

Pillars of Collaboration Professional Series



Collaboration is an evolving process whereby two or more social entities actively and reciprocally engage in joint activities aimed at achieving at least one shared goal.(1) Successful collaboration moves beyond coordinating and does not happen automatically, even when highly effective individuals are brought together. Effective collaboration requires specific team-focused skills. When done well, collaboration can improve quality, efficiency, and innovation.(2) When done ineffectively, it can result in decreased productivity and individual burnout.

Productive collaboration and team performance requires team members to understand shared goals, build trust, maintain mutual respect, and employ effective communication. These four pillars of collaboration are the vital components we develop through our experiential learning Professional Series based on analysis of research in Human Resources, Organizational Development, and best practices recommended by leading experts. Team members will improve these skills at the EDGE and can make connections with patterns that occur in their organizations. EDGE programs provide the space and guidance to begin the transfer of knowledge gained to impact the workplace environment.

Shared Goals



When teams believe in a shared goal, they work more cohesively together. Team members must understand the shared goals of the team's collaboration as well as individual goals, parallel goals, and other goals that may be in conflict with the shared goals.(1) When teams understand these goals, they are more likely to understand the role each individual plays and, as a result, to develop a plan to maximize their performance together.(4)

At the EDGE, teams practice goal setting through problem-solving activities. Time spent in facilitated conversations identify the shared goals, individual goals, etc. of team members and initiate shared goal discussions relevant to their organization's collaborative processes.

Trust

In collaborative communities, trust accrues from the degree to which each person believes in the skills and capabilities of team members to support achievement of shared goals. This increases knowledge sharing and willingness to further the shared purpose. The interdependence of individuals skills and group goals results in relationships between members that are based on functional capabilities instead of who they know or other influence-driven organizational models.(8) As individuals understand how their skills and goals align with the team, they have higher interest in group cohesion.(4)

Through problem-solving activities at the EDGE, team members will learn more about individuals' skills and capabilities and can strategize how those may be utilized in their organizational context.

Mutual Respect

A step beyond knowing is *respecting* the skills and capabilities each person brings to the team. This respect allows space for skills to be practiced which in turn builds trust and cohesion in a team. Collaborative communities utilize distributed expertise to leverage the diverse skillsets to improve efficiency and effectivity.(5) This requires negotiation among individuals who willingly step back to allow others' expertise to take the forefront Mutual respect supports a growth mindset, allowing for innovation and expedient shifts necessary in rapidly changing environments.(6)



At the EDGE, team members have opportunities to practice stepping up / stepping back through taking on different roles during problem-solving activities. Activities are designed to build mutual respect and allow for practice in creativity, idea sharing, and candor.

Effective Communication

In collaborative communities, team members listen to each other to create a space to build understanding. This allows the team to consider different approaches to reach shared goals.(7) Cohesive teams build an explicit and shared understanding around areas such as timelines, expectations, and commitment. These go as specific as necessary—down to details such as the timeliness of email responses and meeting attendance.(3) Teams talk about key priorities so everyone knows what time needs to be spent on and who has capacity to take on necessary work.

Communication will be practiced throughout EDGE activities, as will evaluation of communication skills. The focus is on increasing awareness of effective and ineffective communication behaviors, revealing assumptions, and practice to adjust or improve skills through sequenced activities.

References

Below is a list of those resources referenced in this handout. Please note, this is not a complete list of all resources utilized to develop the professional series. Those with an asterisk are recommended readings for individuals interested in learning more about the skills for effective collaboration.

- (1) Bedwell, W., J. Wildman, D. Diaz Granados, M. Salazar, W. Kramer, & E. Salas. Collaboration at work: An integrative multilevel conceptualization. *Human Resource Management Review*. 22(2) 128-145. 2012. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2011.11.007>
- (2) Amelkin, V., O. Askarisichani, O., Y. Kim, T. Malone & Singh, A. Dynamics of collective performance in collaboration networks. *PLoS ONE* 13(10) 2018. e0204547. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0204547>
- (3) Cross, R., S. Taylor, & D. Zehner. Collaboration without Burnout. *Harvard Business Review*. 96(4), 134–137. 2018.
- (4) Pearsall, Matthew. The "I" in "team." 7.28.2017. <https://www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/news/the-i-in-team/>
- (5) Christian, Jessica and M. Pearsall. What drives successful workplace teams? (2023). <https://thewell.unc.edu/2023/02/10/what-drives-successful-workplace-teams/>
- (6) Ferrazzi, K. A new social contract for teams: Members must commit to new behaviors to accelerate innovation and growth. *Harvard Business Review*. 88-97. (September/October) 2022.
- (7) Gino, Francesca. Cracking the Code of Sustained Collaboration. *Harvard Business Review*. 97(6) 73–81. 2019.
- (8) Kwan, L. The Collaboration Blind Spot. *Harvard Business Review*. 66–73. (March/April) 2019. <https://hbr.org/2019/03/the-collaboration-blind-spot>