



INNOVEST SME

Accelerating Small Business

Achieve collaboration with better Business writing

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*Alone we can do so little –
but together we
can do so much.*

HELEN KELLER

PREFACE

Collaborative business writing is a growing trend among industries because it is a concept that utilizes the talent and knowledge of several individuals to create one final piece of work. Since collaborative writing in the workplace can be done by several different employees, the final work can feature several different views, aspects and opinions that may not be seen if the job had been completed by one person. This concept is also helpful when companies have large projects to finish, since it can be broken down into several 'parts' for team members to complete individually.

*Coming together is a
beginning. Staying
together is progress.
Working together is success.*

HENRY FORD



WHAT IS COLLABORATIVE BUSINESS WRITING?

Collaborative writing is often simply defined as a project or piece of work that is created by a multiple of people combined together. It has become especially useful in many companies that prefer employees to work together on a project or require a large assignment to be divided into smaller parts in order to be accomplished on time. After each employee has finished their share, a group leader or editor works to assemble the parts together to create a final work or project.

CLARIFYING THE OBJECTIVE

Once a collaborative project has been created, it is important to clarify the objective and outline what needs to be completed. Some objectives will outline the necessary components that need to be completed, as well as address which employee should complete it. Collaborative writing can be tough to start, so it's best when members have some sort of shared goal and are aware of shared responsibility and accountability. Once the objective is established and the members know their role, they can benefit from the shared resources, authority and eventual rewards of working together.

Define the objective:

- What are we doing this project for?
- What do we hope to accomplish?
- What parts/aspects need to be addressed in the project?
- What processes should be done in the project?

PRACTICAL WRITING APPROACHES

Collaborative business writing has become a great tool to better design group processes and procedures used in a company. Because of this, collaborative writing has become a practical writing approach that many companies have begun to adapt for their employees. In collaborative business environments, each employee is able to contribute to the project as a whole, while still being able to edit or revise work as needed. Many collaborative groups even allow for coworker's to make comments on or edit each other's work, allowing more views and ideas throughout the project. In addition, since the collaborative writing process can be done almost anywhere, it is easier for employees to include work from a variety of areas, such as from across the state, the nation or even the world. 0

Benefits:

- Improves collaborative processes
- Increase member communication
- Edit/peer review project segments
- Increase contributions from multiple parties

COLLABORATIVE WRITING STRATEGIES

There is a number of different collaboration writing strategies that companies can use to fit the project they need completed. Some strategies rely on a small group of employees working on one piece at the same time. Other strategies involve multiple employees working on projects in individual roles to bring together later. Companies will choose a strategy to use based on a number of factors, including the size of the project, number of employees involved and what sort of deadline the project has.

Some examples of writing strategies that will be discussed later:

- Parallel construction
- Sequential writing
- Integrated writing

COLLABORATIVE WRITING PATTERNS

A collaborative pattern refers to the 'pattern' in which employees will work together to complete the project. These patterns can be used with a set collaborative strategy or they can be used as an independent tool. The collaborative pattern that is used will focus on what members of the team will complete what tasks and how the rest of the team will work to support the main goal. Different patterns require a single person to perform a task, such as creating an outline or editing peer submissions, while other patterns require a group of employees to work on one task together in order to complete it. The collaborative pattern of the team depends on a number of factors, such as the type of project at hand, how many members are available, and the individual talents of each team member.

Common collaborative patterns:

- The team collectively plans and outlines the project, and each employee completes their own part and is later compiled together into a whole piece.
- One individual of the team plans and writes a project draft while the group later revises it
- The team plans and writes the draft as a group while one or more other members revise the draft without any additional input.
- One member will dictate various parts of the project while another member transcribes and edits a final draft.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Ginger has been assigned to write a proposal that provides ideas for ways of improving employee proficiency and has asked to include her department coworkers in the process. Ginger knew this would best be done if they collaborated on the writing portions. She hoped that if her coworkers worked together it would generate ideas for the proposal and streamline the process of putting these ideas into words. Ginger used a writing strategy that involved having each employee work individually and then bring the pieces together. Based on this pattern, she decided she could manage the outline of the project as well as edit the employee's work together to form the final proposal. This way, Ginger can get several different opinions from the department, but will be able to present them in an organized fashion to the management board.

*Training often gives
people solutions to
problems already solved.
Collaboration addresses
challenges that no one has
overcome before.*

MARCIA CONNER



TYPES OF COLLABORATIVE BUSINESS WRITING

Collaborative business writing can cover a wide range of documents and projects, including proposals, memos, letters and even instruction sets. Typically the type of collaborative writing used depends on the type of project at hand and how it will need to be completed. Based on a number of factors, the collaborative team can best determine what type of collaborative writing would give them the best result in the end.

