How to Make Real Collaboration Possible

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Do you agree that collaboration is a Good Thing?
Few teams enjoy real collaboration.
The reasons, and remedies, are not always obvious.

What we’ll cover:

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Collaboration

“Working together to accomplish a shared objective and jointly owning the results.”
Cooperation

“Every participant focuses on completing their own part.”
Why collaborate?

More minds ➔ better ideas, better quality.

**Risks of working on one’s own**

- Misunderstanding the task
- Lacking information
- Deviating from standards, patterns, decisions
- Becoming a silo
- Tunnel vision
- Getting stuck
- Losing focus
- Producing opaque / complicated solutions
- Making questionable assumptions / decisions

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Ideal state: **balance**

- **collaboration**
- **cooperation**
- **solo ownership**

Factors:
- The nature of the work
- The personalities
- Pride, accomplishment, recognition, self-worth
- Future needs
Before we continue, take a moment to:

Identify **specific people**

and a **specific context/situation**

where collaboration does not occur, but should.

Be clear on **why** collaboration would be

a net positive there.
Nine prerequisites for a person to collaborate with others in a given situation
#1: Compelling reasons to join forces

**Related to the result**

- Not sure I’m up to it
- I need help
- More people involved → better result

**Beyond the result**

- Learn to do better next time
- Have fun
- Share my knowledge
- Help my team grow

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#2: Those reasons justify collaboration
#3: Valuable participation

Believing that the other person:

- can make valuable contributions
- will be there to the end
#4: Psychological safety

• While collaborating, I can afford to be vulnerable
• Afterwards, the other will be honest about my contribution
#5: Fair treatment (after the work is done)
#6: Enjoying the other’s company

Looking forward to the experience of working together:
• Reason to believe it would be positive (not merely neutral!)
• Willingness to get past bad experiences
#7: Cocreation of the experience
#8: Emotional intelligence

- Self-awareness
- Empathy
- Ability to handle conflict / awkwardness
#9: Possibility of rapport

- We have *something meaningful* in common
- Physical setup doesn’t make the interaction difficult
Collaboration deterrents

KEEP CALM AND JUST FORGET IT
Work is described in terms of activities and outputs

- **Activities**
  - coding
  - testing
  - meeting

- **Outputs**
  - stories in ‘done’
  - defects found
  - deployments

- **Outcomes**
  - value delivered
  - risks reduced
  - assumptions [dis]proven

The description of a task may make us assume that...

- working solo is enough (or optimal)
- specialization or expertise is critical
- other needed competencies don’t justify collaboration
Processes and tools imply expectation of individual work

Watch out for subtle messages and hidden assumptions

“The Three Questions”
Individuals are accountable but the team isn’t

“I have a lot on my plate”, “my part is done”, etc.
People have too much going on

• High WIP tempts people to split up and work solo
• Will something pull us apart midway through the task?
Exclusionary behaviours are allowed

- Cliques
- Headphones
- More than one language spoken when doing team work
Collaboration is not **explicitly** and **authentically** valued
How to make collaboration possible

1. Define your goals and parameters for collaboration.
2. Identify situations that would benefit from collaboration instead of cooperation or solo ownership.
3. For each situation, mentally survey your team and identify the earliest prerequisite that is typically unmet.
4. Seeing patterns or consistency? Address the root causes at the system level.
5. Seeing disparity? Address each unmet prerequisite on a personal level.
6. Recognize deterrents and decide how you’d handle them.
7. Prioritize your efforts... and be patient.
Recap: the prerequisites

For us to collaborate, we need to …

1. have good reasons not to work solo
2. agree that those reasons justify collaboration
3. expect valuable participation
4. feel safe around each other
5. be treated fairly afterwards
6. enjoy each other’s company
7. create the experience together
8. be able to handle conflict and awkwardness
9. make rapport possible
Recap: the deterents

1. Work is described in terms of activities and outputs
2. Process and tools imply expectation of individual work
3. Individuals are accountable, not the team
4. People have too much going on
5. Exclusionary behaviours are allowed
6. Collaboration is not explicitly and authentically valued