

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

Submitted by Nicholas Longo¹

Last Updated 08/31/2024



Description

It is said that, “the many are smarter than the few,” but under what conditions? 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.

Instructions (40 minutes)

Set Up	Prepare for the Activity Prepare to record the discussion on a white board, flip chart, shared document or slide deck, or using an online whiteboard tool. Begin by introducing the learning goals of this activity.	
---------------	---	--

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

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

<p>Step One</p>	<p>Individually Reflect on Positive Collaboration Characteristics</p> <p>Introduce the following prompts. Allow five minutes of silent reflection and writing before inviting participants to share their answers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think back to a time when you had a positive collaborative experience. Really try to remember a specific example. Where were you? Why were you collaborating? • Take a moment to remember it. If you have a piece of paper, jot down a few descriptive words. Why did it work well? What made it a positive collaborative experience? • What are the traits or characteristics of a positive collaborative experience? 	<p>5 min</p>
<p>Step Two</p>	<p>Share Positive Collaboration Characteristics</p> <p>Once participants have had a few minutes to reflect, ask the group to share their positive collaboration traits or characteristics. Try to record the answers thematically, if possible. Do not engage in discussion or explanation of traits. Generate a broad list of positive attributes.</p> <p>Online Adaptation: Invite participants to type in a shared document, create shapes & add text on slides, or add notes on an online whiteboard. Ask participants to organize the notes thematically as they share ideas. Click here to view a sample collaborative board in Google Slides.</p>	<p>10 min</p>
<p>Step Three</p>	<p>Share Negative Collaboration Characteristics</p> <p>Next, using a slightly expedited process, invite participants to think back to a negative collaborative discussion experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why was it bad? What are some characteristics of negative collaboration? • What should be avoided when collaborating with others? <p>Invite participants to think for a couple of minutes and then share 2-3 characteristics of a negative collaborative experience. Record as before.</p>	<p>10 min</p>
<p>Step Four (optional)</p>	<p>Rank Top 5 Positive and Negative Collaboration Attributes</p> <p>In pairs or small groups, invite participants to review the 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>20 min (optional)</p>

	Repeat this process for negative collaborative experiences.	
Step Five	<p>Debrief as a Full Group</p> <p>Invite participants to review the full lists on the flip chart, the online whiteboard, or shared document/slides. Discuss what collaboration means to the full group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some common observations? Do themes or schemes of analysis emerge from these lists? • Which attributes are most likely to undermine the success of collaboration? • Which attributes would make for the most ideal discussion environment? • Who is responsible for successful collaboration? • How do we create a positive collaborative experience? 	15 min

Reflection Journal

- 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 or circumstances might undermine this idea?
- When should we seek out collaboration and when should we avoid it?

Practice Journal

This week, select your top five collaboration traits and try to use these traits to help you work through a challenge or assignment with others. 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

- [Google - Project Aristotle](#): Duhigg, Charles. “What Google Learned from Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team.” *The New York Times Magazine*, The New York Time Company, 25 Feb. 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/magazine/what-google-learned-from-its-quest-to-build-the-perfect-team.html. Accessed 26 Aug. 2023.
- Surowiecki, James. *The Wisdom of Crowds*. 1st Anchor books ed., New York, Anchor Books, 2005, pp. xi-22.
- [Group Decision Making](#): Sigman, Mariano and Dan Ariely. “How can groups make good decisions?” *TED*, Apr. 2017, www.ted.com/talks/mariano_sigman_and_dan_ariely_how_can_groups_make_good_decisions.

Activity Cluster

1.1 What is Collaborative Learning?

[1.3 Anticipating Conflict and Forming Group Guidelines](#)