



Building a Collaborative Team Environment

Teams are expected to produce results, but performance is hindered when team members don't work together well. A *collaborative team environment* is essential for the team's success. To create a collaborative environment, team members must do the following:

- Have a common purpose and goals
- Trust each other
- Clarify roles
- Communicate openly and effectively
- Appreciate diversity
- Balance the team's focus

Have a common purpose and goals.

A *team* is defined as 'a group of people working together toward a common goal'. Without a goal, there is no team. Ideas for creating a common goal include these:

- Create and/or review the team's charter.
- Discuss why the team exists.
- Allow each team member to express commitment.
- Create mottoes, symbols, awards, or posters that portray the team as one unit.
- Use the common purpose to prioritize team actions.

Trust each other.

Team members must trust each other if they're to work together successfully. Ideas for creating trust among team members include these:

- Be honest.
- Work to eliminate conflicts of interests.
- Avoid talking behind each other's backs.
- Trust teammates (you must trust them before they'll trust you).
- Give team members the benefit of the doubt.

Clarify roles.

Knowing everyone's role and being familiar with the responsibility of those roles creates efficiency and flexibility. Ideas for clarifying roles on the team include the following:

- Review team members' roles frequently.
- Relate team member expectations to the team's overall purpose.
- Clarify responsibilities when action planning.
- Learn what others do on the team.
- Figure out ways to help each other.

Communicate openly and effectively.

Miscommunication can create hard feelings and undermine the success of the team. Ideas for improving communication include the following:

- Err on the side of over communicating.
- Seek to understand all angles.
- Take responsibility for being heard and understood.
- Work to clear up misunderstandings quickly and accurately.
- Reinforce and recognize team member efforts.

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Appreciate diversity.

Team members come from all walks of life, with different backgrounds and perspectives. Ideas for taking advantage of team diversity include the following:

- Remember that reasonable people can and do differ from each other.
- Try to learn as much as you can from others.
- Evaluate a new idea based on its merits.
- Avoid remarks that draw negative attention to a person's unique characteristics.
- Don't ignore the differences among team members.

Balance the team's focus.

Finally, team members need to recognize that they should measure and monitor the products and services the team provides as well as the team's internal group dynamics and relationships. (Sometimes team members get so involved in the process of becoming a team, they forget the reason they were made a team in the first place, or vice versa.)

Ideas for creating that balance include these:

- Regularly review and evaluate the effectiveness of team meetings.
- Hold team celebrations for achieving results.
- Praise individual effort.
- Design individual performance goals that emphasize both results and teamwork.
- Assign certain team members to monitor task needs and others to monitor relationship needs.



Article from CARE's WorkLife Solutions Website