

## What does the Research Tell us about Highly Effective Teams?

EBDM Phase V Kickoff Workshop

## Session Overview

- A definition of “collaboration”
- A review of the research
  - The results of studies examining collaboratives in both the public and private sectors
- The implications of this research for forming and sustaining successful collaborative efforts

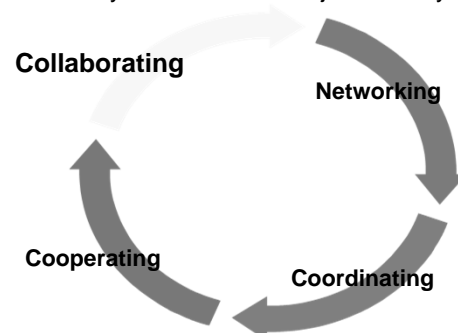
How would you define collaboration?

**Collaboration:**  
**Everyone is talking about it.**  
**But is everyone doing it?**

Collaboration is frequently misunderstood.

The term “collaboration” is mistakenly used to describe individual and agency relationships at *varying* stages of development.

Agencies and individuals actually engage in four very different levels of joint activity:



Himmelman, A. Collaboration For a Change: Definitions, Models, Roles, and a Guide to Collaborative Processes (1994).

## Networking

- Networking is the simplest form of joint activity. It is best described as the exchange of information for mutual benefit.

## Coordinating

- Coordinating refers to the exchange of information and the altering of activities for mutual benefit.

## Cooperating

- Cooperating expands the definition of coordinating to include not only the exchange of information and the altering of activities, but also the sharing of resources for mutual benefit.

## But Collaboration...

...reaches beyond these concepts, bringing with it a much higher level of commitment and responsibility.

Collaboration shifts organizational and individual focus:

- *From competition to consensus;*
- *From working alone to working together;*
- *From thinking about activities to thinking about processes and results.*

## A Working Definition of Collaboration

Collaboration is working together to achieve a common goal that is difficult or impossible to reach without the assistance of another.

## Lessons from Our Past: September 11

### The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States

"Earlier in this report we detailed various missed opportunities to thwart the 9/11 plot. Information was not shared, sometimes inadvertently or because of legal misunderstandings. Analysis was not pooled. Effective operations were not launched. **Often the handoffs of information were lost across the divide** separating the foreign and domestic agencies of the government.

However the specific problems are labeled, we believe they are symptoms of the government's broader inability to adapt how it manages problems to the new challenges of the twenty-first century. **The agencies are like a set of specialists in a hospital, each ordering tests, looking for symptoms, and prescribing medications. What is missing is the attending physician who makes sure they work as a team.**"

Page 353

"We recommend significant changes in the organization of the government. We know that the quality of the people is more important than the quality of the wiring diagrams. Some of the saddest aspects of the 9/11 story are the outstanding efforts of so many individual officials straining, often without success, against the boundaries of the possible. **Good people can overcome bad structures. They should not have to.**"

Page 399

## Lessons from Our Past: Hurricane Katrina

"Following September 11, everyone promised that the nation would learn the painful lessons the terrorist attack taught. But Hurricane Katrina not only revealed that we have failed to learn, it also showed that we have yet to build the capacity to deal with costly, [complex] problems.... *Even worse, we continually show the wrong instinct: to try to draw a box around every new case. We are trying to solve the most important challenges of the 21st century by retreating back to models from the past.*"

--Donald Kettl, Director of Fels Institute of Government,  
University of Pennsylvania, September 5, 2005

## What do we Know about Collaboration?

### Lessons from the Research

Despite good intentions,  
collaborations often fail.

What sets apart those that  
succeed?

Think about your own experiences  
with collaboration

### Larson and LaFasto

- Initial Set of Test Teams
  - Mt. Everest Expedition/British Antarctic Expedition
  - Presidential Commission on the Space Shuttle Challenger Accident
  - Cardiac Surgery Teams
  - Notre Dame Championship Football Team, 1966
  - U.S. Naval Academy Football Team, 1961-1963
  - Centers for Disease Control Epidemiology Teams
- Executive Management Teams including:
  - Baxter International
  - Dun and Bradstreet Corporation
  - Mt. Sinai Hospital

TeamWork: What Must Go Right/What Can Go Wrong, by Carl E. Larson and Frank M. LaFasto. (1989). Sage Publications.

