How to Collaborate Successfully

Understanding 3 elements of collaboration

- **Task** - What are we doing together?
  - Creative, problem solving, or implementation
- **Process** - How are we going to accomplish this task?
  - Managing time, meetings, division and scheduling of work, draft and revision processes

**Affect** - What feelings do we have about this work?
- Feelings that are based on **prior** experience:
  - Religious and cultural values, age/race/ethnic/gender bias, hierarchical issues, competitiveness
- Feelings based on **current** experience:
  - “Not pulling his/her weight”
  - “S/he’s always late with work.”
  - “Didn’t show up for the meeting”
  - Other

**Basic principles**

- Be aware that process and affect change as the task changes.
  - Shifts in task may mean changes in leadership roles and leadership styles.
  - Shifts in leadership roles call for changes in “followership” roles.

- Pay attention to process even in the very beginning of your team’s work.
  - Practice active listening.
  - Use good interpersonal skills.
  - Make it explicit. (Say it out loud. Write it down.)
• Learn to identify body language and behavior that signals negative feelings.
  – E.g. Lack of eye contact, locked arms, missed meetings, time wasting, verbal hostility
• Try to address and resolve the feelings.
  – Hint: it’s usually connected to process.
• If this is not possible, try to control them.
• If this is not possible, get some mediation.

How do strong teams function?
• Elaborate key ideas in writing and verbally.
• Consider alternate ideas/solutions.
  – Don’t jump to consensus prematurely.
• Pay careful attention to process.
• Voice disagreements constructively, directly, and explicitly.
• Give positive feedback directly and explicitly.

How to prevent work division problems
• Clarify expectations.
  – People have different priorities. Know what your’s are. Ask about your teammates’.
• Be explicit in planning work breakdown.
• Keep notes.

Strategies to mend work division conflicts when they do happen
• First, pay attention to what you are doing or saying. Re-shape your actions.
  – We often give cues that say it’s OK for us to do more than our share. Why?
    • To control our own anxiety about project
    • To be in control
    • Because we are competitive
    • Because we aren’t skillful at negotiating so we go off on our own (lone wolf phenomenon)
• Second, collect some data, get your team to collect data and make this data visible.
  – Describe what you are doing specifically.
  – Count and record time that work takes.
    • “I thought that this task would take 3 hours, but it was closer to 6 hours.”
• Third, make discussion about work sharing a natural and non-hostile part of weekly meetings.
  – Address it directly in terms of your perspective rather than an attack.
    • “I think I have done most of the work this week, and I don’t want to keep going this way. Let’s talk about how to reallocate tasks.”
  – Defuse dissatisfaction before it builds.