CONSTRUCTION – “CUT AND PASTE”

As we've said previously, collaborative writing involves combining the many works and tasks of others into one final piece. One form of bringing these parts together is to use cut and paste parallel construction. With this method, often called 'divide and conquer', the team members will either work individually or in groups of 2-3 to completed different parts of the final project. Once each person or group has finished their part, they are turned into a designated editor/assembler (although there can two people assigned to this task). The editor(s), work to compile these separate pieces into one final draft piece. Since this process is done

almost solely by the editor, the original authors may not be consulted on how/when/where their contribution is used in the final draft.

Characteristics of cut and paste parallel construction:

- Begin with many different parts
- Combine the employee drafts into formatted final draft
- Typically done by one or two final editors – may not consult with the rest of the group

PARALLEL CONSTRUCTION – “PUZZLE”

Another form of bringing project parts together is to use the ‘puzzle’ parallel construction method. With this method, sometimes referred to as the Frankenstein method, the team members can work individually or in groups of 2-3 to complete different segments of the final project. In this method, the original author does not necessarily need to complete the whole assignment – sometimes they just need to send in a partially completed piece and let the editor(s) finish the rest. Once each person or group has finished their part, they turn them into a designated editor/assembler. The editor, or editors, will begin to work these segments into a final draft. But in the ‘puzzle’ part of this construction, the editors will not typically use the entire piece submitted in the final draft. This method allows the editor to take bits and parts of the author’s work and piece them with other contributor’s work to form one, solid, cohesive draft.

Characteristics of puzzle parallel construction:

- Begin with many different parts
- Team members can submit a finished or partially finished piece
- Various parts, segments and bits are pieced together from different authors
- Typically done by one or two final editors

SEQUENTIAL SUMMATIVE CONSTRUCTION

Sequential summative construction is a type of collaboration that involves a team member creating a piece of work and having other team members add to it. It starts with every team member being assigned their share of the project. Once they are all complete, one team member begins by bringing their work forward to be edited or reviewed. Once this piece is reviewed, additional members will one by one add their part onto the previous one. Once the next submission is added, this acknowledges that the previous submission is correct and does not need any corrections/editing. The team goes through each member's submissions until they are all added to the final draft to satisfaction. This method allows for more peer editing and group work than some of the other methods.

Characteristics of sequential summative construction:

- One team member submits a finished or partially finished piece
- Additional team members add onto this piece

- Team members cannot change/alter what has initially been submitted
- The team works together to edit/compile final draft

INTEGRATING CONSTRUCTION

One different method of collaboration is the integrated construction method. This method involves the entire team engaged in a form of discussion, so all members must be present to participate. In integrated construction, the team typically presents with a beginning piece of work. From here, the group discusses and suggests new content to add to it. Through these discussions, the editors (sometimes called scribes) will edit and revise content per the instructions of the group. Since this method involves the entire team at once, it can be difficult to take in all of the discussion at once and use every person's input. This can cause the editor/scribe to make a lot of revisions and corrections while working on the piece. Because this method involves the entire team at one time, instead of allowing them to work independently, it is typically not suited for projects that are large or complicate, or projects that have a quickly approaching deadline.

Characteristics of integrated construction:

- Team members engage in discussion to write project content
- One team member (or small group) create and change content
- Typically involves many revisions
- Not suitable for very large projects/projects with short deadlines

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Matthew was put in charge of writing a newsletter for the company shareholders in order to let them know what is going on in the different departments. Matthew contacted different representatives from each department and asked them to submit a piece about what's happening in their area. After all of the submissions were gathered, Matthew wasn't sure what would be the best way to put it together. Since he would be the chief editor of the newsletter, he thought the best way to collaborate the different pieces of work would be through cut and paste parallel construction so that all the pieces come together, but still retain their independent voice. Once the piece was finished, Matthew was happy with how the final piece came together and was happy to submit it to the company shareholders.

*The strength of the team
is the individual member.
The strength of each
member is the team.*

PHIL JACKSON



COLLABORATIVE TEAM MEMBERS

It's called 'collaborative' writing for a reason. Collaborative business writing requires a group, or team, of members to work together and create a final written piece. Each member is usually assigned a certain role or duty individually while still working toward the group goal. We may not always be able to choose our team members, but we can make sure we are allowing their own talents can contribute to a successful finished project.

