for the team to achieve collaborative working. To further support this you can include collaborative working as one of those individual goals. This makes it clear to everyone you expect them to work together and support one another. Encourage sharing of individual goals so the team can support one another individually as well as in a shared sense.

Actively work with your peers to ensure you know what’s going on in other teams around the business, share any updates with your team so they can support colleagues in other teams where possible.

Carry out lessons learnt on a regular basis – not just at the end of a project. Share your lessons with other teams and departments if there’s a chance those lessons will help them.

Celebrate successes where collaboration has worked, or where someone in the team has worked collaboratively with others. Celebrating success, if done genuinely and not on a superficial level, has a great impact on people’s mindsets for collaboration.

As always, I hope this article has been useful to you. If you have any learning needs you’d like to share or discuss, please connect with us either on linked in (Thirst4 Learning Ltd) or via hello@thirst4learning.com.

Best wishes to all.