

The Handbook for

SMART

School Teams

Second Edition

Revitalizing Best Practices
for Collaboration

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Cornerstones of Collaboration and Teamwork

Productive collaboration does not come easily. Most of us have belonged to a team in which everyone got along, but nothing got done. Sooner or later, busy people lose patience with teams that do not seem to accomplish much of anything. Productive collaboration takes both purpose and skill to be effective; teams need to be clear about why they exist (purpose) and have the ability to create and implement a plan for getting it done (skill). We can't create productive collaboration just by telling people to work together. Teams that have skill and purpose save time and develop effective solutions that they can implement smoothly. Without skill and purpose, collaboration is a waste of time—yet, ironically, time is one of the most frequently cited reasons for why people do not collaborate (Kanold, 2011; Loehr & Schwartz, 2003).

This chapter discusses the components needed to add purpose and skill to collaboration and ways that you can set the stage for productive collaboration.

Three Cornerstones of Productive Collaboration

The three cornerstones of effective collaboration and teamwork are *people*, *tasks*, and *processes* (see figure 1.1, page 20). When teams incorporate the characteristics of all three cornerstones synergistically, collaboration will be highly productive and enjoyable.

People

Teams operate with two influences: (1) individual members' interests and background knowledge, and (2) the

Is Collaboration Worth the Effort?

Since the birth of the human relations movement in the 1920s, social scientists have been exploring the relationship between participation and productivity in the workplace. Social science researchers study the structures and opportunities that people have to interact and to collaborate in their work.

The result? When people are taught the skills to work together collaboratively, they:

- Have clearly defined and shared expectations as a group (task)
- Are given time and resources to engage in collaboration targeted at a specific task or outcome (process)
- Realize improved performance, higher-quality solutions, and greater innovation
- Are happier workers

What could be better?

Source: Weisbord, 1987, 2012.

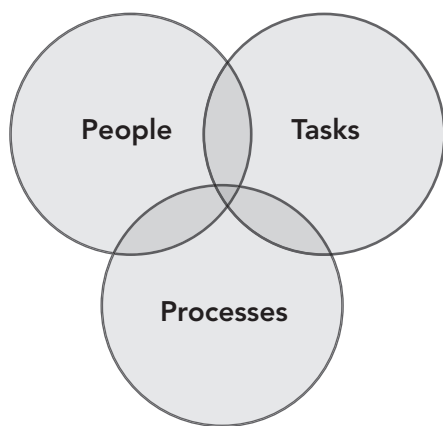


Figure 1.1: Three cornerstones of effective collaboration.

whole group's combined knowledge and creativity. Teams are comprised of *individuals*, which is important to remember because sometimes people think they must give up who they are in order to be effective team players. Not true. In fact, high-performing teams tap into the unique talents and skills of their individual members and value the diversity that those individuals represent. Successful teams acknowledge people's contributions—their leadership, commitment, knowledge, and skills.

Consider what it takes for us as individuals to be successful team members.

- We must be committed to developing skills that help us work effectively with others (communicating, listening, participating, and resolving conflicts).
- We must be committed to increasing our professional knowledge and experience so that we can help the team make good decisions.
- We must be aware of our own behaviors and work-style preferences and their impact on others, so we can adjust our behavior and help the group address all team members' needs.
- We must bring our background and experiences to the table and share them. Helping our group tap into what people know and have done is an essential part of building a successful team.
- We must be willing to work together to become clearer about our common purpose and goals to develop a shared sense of responsibility and commitment to achieving the group's mission—what we aspire to achieve—and goals.

These conditions are the same for everyone on a team, and we cannot forget that effective teamwork is a balancing of individual and group needs. Creating an environment where team members can contribute their individual creativity to a collaborative effort increases the success rate of the team.

Tasks

Teams exist for a purpose; they must accomplish certain goals within a given time frame. That is why an essential