TEAM LEADER SELECTION

Every team has a unique set of team members. Everyone has different work styles, moods, personality styles and even different learning styles. Due to a number of different factors, team members are bound to have conflict and run into barriers during the project. But selecting a proper team leader can not only help during these times of conflict, but it can possibly prevent many of the problems that can arise. A team leader is a member of the team that can oversee the flow of progress and ensure the project is staying on track toward completion. By doing this, they must be able to assign tasks, oversee progress, handle conflict when it arises, and provide each team member with timely feedback.

Characteristics of a leader:

- Be knowledgeable of the project
- Be knowledgeable of company procedures/processes
- Be a good team player
- Be able to communicate with other team members
- They may not have all the answers – but they will get them

CHIEF EDITOR SELECTION

The chief editor of the team is the person generally responsible for reviewing and editing all content submitted from other team members. On top of this, they must be able to organize all of this material into a presentable final draft, depending on what type of collaborative style the team has chosen. It is important for the chief editor to have good communication skills with their team members, since they will often need to communicate with them about missing or impartial submission or the possibility of certain works needing revision.

Characteristics of a chief editor:

- Be knowledgeable of the project
- Be knowledgeable of correct grammar/spelling/context
- Have good communication skills among team members
- Be able to handle and organize numerous submissions from team members

CHARACTERISTICS OF TEAM MEMBERS

Finally, one of the most important parts of the collaboration team is the team members themselves. After all, the collaboration couldn't occur without someone to work with. Employees that want to work on collaboration teams must have certain characteristics and mannerisms in order to work well with the group. Team members should be willing to work with others and engage in meaningful communication with them. They must be willing to learn new tasks and assist other team members when there is slack or lack of support. Effective team members are not only willing to share in the team's achievements, but also in their set back and failures – knowing that everything they do is done as a team.

Characteristics of effective team members:

- Flexible in schedule and assignments
- Have realistic goals and expectations in the group
- Be willing to learn
- Be willing to participate in various group activities
- Able to assist team members if needed

WAYS TO BUILD COLLABORATIVE WRITING TEAM

Creating effective collaboration teams can seem daunting, but with a little thought and consideration, we realize the choices can be plain to see. When preparing to form a collaborative team, first consider the team leader you want to assign to help mediate and monitor the group.

Consult with this team leader about who would work best as an editor in chief. Be aware that there may be more than one person needed to be editor in chief, so don't be afraid to gather a few people for consideration. The main task should focus on the team members needed for the team. Select employees that have shown a willingness to learn new things and have shown their ability to help their coworkers. When team members and leaders have similar characteristics in common, they are more likely to be able to work together and function as a team.

Tips to consider for a team:

- How big is this project?
- How many people will I need?
- Who can I trust to get the job done?
- Who shows the right characteristics?
- Who has the skills needed for this project?

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Sally was told she would need to form a collaboration group in order to complete an annual report for upper management. Sally consulted with her lead writer, John, and asked him to be a team leader for the writing group. Sally and John selected a group of reporters that had experience in company presentations and would be able to provide a lot of information for the report. John selected his chief editor, Mary, to assist with the project and ensure it is constructed in the correct manner.

Over the next few weeks, Sally consulted with John about the report and viewed the progress. Once it was complete, Sally thanked the team for their great work and was positive she could come to them in the future if she needed more collaborative work done.

*Man is a tool-using
animal. Without tools,
he is nothing – but with
tools, he is all.*

THOMAS CARLYLE



COLLABORATIVE TOOLS AND PROCESSES

Collaborative writing can be a lengthy process so it is always a good idea to use various tools and processes to help ensure the flow of work and progress. Larger projects often require some sort of outline or guide; while smaller projects may need closer team member cohesion. As with all forms of collaborative work, factors such as the type of project and the employees involved will better determine what tools or processes work best for the optimal result.

OUTLINES AND STORYBOARDS

A popular tool to use in collaborative writing is a form of outline or storyboards. These tools are designed to map out a project and let all team members where to start and finish, while highlighting a possible route in between. Outlines are best used for writing out main points and showing a flow of how the points move through the project. They are often drawn out in bullet form and include few details. Storyboards can be used for larger projects and allow for more details to be shown at once. They allow the creator to use pictures and icons to illustrate points as well as add text and phrases to identify processes and main points of the

project. When an outline or storyboard is presented at the beginning of the project, employees are more knowledgeable as to what is scheduled to happen and what their role in it will be.

COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

A little planning always goes a long way – especially when working in groups. Although some decisions are made by management or supervisors, it is beneficial to allow the team to collaborate and plan the project together, such as how to assign tasks and when to have regular collaboration meetings. Much of the collaborative planning also includes aspects of the project such as the purpose of the project, who the project is for, how the project is organized and simply how the various tasks will be completed. This type of planning can be done in group discussions or through smaller employee sessions, but it is important to have some form of documentation of the planning that occurs, such as keeping an employee log or a process chart in the work area. This allows team members to view the various parts of the planning process and see where their input can be most valuable.

