

A CLEAR PATH OR CLEAR ROLES?

Which is better for teamwork: a clearly defined approach to achieving a goal or clearly specified roles for team members?

Roles are the key, according to a study of 15 multinational corporations on effectiveness of their teams and collaborative practices.

“Collaboration improves when the roles of individual team members are clearly defined and well understood — when individuals feel that they can do a significant portion of their work independently,” according to “Eight ways to build collaborative teams”



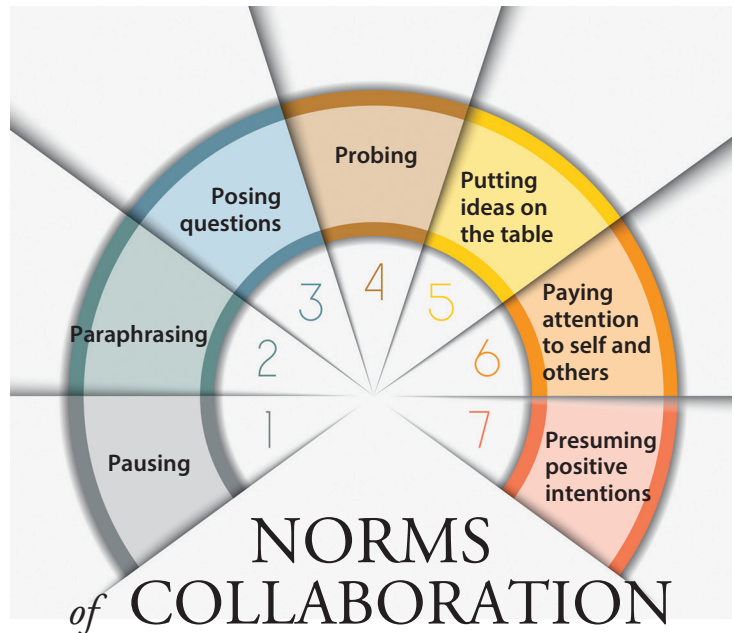
in *Harvard Business Review*.

“In addition, team members are more likely to want to collaborate if the path to achieving the team’s goal is left somewhat ambiguous. If a team perceives the task as one that requires creativity, where the approach is not yet well-known or predefined, its members are more likely to invest time and energy in collaboration.”

Source: Gratton, L. & Erickson, T. (2007, November). Eight ways to build collaborative teams. *Harvard Business Review*. Available at <https://hbr.org/2007/11/eight-ways-to-build-collaborative-teams>.

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Collaboration in any form improves when team members mindfully apply these seven norms of collaboration. Described by Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman in *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups*, team members use the norms above to improve their collaborative practice to achieve shared goals.

Learn more about the norms and find related tools at www.thinkingcollaborative.com.

Learners and facilitators can use these norms to discuss what collaborative behaviors are most important to their collective advancement. Individual learners may choose to focus on a particular norm or two in a given team meeting to strengthen their own collaborative practice.

Source: Garmston, R. & Wellman, B. (2009). *The adaptive school: A sourcebook for developing collaborative groups* (2nd ed.). Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

powerful WORDS

“The ultimate goal of collaborative learning is better teaching, better student learning, better results for every learner in schools. Excellent teams — supported by committed leaders and sustained resources — create a culture where every professional in a school takes responsibility for every student.”

— Tracy Crow, “Keys to collaboration,” pp. 10-12





SUPPORT

FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TEAMS

Is your school ready to support effective professional learning teams? Do a quick front-end analysis to see how many of these factors that influence team performance are in place. Put a check mark in the box next to items you agree currently describe your school. Discuss which boxes you checked in small groups. Which items can be addressed before beginning professional learning teams? Which will need attention?

TEACHER KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND INFORMATION

The faculty knows:

- How to collaborate with other adults.
- Why teachers are using professional learning teams.
- How learning teams are structured.
- What to do in a learning team meeting.
- How to manage resistance and conflict.
- How teachers can get needed information, resources, and assistance.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT, TOOLS, AND PROCESSES

- Policies and procedures are in place that will support learning teams.
- The school culture and organization are structured in a way that makes learning teams a natural outcome.
- Resources are available.
- Existing teacher workloads and expectations allow for learning team work.
- Teachers' noninstructional responsibilities are minimal.

TEACHER MOTIVATION AND COMMITMENT

The faculty:

- Sees professional learning teams as relevant.
- Values the opportunity to work collaboratively.
- Feels confident teachers can succeed in this initiative.
- Exhibits enthusiasm.
- Believes this effort will help students.

INCENTIVES

The school will encourage learning team participation through:

- Memberships in professional organizations and education journal subscriptions.
- Conferences and workshop attendance as teams or groups.
- Opportunities for learning team presentations.
- Celebrations, appreciation, and high team visibility.
- Exchanges (e.g. professional learning credit, business cards, time trades).
- Frequent feedback.
- Involvement in decision making about professional learning teams.
- Adjusted teacher workloads.
- Spotighting team successes.
- Spotighting student successes.

Source: Jolly, A. (2008). *Team to teach: A facilitator's guide to professional learning teams*. Oxford, OH: NSDC.