

Activity 1.1 What is Collaborative Learning? What Makes Collaboration Effective?¹

Description

It is said that, “the many are smarter than the few,” but under what circumstances? This activity encourages participants to reflect upon their own collaborative successes and failures for the purpose of determining which factors help to achieve effective collaboration.

Learning Goals

- Describe strengths, benefits, and challenges of collaborative learning.
- Identify key attributes associated with successful and unsuccessful collaborative learning.

Practice (50 minutes)

Step One	Calling on your own experiences with collaboration (school, work, teams, clubs), <i>create a list of attributes that you associate with positive collaboration.</i> Use these prompts to help you remember the details of your positive experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who did you collaborate with?• How did you collaborate and what were the outcomes?• What conditions, activities, and/or characteristics made the collaboration work well?	10 min
Step Two	Next, using the same prompts, think about a negative collaborative	5 min

¹ Citation for this activity: Nick Longo (2023). What is Collaborative Learning? In Hartman, Britt, & Byrd (Eds). *The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit*. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/module-1-introduction-to-collaboration>

	experience. Create a list of attributes of failed collaboration.	
Step Three	<p>In pairs or small groups, share your lists and identify at least 5 common attributes associated with successful collaboration. Discuss their importance and rank them. For example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Diversity of perspective 2. Trust and respect within the group 3. Responsiveness to team members 4. Familiarity 5. Playfulness <p>Repeat this process for negative collaborative experiences.</p>	20 min
Step Four	<p>Share back and debrief. Each group should share their top 2 attributes (positive and negative) with the entire group. Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some common observations? Do themes or schemes of analysis emerge from these lists? • Who is responsible for successful collaboration? • What single attribute is most likely to undermine the success of collaboration? • How do we anticipate or work around these obstacles? 	15 min
Tip: Consider coupling this activity with 1.3 Anticipating Conflict & Forming Group Guidelines		

Online Adaptation

Try out this activity using [Jamboard](#) or another white board application. Attributes can be posted by participants and then moved around and ranked by the group.

Reflection Assignment

Do you believe “the many are smarter than the few”? Is this always the case? What preconditions or factors are necessary to help make this a true statement? What factors might undermine this practice?

Practice Journal

This week, use your Top 5 Collaboration Attributes to help you work through a challenge or assignment. You may apply these attributes within an existing group or form a small collaborative group. Describe your experience. Reflect on how best to maximize positive collaborative attributes in future groups.

Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- Charles Duhigg, “What Google Learned from Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team,” NYTimes Magazine (Feb. 2016)
- James Surowiecki, The Wisdom of Crowds (Intro and Chapter 1, pp. xi - 22)
- Sigman and Ariely TedTalk. [How Can groups make good decisions?](#)