



Leading Through Collaboration

What is Collaborative Leadership?

Collaborative leadership is founded on a belief that "...if you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organization or community," (Chrislip & Carl, 1994).

Necessary skills for a collaborative leader:

- **Develop an inspiring vision**
 - "The only visions that take hold are shared visions—and you will create them only when you listen very, very closely to others, appreciate their hopes, and attend to their needs," (Kouzes, 2009).
- **Concentrate on results, conditions, and building relationships**
 - Teams are expected to achieve results however performance is stalled when team members do not work well together. A collaborative team environment is vital to success (1997).
- **Fully involve those who are affected**
 - Invite team members to contribute to vision building, problem solving, idea creation, and policy making.
- **Use the talents of others to create a plan of action**
 - Often times, your team will be comprised of individuals with varying skillsets and interests. Use those skills and interests to the team's advantage! By utilizing each team member's talents, you help facilitate a collaborative environment.
- **Preserve agreement and coach for success**
 - Refrain from agreeing with ideas proposed. You want to avoid showing bias towards some ideas over others, in order to avoid the team choosing the path that seems *most agreeable* to you. Instead, coach individuals to further develop and fine-tune their ideas and contributions so the group is able make the best decision.
- **Celebrate a job well done**
 - All too often we focus on the things that don't work. Ensure you are taking the time to celebrate when the team works together to enhance the department.

Why it matters?

"Successful collaborative leaders must truly value collaboration and the need for relationship building, integrity, and honesty. They must set aside self-motivated purpose and focus on creating an atmosphere where all these things happen automatically, without personal intervention," (Harman and Stein, 2015).

Making Collaborative Leadership Work in Your Organization

There are three key characteristics that must be kept in mind in order for a collaborative leadership model to work.

- **Collaborative problem-solving**
 - With collaborative leadership, the responsibility to solve problems and make decisions does not fall on the leader. Rather, it is the responsibility of the group to analyze the problem and determine the most appropriate course of action. The leader takes on the role of a mentor and helps to facilitate and guide the process.
- **Open process**
 - For an open process to take place, the leader doesn't simply lay out her or his goals and require that the group move in that direction. Collaborative leadership requires the process of decision-making to be *truly collaborative*. There is no starting point, where after the leader explains his or her plans, collaboration can begin. Rather collaboration starts with including everyone in the goal-making process. Further all participants work together towards an end result.
- **Lead the process, not the people**
 - The purpose of collaborative leadership is to help the collaborative process work, rather than to lead the people involved toward something—to a particular decision, for instance, or in a particular direction.

Challenges to Collaborative Leadership

There are many challenges to collaborative leadership. Some of the most common challenges and mitigation techniques are outlined below:

- **Time**
 - When incorporating the views and opinion of all members of the team, decision-making has the potential to take a great deal of time.
- **Conflict requires mediation**
 - If conflict arises, it must be mediated in order to remain productive in the decision making process.
- **Resistance**
 - To some individuals, being asked to share a leadership role can be uncomfortable. This can cause resistance in the process. Be prepared to guide these individuals to take a more active role in the process.
- **Ego Neutrality**
 - As the leader, be prepared to let go of your ideas if they are not adopted by the group. It is important for everyone, including you, to share your ideas, and it is vital that all members of the group have a voice in determining goals and vision for the organization.
- **Unwillingness to share information**
 - Be prepared to coach members of your team to share ideas. Some may be unwilling to share and may need additional guidance.
- **“Us versus them” culture**
 - Often times, organizations form silos which can lead to an “us versus them” mentality. Rather an “us versus them” foster a culture of “us.”

In order to mitigate some of these challenges, utilize your skills as a collaborative leader such as coaching your team to develop their ideas, utilizing everyone’s individual talents, and building trusting relationships to encourage the sharing for ideas (Harman and Stein, 2015).

Bringing it all together

While it is no simple task to demonstrate collaborative leadership, remember, "...if you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organization or community," (Chrislip & Carl, 1994). The benefits of collaborative leadership, far outweigh the challenges and difficulties that come with implementing a collaborative team.

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