Chapter - 3

Ingredients of Collaboration

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Ingredients of Collaboration

The term Collaboration is used to denote a working environment where team members support each other by sharing information, making effective communication and understanding each other with respect to work requirement. Collaboration can be thought of as a process as well as an outcome. The collaboration is a broader term which has been used differently by writers in the literature. Sometimes the terms like coordination and teamwork are used as synonyms for collaboration. This chapter will explain the concept of collaboration in the light of existing literature on this topic.

3.1 Collaboration Defined:

Business is an activity that cannot be performed in isolation. It is a result of collective efforts and all such efforts need a certain level of collaboration among themselves for being effective. The success of any team depends on the extent of collaboration among its members. Lack of coordination and cohesion among members is the most fundamental reason for the failure of any team. All business organizations can be thought of as a team. Thus, the success of any organisation can be achieved with high level of collaboration at all levels in its internal structure. Collaboration is defined as working with other members of the team or group to achieve shared objective. The collaboration can exist among the members of a team / group or among the teams, groups of an organization and even among organizations. Bedwell, et al. have defined the collaboration as “an evolving process whereby two or more social entities actively and reciprocally engage in joint activities aimed at achieving at least one shared goal.”¹ As per this definition the collaboration engages two or more entities who have at least one shared goal which they want to achieve. Gray has defined the term collaborations as “a process of joint decision making among key stakeholders of a problem domain about the future of that domain.”² Here the problem domain means a complex situation that needs members to work together.

The term collaboration has been used interchangeably with cooperation at many places. Both are slightly different. The word cooperation implies the sense of working together to achieve some objectives but it does not include “complex interpretations
Gray has proposed three stages of collaboration – the first stage as problem setting which means identifying the key stakeholders and issues for collaboration; second stage is direction setting which means identifying and sharing future collaborative interpretations & developing a sense of common purpose and the third stage is implementation.

“Collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organisations to achieve common goals. The relationship includes a commitment to a definition of mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards.”

Dr. Noble David and Dr. Michael Letsky defines the collaboration as "the mental aspects of joint problem solving for the purpose of achieving a shared understanding, making a decision, or creating a product." In this definition they have emphasized on cognitive and problem solving aspects of the collaboration rather than just information sharing.

While defining collaboration Thomas Kayser says “Collaboration is a joint effort between two or more people, free from hidden agendas, to produce an output in response to a common goal or shared priority. Often this output is greater than what any of the individuals could have produced working alone.” While explaining the collaboration he has given importance to the need of genuine partnership in collaboration. He says “In a true collaborative partnership, obligations are broadly distributed, the possibilities for cooperation are extensive, understanding and solidarity grows among the collaborative partners, communication is frequent and intensive, and the interpersonal context is rich.”

The collaboration can be considered as a reciprocal process in which all the involved parties have to contribute towards the achievement of shared goals. It is not mandatory that all participating parties will have equal share in contribution but definitely all have to actively contribute in some way. Moreover, in collaboration all members are interdependent on each other for the achievement of shared objectives and therefore one member cannot dictate and control the others.
3.2 Ingredient of Collaboration:

A good collaboration involves clear shared goals, systematic communication, close coordination, structured and open hearted discussions and well planned actions to achieve goals. There are some essential ingredients for the collaboration to happen. Collaboration is not simple and it will not happen on its own. As Thomas Kayser says “the bed has to be cultivated before the flowers can grow”, the necessary ingredients of collaboration are needed to be identified before planning and making collaborative efforts. There may be different opinions about the ingredients of collaboration. The literature has explored the ingredients of collaboration according to the need of collaboration.

Thomas Kayser through his years of work experience at Xerox Corporation and experience in team building activities identified six ingredients for building collaborative partnership and divides them into two categories –

(a) Structural Ingredients
   (i) Shared Goals
   (ii) Interdependence and Complementary Skills
   (iii) Accountability

(b) Behavioral Ingredients
   (i) Character
   (ii) Commitment
   (iii) Authentic Communication

Roy Soliman et.al has identified eight essential ingredients of collaboration:

   (i) People
   (ii) Shared Space
   (iii) Time
   (iv) A Common Objective
   (v) Focus on the objective
   (vi) A common Language
   (vii) Knowledge in the area of the objective
   (viii) Interaction
Chris Jones in his blog titled “Six Fundamentals of Effective Collaboration” \(^{12}\) has identified six fundamentals of effective collaboration as:

(i) Engagement
(ii) Keeping it Real (being Authentic)
(iii) A Bias for Learning & Discovery
(iv) Respect for Community Members
(v) Driving a Positive Vibe
(vi) Focus on Results

Jordan Buller and Alex Kass of Accenture Technology Lab have identified the ingredients of collaboration in the form of layers in their paper “Understanding the Layers of the Collaboration Stack and how they fit Together”\(^{13}\). They have defined four layers in which at the bottom two layers are related to infrastructure and toolkit and the top two layers are related to people and processes in collaboration. In this approach the bottom two layers are related to hardware and software and of the concern of people involved in the development of collaborative tools such as IT people. The top two layer issues for collaboration are related to the business leaders and mangers.

### 3.3 Importance for Organizational Effectiveness:

The collaboration is an important factor in achieving organisational effectiveness. Collaboration helps the organisation in coordinating all the activities in such a way that available resources are utilized in most efficient manner and directed towards the achievement of most important objectives of the organization. Effectiveness and efficiency are two terms that are used to measure the organizational performance. Both of these exist in long run, only when both are being achieved together. The effective collaboration is not only instrumental in improving efficiency in all the activities of group environment but also helps the organisation to become effective in long term. Cost efficiencies can be obtained with collaborative work. In collaboration, common issues are addressed jointly and thus, it helps in delivering similar services together with the peers. Collaboration can reduce cost in individual planning, research, training etc. Sharing of overhead expenses can also reduce the duplication of cost and effort.
There are evidences in literature that proves the importance of collaboration in organisational effectiveness. Stephen P. Robbins et.al in their book ‘Organizational Behaviour’ has referred a study of Fred Luthans and his associates. In this study, Fred Luthans and his associates have studied activities of managers who can be termed as Average, Successful and Effective Managers. The study has provided the time allocation of activities for the three types managers. The result of study shows that effective managers as opposed to average managers spend more time on communication which is an important activity in collaboration. Thus collaboration is important in being effective.

Average Managers  Successful Managers  Effective Managers

1. Traditional Management  2. Communication

Exhibit 3.1: Allocation of activities by Time

This research work is related to understand the effect of digital collaboration in organizational effectiveness. Therefore, it is worth remembering the words of Thomas Kayser at the closing para of this chapter; who says “Collaboration is not a pipe dream; it is a difference maker in terms of business effectiveness.”

This chapter included the definitions of collaboration available in literature. In light of the discussions on the collaboration it can be defined in simple words as a process by which members of the organisation help each other in utilizing the available resources optimally for the purpose of completing each other’s tasks and responsibilities which results in organizational effectiveness.
References


4. Ibid. p-189


8. Ibid


10. Ibid


15. Ibid.


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