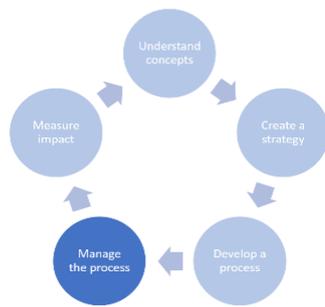


How do I manage the Collaboration Process?



Many of the cultural barriers to collaboration are as prevalent within as between organisations. It has been suggested that information can flow more easily between, say, software developers from different companies meeting at a barbeque than between people from different departments within the same organisation. Organisations therefore need to create a culture of sharing and, often, to overcome political resistance to working across silos

Collaborative working is tough. This is not about cosy, complacent relationships with no disagreements. This is about cultivating the very best and challenging thinking, of going to the limits of a relationship in arguing and contesting, exploring and testing, listening and reflecting. This is an environment of contrast – of action and reflection, of safety and of risk, of trials and of reward. But it should also be a culture of warmth and respect, of humility and pride, of sensitivity and firmness. The challenge we have is that people will view the problem with differing perspectives – reflecting their experience, circumstance and skill.



What factors do you think can influence collaboration?

There are many factors that can influence collaboration such as strategy, communication and culture. Please read on for a brief discussion of some of the main factors.

Critical success factors

When managing collaboration, you must consider the following 5 keys success factors:

Leadership

Culture

Communication

Structure

Finding the right
partner

Culture

Companies that create a culture and climate for knowledge generation, transfer and use perform better. Culture is the collection of fundamental values and belief systems which give meaning to organisations and is created from a broad range of internal and external influences, some of which are difficult to manage. Your organisation's culture can either help or hinder collaboration.

You can:

1. develop a visible connection between **sharing knowledge** and practical business objectives
2. integrate **knowledge creation and transfer** with an existing key business initiative
3. align **reward and recognition** structures to support knowledge transfer and reuse
4. try to encourage **trust, cooperation and management of conflict** in your business.

Leadership

Effective leadership is important for successful collaboration and innovation. Leaders can influence a group to achieve their goals by establishing and communicating goals building trust and inspiring teamwork defining a clear purpose and strategic intent .

You can:

1. Make innovation a regular item for discussion
2. Ensure some of your funds go towards innovative projects.
3. Ensure staff have the time and training necessary to collaborate.
4. Set expectations and get ready to hear all kinds of different viewpoints.
5. Give people time to problem solve by themselves.
6. Allow space for conflict and disagreements.
7. Make communication and problem solving transparent.



You could also try the following collaborative problem-solving technique as by taking on collaborative problem solving with clear goals, leaders are more likely to discover smart, creative solutions to help the team progress in its mission:

Action	Description	How collaboration helps
Problem Finding	Determine the origin of a problem, what happened and why it happened	Widen your focus. Plan an integrated approach that takes the roles and goals of all key people involved into consideration.
Fact Finding	Spend time to find what went wrong, what solutions already tried	Depending on the nature of the problem, use techniques to collect as much information as possible (talk to key informants, observe, interview, make research).

Problem Definition	Find the root of the problem	If you only fix what you see on the surface, the problem will almost certainly return, and need fixing over, and over again. So, involve others to get to the root.
Idea Finding	List potential problem resolution strategies along with the risks and benefits associated with each one	Involve others to list potential problem resolution strategies along with the risks and benefits associated with each.
Selection and Evaluation	Read case studies, interview experts and play online business simulation games	Read case studies, interview experts and play online business simulation games.
Planning	Before implementing a solution, assess its impact.	Do a small-scale survey and measure reaction. Get an opinion, especially from more experienced people.
Selling the Idea	Promote your idea to fellow team members	Identify the key influencers in your company or your customers and make sure you get them on board.
Action	Refresh your project management skills?!	Create step-by-step actions for solving the problem along with a communications strategy for notifying stakeholders and a timeline for implementation.

Communication

Collaboration facilitates the cross fertilisation of ideas. Communication among employees and with outsiders stimulates their performance. Thus, the better that members relate to each other and with key outsiders the better their performance.

Organisational structure

The structure of your organisation is a critical success factors for collaboration. This comprises the definition of authorities, responsibilities, roles and tasks assigned to each member. Even if they do not work on the same thing your staff can learn from each other's experiences and apply this new-found knowledge to their work. Mixing staff allows employees from all sorts of different social and work backgrounds to learn from their colleagues' experiences from a different perspective. Thus, they can bring fresh ideas to the project by thinking out of their comfort zone.

When collaborating externally, although each enterprise keeps its own organisational structure, it is sometimes useful to define an inter-enterprise structure to not only allow fast decision-making but also help to manage the complexity of the collaborative association.

Think about:

1. Collaboration leadership
2. Compatibility of management styles
3. Joint decision-making
4. Multidisciplinary teams.

Most alliances are defined by service level agreements (SLAs) that identify what each side commits to delivering rather than what each hope to gain from the partnership. The SLAs emphasize operational performance metrics rather than strategic objectives, and all too often those metrics become outdated as the business environment changes. Alliance managers don't know whether to stick to the original conditions or renegotiate. By that time, the companies' leaders have returned to run their own organisations and haven't followed up to ensure that their vision for synergies is being realized. The middle managers coordinating the alliance, who have no clear way to translate their leaders' vision into action, simply focus on achieving the operational SLA targets instead of working across organisational boundaries to make the alliance a strategic success. And because the managers usually remain under the HR policies and follow the career development paths of their parent organisation, they have little incentive to commit much energy to the project.

Finding the right partner

We have already discussed the importance of finding the right partner, but it is worth repeating here as it is so important for successful collaboration. Both sides of the collaboration need to determine what they want from the partnership and what they are willing to give to achieve it. It is also vital to put a collaboration agreement in place to create a clear understanding between all parties.

You should also consider other factors such as:

- Holding face to face meetings
- Having a top-level executive sponsor.
- Ensuring that participation is seen as approved – even mandatory-behaviour.
- Creating a shared sense of purpose.
- Providing a reward – intrinsic or otherwise – for participation
- Involving your staff early in the process.