

Two Huge Benefits of Collaboration

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My recent articles advocate that leaders collaborate with their peers, their direct reports, their suppliers, and their customers. I've presumed that the effective benefits of collaboration were obvious. A recent question made me realize that not everyone inherently understands those benefits.

Giving clear direction with immediate rewards and punishments gets things done quickly and usually results in the expected outcomes. So what's wrong with giving orders and insisting that things be done a specific way? After all, valuable time is saved and the needed outcomes are typically satisfied!

Well, that may seem adequate. But it requires that you as the order-giver be present not only this time but also in the future when similar (or different) situations present themselves. What if an unexpected obstacle occurs? You'll want it addressed quickly and to your satisfaction--though you won't be present.

Contrast "collaboration" with this "I tell and you do" approach. Two huge benefits (and many smaller advantages) occur. One is that better outcomes are usually achieved, and the action-taker is more confident. The longer-lasting effect is that healthier, more robust relationships are created.

All decision-making involves two steps. The first is thinking through the situation, and considering what you desire as an outcome. The second is determining the process that will lead to that outcome.

In collaboration, both parties come with their mental images of what is desired and possible. Both may be acceptable, but through dialogue, the best characteristics of each imagination are acknowledged and respected, and an even more attractive potential outcome usually results.

To achieve that desired outcome, action is required. Again, each party to the collaboration has an idea about what needs to be done. Through sharing possibilities and seeking potential improvements, the two individuals agree on what is probably an improved approach for making something happen.

In general, people feel a stronger allegiance to a plan if they've been involved in considering the alternatives. If obstacles arise, they'll work hard to overcome the limitations.

With a better-desired outcome in mind, a better plan in hand, and greater commitment to executing the plan, a collaborative approach usually yields an improved outcome. That's the first, most recognized benefit of using collaborative methods.

Perhaps an even larger benefit of collaboration is the positive effect it has on relationships. Success in any endeavor involves interactions with other people, so healthy relationships are hugely beneficial.

Why do collaborative efforts enhance relationships? When people are engaged and experience having their opinions and perspectives considered, they feel valued. More importantly, they have a lasting positive memory of the experience. They are more likely to repeat similar involvement in the future.

In working collaboratively, your values are apparent to the other person. Further, the other person reveals what's important to him or her. You learn what motivates each other. Trust develops.

As your reputation for working collaboratively grows, others want to be a part of future efforts. Colleagues are more likely to seek your help. Through the process of working together, less experienced individuals gain new confidence and skills and become more engaged.

When you deliver unilateral decisions, you are limited to your own experiences. Further, your motives are subject to misinterpretation. By engaging with others, they understand the problems better, recognize the potential drawbacks, and learn that simple solutions are not always easy to execute!

Though it may take more time, let me suggest that you adopt a strategy in which you never address a problem or offer an improvement without collaborating with someone. You'll not only generate better ideas, you'll build the skills of individuals who can address future problems without your involvement.

You'll generate better outcomes, and you'll build strong, long-lasting relationships. Collaboration has those two huge benefits over other, perhaps more efficient, methods of making things happen!