Effective Workplace Collaboration

In today's turbulent political and business environment organizations are constantly challenged to do more with less. Accomplishing this is ultimately dependent upon how the potential of people and the quality of the information they possess is combined with their ability and willingness to share that knowledge. A critical success factor necessary to accomplish this is the need to tear down the silo mentality and discourage information and knowledge hoarding through increased collaboration across the enterprise.

Collaboration is not only sharing information but also the actions of two or more people, groups, agencies, companies, etc. working together with a shared sense of purpose and direction in a manner that is attentive, responsive, and adaptive to environmental factors that may influencing their desired outcome(s). At the highest of levels there are three basic forms of collaboration:

- **Team Collaboration** involves members with clearly defined interdependencies, information exchange, and explicit timelines. There is often a defined leader however; members cooperate to achieve identified goals (i.e. public health project team).
- **Community Collaboration** involves members with shared interests focused more on learning from each other, building and sharing knowledge, rather than achieving a specific goal (i.e. CDC Project Management Community of Practice).
- **Network Collaboration** involves dispersed members who often don't know each other. Collaboration starts with an individual action that is then promoted to network members. Members share common interests but have no explicit roles or titles (i.e. social software).

Collaboration itself is not difficult. The challenge is creating an environment where skills, knowledge, and teamwork are applied openly by everyone across departmental and organizational boundaries, cooperating and working together to produce innovative, cost effective, and targeted solutions.

Traditional management is based on controlling a team and a set amount of resources. By contrast, collaboration requires managers to achieve success through people and resources outside their control. As a result, successful collaboration requires unique leaders that build trust, safeguard the collaborative process, and facilitate interactions necessary to deliver results across organizational boundaries. Such leaders influence the perspective and beliefs of others through their behavior, communication, and organization of resources in support of collaborative environments and relationships.

Madeline Carter, writing for the Center for Effective Public Policy as part of research project funded by the United States Department of Justice and State Justice Institute, defines five qualities of a collaborative leader:
- Willingness to take risks
- Eager listeners
- Passion for the cause
- Optimistic about the future
- Able to share knowledge, power and credit

Similarly, ten key lessons were identified for a successful collaborative leader:
- Find the personal motive for collaborating
- Find ways of simplifying complex situations
- Prepare for how you are going to handle conflict well in advance
- Recognize that there are some people or organizations you just can't partner with
- Have the courage to act for the long term
- Actively manage the tension between focusing on delivery and on building relationships
- Invest in strong personal relationships at all levels
- Inject energy, passion, and drive into your leadership style
- Have the confidence to share the credit generously
- Continually develop your interpersonal skills, in particular: empathy, patience, tenacity, holding difficult conversations, and coalition building

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Some leadership strategies for tearing down silos and increase collaboration may include:
- Acknowledge successful collaboration and those contributing and supporting it
- Recognize and reward individuals and groups that share, teach, mentor, and learn from each other
- Scrutinize those individuals, departments, and organizations hoarding knowledge, information, and failing to build and share ideas with others
- Focus on building collaborative relationships with customer and end-users
- Exploring alternatives by considering perspectives and possibilities that may otherwise be ignored
- Eliminate boundaries and barriers by implementing practices, processes, tools, and techniques that encourage and facilitate the free flow of ideas and the sharing of information
- Learn from failure by analyzing mistakes with the goal of preventing or at least more quickly detecting potential issues in the future
- Harness the energy and recognition of talented people and leaders to encourage others through their positive influence of collaborative efforts
- Focus on innovation, bleeding-edge technologies, and cross-pollination of ideas, knowledge, skills, and information to drive breakthrough solutions
- Utilize social media technologies and processes to allow people to share opinions, experiences, insights, and perspectives in various ways
- Nurture collaboration at all levels of the organization by taking time and effort necessary to emphasize the collective strength of groups sharing and learning from each other
- Develop shadowing programs that allow personnel to follow and learn from subject matter experts
- Where appropriate encourage cross-functional teams and job rotating
- Accelerate knowledge and information flow across departmental and organizational boundaries by encouraging and establishing community networks
- Encourage open and transparent communication. How information is controlled determines if it is an obstacle to or an enabler of collaboration
- Treat people the way you want to be treated
- Unify organizational goals to combat silo mentality
- Blatantly promote the benefits, productivity, and success of collaborative ventures to further break down the silo mentality
- Create workplace environments that arrange chance encounters that stimulate collaboration

Collaborative organizations share knowledge and learn through an ongoing iterative process of continuous improvement.

For more information and tools related to effective workplace collaboration, the CDC Unified Process, or the Project Management Community of Practice please visit the CDC UP website at http://www.cdc.gov/cdcup/. ❚

Project Management Community of Practice

- **December 09, 2011**
  Enterprise Architecture

2012 PMCoP Calendar Dates
- *January 27, 2012*
- *February 24, 2012*
- *March 30, 2012*
- *April 27, 2012*
- *May 18, 2012*
- *June 29, 2012*
- *July 27, 2012*
- *August 24, 2012*
- *September 28, 2012*
- *October 26, 2012*
- *December 07, 2012*

For more information on the Project Management Community of Practice visit the PMCoP website at http://www2.cdc.gov/cdcup/library/pmcop/ ❚

CDC Unified Process Presentations

The CDC UP offers a short overview presentation to any CDC FTE or Non-FTE group. Presentations are often performed at your facility, on a day of the week convenient for your group, and typically take place over lunch structured as one hour lunch-and-learn style meeting.

Contact the CDC Unified Process at cdcup@cdc.gov or visit http://www.cdc.gov/cdcup to arrange a short overview presentation for your group. ❚

Contact the CDC Unified Process

The CDC Unified Process Project Management Newsletter is authored by Daniel Vitek, MBA, PMP and published by the Office of Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services.

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