### Larson and LaFasto

- Project Teams including:
  - McDonald's Chicken McNugget Team
  - IBM PC Team
  - Boeing 747 Airplane Project
- Hypothesis Testing Teams
  - Disaster teams
  - Theatre productions
  - USS Kitty Hawk
  - Presidential Cabinets
  - GAO and Congressional investigation teams
  - U.S. Navy Strike Warfare Center

### Lessons from Research: There are 8 Characteristics of Highly Effective Teams

- A clear and elevating goal
- A unified commitment to the goal
- A results-driven structure
- The right people on the team
- Effective leadership
- A climate conducive to collaborating
- Standards of excellence
- External support and recognition

Adapted from: Team Work, Larson, Carl E. and LaFasto, M.J., (1989). Sage Publications.

### Characteristic #1: A Clear and Elevating Goal

- High performance teams have both a clear understanding of the goal to be achieved and a belief that the goal embodies a worthwhile or important result.
  - The greater the clarity of understanding regarding the nature of the problem being addressed, the more effective people are at solving the problem.
  - The degree of challenge, the sense of urgency, and the belief that the accomplishment will make a significant and measurable difference makes the work compelling.

### What Does the Research Say?

- The most effective teams are those who are focused squarely on the result because *whether the team succeeds clearly makes a difference*.
- The greatest threats to successfully working toward a clear and elevating goal are *politics and personal agenda*.

### Characteristic #2: A Results-Driven Structure

- The importance of structure is not its specific design. More important is whether a structure is in place that is appropriate for the achievement of the performance objectives.
- To be successful, a team's structure should be designed around the results to be achieved.

### What Does the Research Say?

A results-driven structure includes:

- Clear roles and accountabilities;
- An effective communication system; and
- Monitoring performance and providing feedback.

These become the framework through which the clear, elevating goal can be achieved.

### Characteristic #3: Competent Team Members

- “Competent” team members are those who are best equipped to achieve the team’s objectives.
- Competency is defined as the necessary skills and abilities to achieve the desired objective (technical competencies) and the personal characteristics required to achieve excellence while working well with others (personal competencies).
- Three common features of competent team members:
  - Essential skills and abilities to accomplish the work;
  - A strong desire to contribute; and
  - The capacity to collaborate effectively.

### What Does the Research Say?

- When strong technical skills are combined with a desire to contribute and an ability to be collaborative, the observable outcome is an elevated sense of confidence among team members.
- This confidence translates into the ability of a team to be self-correcting in its capacity to adjust to unexpected adversity and emergent challenges.

### The Weight of an Ox

- One day in the fall of 1906, the British scientist Francis Galton left his home in the town of Plymouth and headed for the county fair.
- There he observed a crowd of locals placing wagers on the weight of an ox.
- Approximately 800 people participated in the game; each noted their guess on a ticket.
- When the contest was over, Galton asked the organizers if he could have the tickets.
- At home, he conducted a series of mathematical calculations. He was surprised to learn this:

*The Wisdom of Crowds, Surowiecki, 2004*

- When Galton averaged the 787 fair goers guesses of the weight of the ox, the average of all guesses was 1,197 pounds.
- The correct weight of the ox was...
  - 1,198 pounds.

In 1968, the submarine *Scorpion* disappeared off the coast of Newport News, Virginia, upon its return from a tour of duty in the Atlantic. Although the Navy knew the location of the sub at the point of last contact, no one knew what happened to the vessel or how far she had traveled since her last radio contact.

## The U.S.S. *Scorpion*

- Naval Officer John Craven devised an unconventional strategy to pinpoint the *Scorpion*'s location.
- Assembling a team of individuals with a wide array of knowledge (mathematicians, submarine specialists, and salvage technicians), Craven presented each with the limited data available and a set of scenarios.
- He asked each individual for their assessment of the likelihood of each scenario, as well as their hypothesis of the source of the *Scorpion*'s problem, the speed of her descent to the ocean floor, the steepness of descent, etc.

