

10 Tips for Creating a Culture of Collaboration

- **1. Make a Commitment to Ensure Every Individual is Represented**

One challenge in collaborative work environments is the potential for having the brunt of work fall on only a few individuals. One way to circumvent this in your organization is to avoid silencing team members when they speak. Because some individuals are naturally shy or introverted, they may discount their ideas before they share them. If someone repeatedly silences himself or herself, or is repeatedly silenced by others on the team, then there may be a reluctance to participate in collaborative activities.

- **2. Establish Collaboration Protocols**

There are two cliché phrases often associated with collaborative efforts: "two heads think better than one" is the positive affirmation of the benefits of collaboration. Conversely, the phrase "too many cooks spoil the broth" encapsulates some of the negative aspects of collaboration. Communication protocols will assist you in embracing the benefits of collaborative work in your organization and minimising its negative aspects.

- **3. Set Clear Collaboration Goals**

It's not enough to establish protocols and to make a visible commitment to collaborating with others. It is **absolutely vital** that at the outset of any collaborative undertaking you hold at least one meeting devoted towards setting goals for the project. What is the deliverable that will be created through collaboration? How much collaboration will be necessary, how much work will be delegated amongst the members? What is the desired outcome? These goals must be **S.M.A.R.T.** (specific, measurable, attainable realistic and time- bound) to ensure people are all on the same page.

- **4. Develop a System for Tracking Everyone's Involvement**

Have a reliable system in place for tracking the involvement of each member involved with the collaboration. There are many software programs that allow users to track tasks and their completion. Nonetheless, it doesn't have to be 'fancy'. You could easily use task boards and frequent, regular meetings to ensure you know where each individual in the collaboration team is with his or her efforts.

Continued on next page ...

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- **5. Reward Collaboration Efforts**

Acknowledge solid collaboration efforts when you see them in action. By acknowledging a job well done, you are helping to encourage future behaviour that mimics what you currently see. Similarly, if a team member refuses to work with the other individuals in a collaborative manner, you will need to use effective conflict resolution techniques and have appropriate consequences for the situation.

- **6. Set the Office Up for Collaborative Work**

Organisations with traditional cubicle work spaces may find the environment works against their attempts to conduct collaborative projects. Make work desks as open as possible. Have an internal instant messaging system that facilitates communication between members. Group individuals in the same office or adjacent offices who are working on similar projects.

- **7. Have an Open Dialog About What is - and Isn't - Working in the Collaboration**

This isn't just about discussing the nuts and bolts of the tasks an individual is working on and what still needs to be done. Keep the door for communication open when it comes to discussing the collaboration itself. What's working? What isn't? Be sure you understand where your team members stand on the collaboration by asking *how the collaboration itself is coming along*.

- **8. Implement the Proper Collaboration Tools for the Job**

Having the appropriate collaboration tools is especially important if your team members are located in different physical locations. Team members need a way to post ideas, discuss issues, and track where everyone else is on the project. Collaboration software is not necessarily required. You can use Skype, Google documents and other Cloud resources to assist you.

- **9. Accept that arriving at Consensus May Not be Easy**

Collaboration projects require team members not only work together, but that the work appears to be seamless when complete. That parts were worked on separately should not be obvious. To do this, team members must reach a consensus about the end result (and this relies heavily upon the clearly defined goals). There must also be a sense of accountability for all members. Ask all members to voice their concerns about each stage of the planning process – reach consensus – and any holes in your plan will be identified early on and the team can work together to overcome potential challenges.

- **10. Ensure Every Team Member Possesses the Required Knowledge for Collaboration**

Every team member needs information, collaboration tools, background & experience necessary to the project - **and** they are motivated to perform well.