

Collaboration

What is it?

Collaboration enables individuals to work together to achieve a defined and common business purpose. It exists in two forms¹:

- **Synchronous**, where everyone interacts in real time. Examples include in-person or online meetings, instant messaging, or any venue where communication is in real-time.
- **Asynchronous**, where the interaction may be time-shifted. Examples include file sharing, crowd sourcing, shared workspaces, or adding content to an information site, such as a wiki.



Image Source: Google Images

How do I start?

Building a team to collaborate on solving a business problem should not be taken lightly. A team needs to represent the various skills necessary to complete the specific project.

Below outlines six more steps from Inc.com²:

- **Remove Quiet Politeness.** Reward openness and authenticity with admiration. Groundbreaking ideas only surface when people “go all in” and become vulnerable.
- **Establish Communication Protocols.** Developing, and agreeing to, communication guidelines at the beginning of a project, allows participants to focus more on the idea creation. Determining roles among team members and deciding on modes of communication are also important.
- **Use a Specific Process.** Brainstorming takes structure and a strong facilitator. Place importance on selecting the path for this step.
- **Give Requirement and Permission.** Part of the communication guideline for the team should contain a section on contribution balance and how to handle a team member who fails to adhere to the agreement.
- **Work with Respect.** Few intend to be disrespectful; however for various reasons, verbal or nonverbal, it may occur. Keep the conversation open and deal with issues immediately. Focusing on the objective will help alleviate those situations.
- **Broadcast Recognition and Gratitude.** Give praise, credit, and affirmation often, loudly and where they are due.

¹ What is Collaboration. <http://www.aiim.org/What-is-Collaboration>

² How Smart People Collaborate for Success. <http://www.inc.com/kevin-daum/how-smart-people-collaborate-for-success.html>

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Important Tips

- **Recognize team successes.** Celebrating short wins will elevate the team's spirits and keep them going, striving for further wins.
- **Increase cross-cultural awareness.**³ Whether in-person or virtual, cultural differences may lead to unintended confusion and in certain situations, disruption. Before any real work begins, educate the team on the various cultural norms represented.
- **Establish trust.** This is more difficult if teams are purely virtual. In both situations, sharing personal tidbits helps to break down barriers and brings everyone to the same level. Introductions with names and roles may be paired with an interesting aspect of their lives such as a dream vacation or a hidden talent. If virtual, posting team photos and holding video meetings will help establish trust, and if there is any way, hold the initial meeting in person.
- **Common goal.** This might sound obvious, but it is important to make sure that every team member understands the team's goal and what "success" will mean. Throughout the collaboration, remind each other of the goal.
- **Appoint a Leader.** Attempting to get by leaderless in an effort to ensure absolute equality typically either descends into chaos or a survival of the fittest scenario where the bossiest rise to the top. There needs to be someone making sure all the T's are crossed and I's dotted.⁴

If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas.
- George Bernard Shaw

How can I learn more?

- **What is Collaboration**
<http://www.aiim.org/What-is-Collaboration>
- **How to Create Your Own Wiki**
<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2399582,00.asp>
- **The New Power of Collaboration**
http://www.ted.com/talks/howard_rheingold_on_collaboration?language=en
- **Improving Group Dynamics**
<http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/improving-group-dynamics.htm>
- **Open.NASA** <https://open.nasa.gov/>
- **NASA CKO Knowledge Map Face-to-Face Services**
<http://km.nasa.gov/knowledge-map/>
- **Examples of virtual work spaces:** wiggio.com and asana.com

³ 5 Tips for Virtual Collaboration. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/carolkinseygoman/2012/06/05/5-tips-for-virtual-collaboration/>

⁴ How to Collaborate Without Killing Someone. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jmaureenhenderson/2011/09/13/how-to-collaborate-without-killing-someone/>