**Tips for Effective Collaboration**

**What is Collaboration?**

Collaborationoccurs when a group of people – either inside of an organization or across organizations – work together on a common task or provide significant help to each other.

Collaboration might be used when one group provides advice to another group or in a more evolved situation in which two or more groups work on a common problem and seek solutions together.

Regardless, meaningful collaboration requires more than just exchanging data – it also requires people working together.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Collaboration works best when it is understood that it[[2]](#footnote-2):

* Is a method for improving results, not an end or a goal on its own
* Must be tailored to local contexts and cultures
* Requires an understanding of the connections and interdependence that exist between partner organizations
* Can only work when time is taken to develop trust and solid interpersonal relationships among participants
* Is facilitated by shared norms that support blame-free communications, firm commitments to problem solving, and improvements in the way that all stakeholders treat each other and interact with one another.

The following are some tips about working collaboratively and how to achieve success.

**Getting People to Work Together**

When people don’t HAVE to work together, effective collaboration requires that they WANT to. You can give people the desire to collaborate by:**[[3]](#footnote-3)**

* Providing inspiration – showing them a vision for change that no one would be able to accomplish individually but that could be achieved through collaboration.
* Convincing them that the others they will be collaborating with are important to the effort, and capable of making a contribution.
* Ensuring that no one party stands to gain so much that it will make the others involved feel their input is exploited.

**Collaborative Leadership[[4]](#footnote-4)**

Collaboration is the opposite of traditional management styles that employ a command and control or top-down approach, where those at the top of the organization make the decisions and the hierarchy is very clearly defined. Nor does collaboration seek to reach complete consensus in all matters.

To get results through collaboration, the leaders of the collaborative effort should:

* Look broadly for ideas and opportunities; don’t focus internally on who and what you already know.
* Involve a diverse group of people – in terms of their experience, gender, age, culture etc.
* Model collaboration – show people how it works at the top of the organization(s) and lead by example; let go of organizational politics.
* Be strong and decisive; don’t let groups get bogged down in arguments or attempts to reach total consensus.

**The Essential Elements of Collaboration[[5]](#footnote-5)**

In addition to strong leadership, successful collaboration also requires the following:

* Shared agreement about problem areas(s)
* Shared aims, values, principles about change, and improvement strategies
* Shared results and accountability for those results
* Shared commitment to monitoring results and making adjustments when barriers and problems are identified
* Shared information and resources
* Opportunities for risk-taking, new roles, and continued learning
* Democratized leadership and decision-making structures
* Shared commitments, expressed in inter-agency agreements, to needed changes in policies, organizational structures and cultures, and definitions of best practices.
1. Hansen, Morten T. Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Create Unity, and Reap Big Results*.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Business Press; 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hansen, 2009 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Aberle, J. Building Minds. Harvard Business Review, July-August 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibarra, H. And Hansen, M.T. Are You a Collaborative Leader – How great CEOs keep their teams connected. Harvard Business Review, July-August 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Collaboration: Creating Caring Communities to Strengthen Mental Health Work. Presented at the 18th Annual Colorado Child and Adolescent Mental Health Conference. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)