

How to Collaborate Successfully

Understanding 3 elements of collaboration

- Task - What are we doing together?
 - Creative, problem solving, or implementation
- Process - How are we going to accomplish this task?
 - Managing time, meetings, division and scheduling of work, draft and revision processes

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- Affect - What feelings do we have about this work?
 - Feelings that are based on prior experience: religious and cultural values, age/race/ethnic/gender bias, hierarchical issues, competitiveness
 - Feelings based on current experience
 - “Not pulling his/her weight”
 - “S/he’s always late with work.”
 - “Didn’t show up for the meeting”
 - Other

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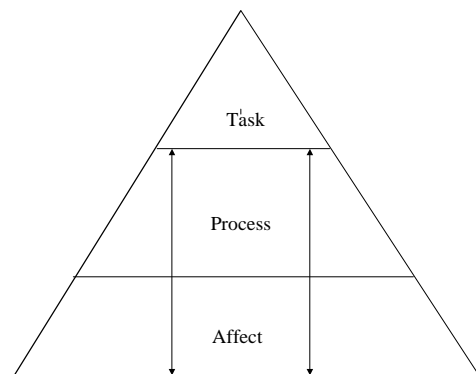


Figure 1. Collaboration elements

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Basic principles

- Be aware that process and affect change as the task changes.
 - Shifts in task may mean changes in leadership roles and leadership styles.
 - Shifts in leadership roles call for changes in “followership” roles.

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- Pay attention to process even in the very beginning of your team’s work.
 - Practice active listening.
 - Use good interpersonal skills.
 - Make it explicit. (Say it out loud. Write it down.)

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- Learn to identify body language and behavior that signals negative feelings.
 - E.g. Lack of eye contact, locked arms, missed meetings, time wasting, verbal hostility
- Try to address and resolve the feelings.
 - Hint: it's usually connected to process.
- If this is not possible, try to control them.
- If this is not possible, get some mediation.

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How do strong teams function?

- Elaborate key ideas in writing and verbally.
- Consider alternate ideas/solutions.
 - Don't jump to consensus prematurely.
- Pay careful attention to process.
- Voice disagreements constructively, directly, and explicitly.
- Give positive feedback directly and explicitly.

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How to prevent work division problems

- Clarify expectations.
 - People have different priorities. Know what your's are. Ask about your teammates'.
- Be explicit in planning work breakdown.
- Keep notes.

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Strategies to mend work division conflicts when they do happen

- First, pay attention to what you are doing or saying. Re-shape your actions.
 - We often give cues that say it's OK for us to do more than our share. Why?
 - To control our own anxiety about project
 - To be in control
 - Because we are competitive
 - Because we aren't skillful at negotiating so we go off on our own (lone wolf phenomenon)

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- Second, collect some data, get your team to collect data and make this data visible.
 - Describe what you are doing specifically.
 - Count and record time that work takes.
 - "I thought that this task would take 3 hours, but it was closer to 6 hours."

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- Third, make discussion about work sharing a natural and non-hostile part of weekly meetings.
 - Address it directly in terms of your perspective rather than an attack.
 - "I think I have done most of the work this week, and I don't want to keep going this way. Let's talk about how to reallocate tasks."
 - Defuse dissatisfaction before it builds.

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