Section one:

Why collaboration is important

This workbook will help you to understand the importance of working with other departments in the organisation and to collaborate more effectively with them.

What is workplace collaboration?

Where groups of two or more individuals work together to achieve a common objective by sharing knowledge, skills and ideas. The result is a win–win for all parties and it is unlikely the desired outcome could have been achieved without such collaboration.

All effective team work requires collaboration but when those teams are formed across departments they are potentially even more powerful. Bringing together a wide variety of knowledge and expertise from people that do not normally work together and ensuring effective collaboration takes place can transform organisations.

Collaborating with other departments can transcend intra–departmental team-working.

The importance of collaboration

No single department can be expected to have all of the knowledge required to meet organisational goals all of the time. For some tasks and projects, it is necessary to bring in expertise from across the organisation. The need for closer departmental collaboration is likely to grow as organisations find themselves operating in increasingly complex and rapidly changing marketplaces and conditions. Many organisations have also become flatter in their structure rather than hierarchical. The ability to work collaboratively with those from other disciplines and functions and see beyond their own department, therefore, will increasingly become a requirement of the manager's skillset.

If approached correctly, a side benefit of effective collaboration is improving the morale and knowledge of the people in your organisation. They learn from each other and it creates a sense of community, with colleagues feeling they can share both their ideas and problems.

Not all interaction with other departments is collaborative though and some can lead to negative rather than positive outcomes. For example, there can be a natural tendency for departments to compete with one another while others avoid each other. A number of factors ranging from personality to company culture can dictate the type of interaction that occurs between departments. And with many departments measured on their own performance, a silo-led attitude to working can make it difficult to foster a culture of collaboration.

Five basic types of interaction

There are five basic types of interaction that can take place with other departments in your organisation:

- **Competing** – When a party seeks to satisfy its own interests, regardless of the impact it will have on the other parties involved and so the result is a win-lose situation.

- **Avoiding** – When one or both parties recognise there is a problem, such as a conflict, but choose to ignore it rather than confront it in the hope that it will go away.

- **Compromising** – When both parties choose to concede on an issue or both surrender something to resolve the situation.

- **Accommodating** – When one party puts the interest of the other ahead of its own in order to reach a resolution.

- **Collaborating** – When both parties work to satisfy all their requirements for a mutually beneficial outcome: a win-win.

Rooms Available

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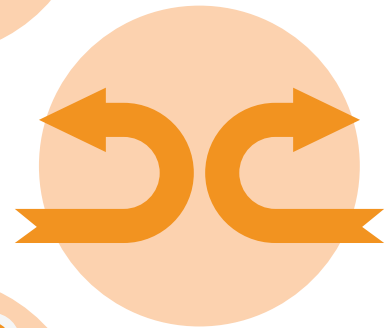
Ⓐ Task one: Types of interaction

Name four departments in your organisation that you or your department interact with. Respond to the questions about them and type your answers in the spaces provided below.

Type of interaction

Type of interaction

Type of knowledge shared

Type of knowledge shared

Type of interaction

Type of interaction

Type of knowledge shared

Type of knowledge shared

When is it necessary to collaborate?

> 'The idea of disciplined collaboration can be summed up in one phrase: the leadership practice of properly assessing when to collaborate (and when not to) and instilling in people both the willingness and the ability to collaborate when required.'

Hansen (2009)

Any project or task that impacts different areas of the organisation will benefit from cross-department collaboration. A good example of this is the implementation of an IT system that will introduce new ways of working in different departments. With representatives from different functions on the project team such as IT, HR and operations, it will have far greater chance of success. As well as contributing their specific skills and knowledge to the project, they can explain the impact of the implementation from their perspective and highlight areas of concern and importance for each of their individual departments.

A completely different example would be for the purpose of research and development and to foster a culture of innovation. The R&D department may be surprised by the value that the HR or IT department can bring to a discussion about a proposed new product.