COLLABORATIVE REVISION

Collaborative revision occurs once all team members have completed the original drafts of their assignments and then come together to combine their work into the solid, final draft. Different collaboration strategies will perform collaborative revision differently. For instance, some strategies require a small group to review the member's submissions and determine

how it will work into the final project. Other strategies require the group to work as a whole and edit works together to build the final draft. Whichever strategy is used, the purpose of collaborative revision is to allow team members a chance to participate in the revision process and feel as though their participation is valuable and that their opinions and insight will be heard instead of being pushed aside.

COLLABORATIVE TEAM COHESION

Team cohesion is an important part of collaboration because it ensures that the team members are able to work together toward the common goal and not allow personal interests or conflict to divide them. When a group has strong team cohesion, team members will feel more motivated and will lead to better performance not only in themselves, but for the team. Also, collaborative team cohesion helps team members focus more on group goals, guidelines and even improve group communication.

There are four main stages of group development and it's important that the group handle each stage carefully and progress the group to 'Norm' and 'Perform' together.

- **Forming** – this is the stage where the group first comes together. Team members are focused primarily on themselves right now.
- **Storming** – this is the stage where conflict first appears and can determine future problems for the group.

- **Norming** – this is the stage where cohesion begins. Team members begin to trust one another and communicate more openly.
- **Performing** – this is the stage where the group finally comes together to work toward the common goal.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Jeff was gathering his new collaboration team to begin working on a new company handbook. Once he gathered his current team members, he held a group meeting to discuss the project in full. Jeff used outlines to display the different sections that would need to be completed for the handbook. He then asked the group to help plan the different steps needed to complete these sections. Before the meeting was dismissed, Jeff asked that several members work together on some sections and assigned several people to work as liaisons between the different 'sections'. Jeff wanted the group to feel as though they could openly communicate together and wanted them to feel as though they were keeping in step with the group, despite working separately.

*Style is a simple way of
saying complicated things.*

JEAN COCTEAU



SETTING STYLE GUIDELINES

Style guidelines refer to a set of standards or formats used when creating new writing materials, such as setting typography, graphic design aspects and even text content. In collaborative writing, it is important to set these guidelines at the beginning of the project. This lets every team member know what is expected of them and allows them to ‘be on the same page’ as the rest of the group while they are working.

VOICE AND PERSON

Every piece of writing will have some form of voice or point of view from it. The voice and person point of view contribute to the uniqueness of the work and add emphasis to various areas. Using an active voice is more productive when seeking change or an action, since it stresses verbs and actions. A passive voice is suitable when stating facts or figures with needing much in return (such as describing the sales quotas from last season).

The person (or point of view) is another form of voice and style that can point a piece of writing in a certain direction. Based on what POV the author uses, the emphasis on actions or subjects can change. First and second person POV speak about someone directly (I, Me, You, Yours,

Ours), while third person is often known as a narrative mode since it simply states facts and phrases.

Remember:

- **Active voice** – the subject is actively saying something (i.e. ‘we recommend changes...’)
- **Passive voice** – the action is emphasized more, making the subject fade into the background (i.e. ‘these steps are recommended for change...’)
- **First person point of view** – Uses pronouns ‘I’, ‘We’ (i.e. ‘We have a staff shortage in Accounting’)
- **Second person point of view** – Uses pronouns such as ‘You’ or ‘Your’ (i.e. ‘You need to listen to our ideas.’)
- **Third person point of view** – Uses pronouns ‘He’, ‘She’, or ‘It’ (i.e. ‘He came up with the idea for a new plan/She didn’t like the changes to the office.’)

FORMAT

Format simply refers to the set-up or structure of the written works in the project. Some standard aspects of formatting include page margins, font size/style/spacing and even placement of names and sources. But establishing format in a collaborative group is even more important due to the multiple numbers of employees that will be involved in writing and completing parts of the project. Because every employee will, at some

point, work on their own and then return this work to the group, format should be established at the beginning of the project in order to reduce problems or conflict after the work is already done.

Before employees set off to work individually, establish a universal format concerning document size/structure, fonts, wording, common grammar mistakes and even what program/media to use when bringing the work back. When employees know how to shape their work before they begin, they are less likely to have conflict with the editors when they return to the group.