- Using a mathematical algorithm, Craven calculated the average of all responses.
- When he was done, he had what he considered to be the group's "collective estimate" of the location of the submarine.
- The estimate did not match any single response offered by any of the experts. But...
- The ship was later recovered 220 yards from where the collective estimated it would be.

- "What's astonishing about this story is that the evidence that the group was relying on in this case amounted to almost nothing. It was really just tiny scraps of data. No one knew why the submarine sank, no one had any idea how fast it was traveling or how steeply it fell to the ocean floor. And yet, even though no one in the group knew any of these things, the group as a whole knew them all." (*Surowiecki, page xxi.*)

## How did these Resources Perform?

- The "experts" (phone a friend) did pretty well. Overall, their responses were correct 65% of the time.
- But they were out-matched by the audience, the group of non-experts who were in attendance simply to enjoy the show. Over the lifetime of the show, their responses were correct 91% of the time.

## The Point of these Stories

A series of scientific (and not so scientific) studies have led researchers to this conclusion:

- On the whole, *groups are better problem solvers and make better decisions than individuals.*
- Further, the problem solving ability of diverse groups is far superior to homogenous groups.
  - Diverse members bring different perspectives and knowledge to the table.
  - Diverse members are more likely to question conventional wisdom and challenge members to look at problems in a different way.

## Characteristic #4: Unified Commitment

- Perhaps this is the most elusive of the eight traits. It is best characterized by:
  - A sense of loyalty and dedication to the team;
  - A sense of excitement and enthusiasm about the team;
  - A willingness to do anything that has to be done to help the team succeed;
  - An intense identification with the people who are the team;
  - A loss of self; and
  - The unique experience of being a part of something special, something effective, something productive.

## What Does the Research Say?

- One of the most serious threats to a team is the conflict between *individual* goals and *team* goals.

## Characteristic #5: A Collaborative Climate

- The team believes that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- Trust is a mainstay virtue.

## Trust is Produced in a Climate that Includes Four Elements

- Honesty – Integrity, truthfulness.
- Openness – A willingness to share and be receptive to new ideas.
- Consistency – Predictable behavior and responses.
- Respect – Treating others with dignity and fairness.

## What Does the Research Say?

- Collaboration flourishes in a climate of trust.
- Trust allows team members to stay problem-focused.
- Trust promotes more efficient communication and coordination.
- Trust improves the quality of collaborative outcomes.
- Trust leads to compensating (one team member picks up the slack when another team member falters).
  - Compensating is positively correlated with success. Teams that are able to function in this way are able to achieve higher levels of performance.

### **Characteristic #6: Standards of Excellence**

- A standard is the pressure to achieve a required or expected level of performance.
- Standards define those relevant and very intricate expectations that eventually determine whether the level of performance is acceptable.

### **What Does the Research Say?**

- There are three variables integral to establishing and sustaining standards of excellence.
  - The extent to which:
    - Standards are clearly and concretely articulated.
    - Team members require one another to perform according to the established standards of excellence.
    - A team exerts pressure on itself to make those changes that will improve the performance standards.
      - Successful teams do not become complacent. They actively work at finding reasons to be dissatisfied with their performance.

***Each performance is an opportunity to discover ways of doing it better next time.***

### **Characteristic #7: External Support and Recognition**

- The team is given the resources it needs to get the job done.
- The team is supported by those individuals and agencies outside the team who are capable of contributing to the team's success.
- The team is sufficiently recognized for its accomplishments.
- The reward and incentive structure is clear, viewed as appropriate by team members, and tied to the team's performance.

### **Characteristic #8: Leadership**

Effective leaders:

- Establish for their team a vision of a better future;
- Enlist others (those within and outside of the team) to embrace the vision;
- Create opportunities for change; and
- Unleash the energy and talent of contributing members.

### **In Summary...Collaboration**

- Collaboration is about the creation of something that exceeds our current, individual capabilities.
- Unlike communication, it is not about *exchanging* information. Rather, it is about *using* information to be more effective.
- Unlike coordination, collaboration seeks divergent insight and creativity.
- Unlike cooperation, collaboration thrives on differences. Each member brings something unique to the table.
- Successful collaborations are anchored in the pursuit of a specific result.
- The way in which collaborations are built and sustained impacts the long-term success of the team.