



Professional reconversion to ensure a better professional future

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Chapter 8 Teamwork and Collaboration



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Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the concepts and importance of teamwork and collaboration, as means to develop skills and competencies to effectively work together and achieve assigned goals. The content provides an overview of the two skills, including main characteristics, challenges and barriers to put them into practice, assumptions to generate group work dynamics, to develop social and collaborative skills, and to enhance participants' capacity to effectively work together.

Learning Objectives

- Understanding the operative framework, needs and importance for teamwork and collaboration to successfully succeed in group-work assignments.
- Overcoming personal barriers by tackling teamwork and collaboration practices: how to facilitate a mutual learning environment, how to enhance collaborative-type attitudes and develop skills for maximisation of work outputs.
- Integrating knowledge and technical capacities for working groups.
- Applying real cases of teamwork and collaboration, assess the mutual learning process and review of outcomes based on lessons learned.

8.1. Teamwork and collaboration

8.1.1. Definition

Even if a single definition of teamwork and collaboration is not widely formalised, as it is deeply influenced by several factors not limited to the cultural background and individual perceptions, it is possible to outline a broader meaning of both. This will help to understand the concept and the distinguishing features among them.

Both teamwork and collaboration involve a group of people working together to complete a shared goal. The key difference between the collaboration and teamwork is that teamwork combines the individual efforts of all team members to achieve a goal or complete a given task, people working collaboratively complete a project, solve a problem or create some new strategy collectively.

In other words, if a group of employees works together to finish a project on time, they work as a team. But if they are brainstorming new ideas for the project, they are collaborating.

Those collaborating work together as equals, usually without a leader, to come up with ideas or make decisions together to complete a goal.

Whereas a team leader usually oversees teamwork and those within a team are delegated individual tasks to complete to contribute towards the team's end goal.

When to use Teamwork

If the task presents itself as relatively uncomplicated and all team members are on the same page, teamwork may be the best option.

Teamwork commonly refers to a larger group of people working together regularly, and who have clearly set roles and responsibilities among them.

When to Use Collaboration

Where the task at hand shows great complexity or harbours the potential for disagreements among team members, collaboration may be necessary to ensure that everyone is working towards the same goal.

Collaboration typically involves a smaller group working closely together on a specific project. This type of arrangement often requires frequent communication and a high level of trust among team members.

8.1.2. Characteristics and values

The two concepts bring peculiar characteristics, which help define work modalities. Teamwork is usually implemented in clear circumstances, which require completing projects/tasks or hitting targets. It is based on the following characteristics and values:

- A leadership delegating the workflow and supervising the related performance usually drives teamwork. The leadership itself can orient the teamwork according to its leadership skills (i.e. based on motivation, empathy, and time management).
- Setting a good team working environment includes: i) providing a clear context, by describing well the requested actions ii) defining organisational roles iii) supporting the workflow in case of need iv) ensuring an efficient communication including team building practices.
- It typically refers to managers, taking a lead role and structuring the workflow of the team.
- The teamwork process is driven by the factor of effectiveness because it requires coordination among assigned resources to complete tasks.
- It includes strong and effective communication among the assigned people.
- Values applying to teamwork include coordination, monitoring, strong communication, mutual trust and understanding, conflict prevention attitudes.

On the other hand, collaboration is typically implemented for brainstorming sessions or group discussions, which include some elaboration on defining strategic lines. It is based on the following characteristics and values:

- Collaboration is mostly driven by sharing the content of workflow among participants, without compelling guidelines or hierarchical dynamics.

- Setting a good collaboration environment includes: i) provide a set of questions to facilitate the formulation of objectives or define the problem ii) share workflow modalities iii) effectively define a strategy to ensure achievement of a strategy implementation of solution to an issue iv) wrap up the work in progress and come to agreed conclusions.
- The collaboration process is driven by the factor of cooperation and efficiency (e.g. to reduce bottlenecks, maximise productivity or output, cost amelioration plans etc.), and for this reason is well-suited among peers, with a certain responsibility, for example.
- It also includes strong and effective communication among the assigned people.
- Values applying to collaboration include coordination, capability to build on each other's works, sharing of working documents, communication, and conflict prevention attitudes.

8.1.3. The Importance of teamwork and collaboration in modern life

Modern work is organised into areas/departments, which require organised workflows. Several times, this type of organised workflow proves extremely important, especially when facing complex projects or activities. In many cases, it is a “must” and not a “need”, for this main reason it is important to effectively be able to deal with it. This is why it has become important for job seekers to enhance their skills set by acquiring a few transferable skills.

As previously stated, collaboration skills are what people use when working with others, whether virtually, in-person, synchronously, or in different time zones.

Employers not only want their employees to mark their presence in team meetings, but they also want them to engage, interact, contribute and, at the same time, motivate others to do the same. Collaboration skills make someone an easy person to work with and an effective teammate, regardless of the focus of the job and the colleagues you are working with.

More broadly speaking, teamwork and collaboration represent the basis to develop knowledge and to experience values, thus allowing individuals to build their soft skills, such as adaptation, sharing, mutual understanding and effective communication.

