How to Make Real Collaboration Possible

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Almost ready!
Small-group discussion:

What concerns about collaboration led you to attend this session?
Why this session exists:
• Seemly universal agreement that collaboration is a Good Thing
• Yet, few teams enjoy real collaboration.
• The reasons, and remedies, are not always obvious.

What we’ll cover:

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<td>1</td>
<td>Collaboration vs. cooperation</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Nine prerequisites to collaboration</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Deterrents: cues and pressures that discourage collaboration</td>
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<td>How to make collaboration possible</td>
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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
Ideal state: **balance**

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

Think of **specific people**
and a **specific context/situation**
in your work/personal environment
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
#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 (by others, 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 deterents

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>coding</td>
<td>stories in ‘done’</td>
<td>value delivered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>testing</td>
<td>defects found</td>
<td>risks reduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meeting</td>
<td>deployments</td>
<td>assumptions [dis]proven</td>
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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

To Do | Doing | Done
---|---|---
Alex | | 
Tyler | | 
Mia | | 
Sandy | | 

"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
• makes it harder to justify collaboration
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 real 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 deterrents

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
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“The Agile Mind-Set”: how to be Agile... without prescribing practices
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