8.2. Teaching approaches to teamwork and collaboration

8.2.1. Challenges / Barriers

Teamwork and collaboration carry some threats too, which may significantly reduce the beneficial impact or even significantly hamper the result. Some of these aspects may occur regardless of the type of work, relationship or hierarchical aspects. A non-exhaustive list of most common factors preventing effective teamwork and collaboration to happen is represented by:

1. Lack of clarity on objectives

2. Lack of clear vision
3. Developing distrust among team members
4. Lack of productivity vi) Power-associated dynamics
5. Miscommunication

The recurring of one or more of these dynamics can actually negatively affect teamwork and collaboration. Future trainers must be aware of the corrective measures to take to prevent the realisation of such undesired negative outcomes.

8.2.2. The role of the educator

The role of the educator is to ensure maximisation of learning outcomes for all, after the workflow is assigned. By doing so, he/she is expected to understand the individual and group dynamics through direct observation and analysis. The educator will have to be able to possibly assign and set up groups in a way that each person brings its personal contribution, and feels directly involved in the process. In this sense the role of educator is to engage adult learners in expressing themselves. The role is also to ensure that main recurring obstacles and barriers are minimised.

The best way to overcome teamwork and collaboration challenges will vary depending on the specific situation and context. However, some the future educators must possess to overcome collaboration challenges include:

1. Clearly define goals and objectives and ensure that they are clear
2. Establish clear communication channels and protocols and ensure everyone is aware of and has easy access to them.
3. Encourage and promote open communication and transparency
4. Make sure that there are mechanisms in place to resolve disagreements and conflict so that it does not affect workflow.
5. Monitor the progress of teamwork/collaboration and adjust as applicable.

8.2.3. Characteristics of a classroom

There are no pre-set characteristics of a classroom as individuals are those who compose them and forge them. In managing a classroom of adult participants, an educator will have to behave in such a way to make the classroom feel comfortable and participative. Especially, regarding training delivery for team building and enhancement of collaboration he/she is expected to organise the classroom as follows:

- Set clear objectives for assignment.
- Organise groups according to experience, dynamics, and different backgrounds.
- Keep the assignment concrete and based on the knowledge level of participants.
- Define the learning strategy for work groups.

- Define the organisational structure based on teamwork or collaboration assignment.
- Support in defining ongoing tasks or provide guidance pills during assignments implementation.
- Activate egalitarian participation within group dynamics.
- Monitor the progress of activities.
- Ensure effective communication flow under all circumstances.

8.2.4. Evaluation

Measuring teamwork performance is important as it can assist in planning and achieving desired learning outcomes from participants. The factors to measure the degree and level of teamwork and collaboration practices are multiple and should in general be referred to the:

1. quality of work
2. level of interaction
3. punctuality in meeting deadlines
4. skills development of participants
5. methods for reaching consensus
6. accountability of members.

The assessment tools to monitor these group activities are multiple and can be:

- In charge of educator: this includes quality evaluation of works carried out, assess the interaction based on direct observation; evaluate participation before and after teamwork is carried out; review of the training process based on analysis of feedback received; improvement for future training delivery session.
- In charge of participants: self-assessment questionnaires to evaluate the dynamics generated during the management of the workflow. These may include open statements asking participants if they agree/disagree and to which level on a scale from 1 to 5. It may also include open statements with requests to describe how the process to reach consensus on main points of discussions was.

8.3. Good practices/applications in adult education

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) lists the following requirements for building effective teams: finding time, selecting team members, empowering team members, providing training in relevant skills and knowledge, developing shared goals, and facilitating team functioning.

Effective teams are carefully designed, in fact, when creating a team, it is very important to consider the overall dynamics of the team members.

Several authors (for example, Brower 1995; Carr 1992; La Fasto 2001; Fajana 2002) have come up with a set of good practices for enabling smooth processes in teamwork and collaboration activities, which may be listed herewith:

Topic	Action
Clarity	Actively engage with their team members and encourage them to share their insights and ideas. There must be clear means of measuring the ongoing effectiveness of the team, which should be written down for eventual communication to and discussion with all team members.
Understanding objectives	As much as possible, input from all members must be included in the design and wording of the goals. Carr (1992) affirms that all expectations must be clearly stated and this must be clearly understood by team members who must also understand the reason for the creation of the team. Added to the provision of clear goals is the development of meaningful and acceptable performance measures so that the team members can feel confident in their own achievements. Team members must establish the practice to meet regularly to establish and review the level of achievement of objectives / or maturity of ideas.
Confidence	Team Building activities to improve trust in each other's operations. Prioritising employee recognition results in a positive, productive, and innovative organisational climate. Timely employee recognition enhances positive feelings and positively affects confidence in their ability to do well in the workplace.
Workflow	Standardised operating procedures and brief each team member on what they need to do and what protocols they need to follow before they work. To ensure good coordination and work planning, educators should encourage the team to appoint a leader at the beginning of the project. Effective team leadership depends on leadership competencies. A competent leader is focused on the goal, ensures a collaborative climate, builds confidence of team members, sets priorities, demonstrates sufficient "know-how" and manages performance through feedback.

Communication	Advocate for openness and engagement, setting boundaries specialisation and respect rules. The manner of communication is important in the effective working of teams to bring about an organisation where all components are connected and pulling in the same direction.
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