Common format concerns in collaborative groups:

- Ensure everyone uses the same media (computer software, written versions, audio files, etc.) to ensure smooth conversion.
- Specify font size and style, including for special text such as headings and titles
- Specify paper margins and spacing
- Determine if numbers or symbols will be used or if only text should be used (i.e. 100 vs one hundred, % vs percentage, etc.)

CONSISTENT SPELLING OF COMMONLY USED WORDS

The human language has continued to evolve and shift over time. Many words began as separate words, but then evolved into hyphenated compound words (*make-up*, *hour-long*, etc.). Overtime, many of these phrases became simply compound words that stood alone (*backup*,

altogether, workout, etc.). Every person has had a different exposure to the English language and what formats are acceptable/unacceptable. As a collaborative team, it is best to establish from the beginning what qualifies as the correct spelling for the employee's written submissions. While it is impossible to know every word they may use, it is possible to narrow the list down to common words that will be used (This can be done based on the topic of the project). Specify the correct spelling for common terms we use all the time in writing, such as *every day* vs. *everyday*, *never mind* vs. *nevermind*, *all right* vs. *alright* – and so on. Be sure to also notify employees to consult with their team leader or coworker if in doubt about any format/commonly used word problems.

Examples of commonly used words with difficult spelling:

- Sign-on vs. sign on
- Workplace vs. work place
- Database vs. data base
- Lifestyle vs. life style
- Website vs. web site
- A lot vs. alot

NUMBERS AS WORDS OR FIGURES

There are many different rules about how to write numbers in text. Many try to specify when it is correct to spell out a number or to use numeric text. There are many rules that state numbers under twenty, or even as low as

ten, should be spelled out, while higher numbers, such as 25 or higher, should be written as a number. Other ‘universal’ rules define how to spell out or notate figures, such as percentages or fractions. Although there is no absolute way of writing numbers in text, it is highly recommended in formal or business writing to use the word form of many numbers as well as use symbols as sparingly as possible in order to keep the text looking as professional as possible.

Common number rules to remember:

- Spell out small numbers (such as smaller than 10)
- For numbers with more than one syllable, use number type (27, 45, 73, etc.) but spell out number with one syllable (twelve, nine, twenty, etc.)
- Don’t start a sentence with a numeral – spell out the number instead.
- Spell out fractions and use a hyphen (one-half, two-thirds)
- In formal or business writing, spell out the percentage or measurement:
 - o 13 percent of cases
 - o Add 4 cups of nuts
 - o Over 10 years ago

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Mike is consulting with his collaborative team about the new employee handbooks they are writing. After assigning everyone their particular section to complete, Mike introduced a set of style guidelines to use by the whole team. First, Mike informed the team that the handbook is written in narrative form, so writers should not use pronouns such as “I”, “You” or “We”. Then, Mike spoke about heading and title guidelines and defined what type of font is to be used. Finally, since Mike knew the company used a lot of number figures for every department, he specified what figures should be fully written out and which figures would be alright to abbreviate or use numerical text. Once Mike had these guidelines laid out, he excused the team members to begin working on their sections and told them to meet with him personally if they had any additional questions.

*Obstacles are things a
person sees when he takes
his eyes off his goal.*

E. JOSEPH COSSMAN



BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE WRITING

All teams or groups have their share of problems when working together – this is just human nature. Many of these problems are worked out during the ‘Storming’ and ‘Norming’ periods of adjustment. But some problems can happen later within a project and could affect the work of others. These problems should be addressed right away and ensure that they do not pollute the group.

HOARDING

In collaborative writing, hoarding is a term used for team members that are holding back from participation and are ‘hoarding’ information. These team members may hold back for several reasons, such as feeling unimportant, feeling like the collaboration process is a waste of time, or to simply to avoid sharing the information they already know. In some cases, the team member may be reluctant to participate because they can feel that they are giving up their power in the group if they offer ideas

into the group discussion. So in turn, they distance themselves from other team members and do not contribute to the group.

Some ways to handle group hoarders:

- Offer team members rewards for participating in the group, not just individual progress
- Ask questions directly to team members when possible – this way they cannot avoid giving input
- Reduce competition as much as possible – stress group mentality

INNOVATION

The innovation barrier, also commonly known as the “not-invented-here” barrier, is a type of barrier that demonstrates a lack of willingness to reach out, or innovate, with other team members. Team members can have an unwillingness to communicate with their team members for a number of reasons, such as wanting to appear self-reliant, not appear to be ‘the weak one’, or simply believing that they have all the information and do not need to communicate with others. This type of barrier can often lead to the “I’m better than you” attitude and can lead team members to look out for their own self-interests rather than the good of the group.

Some ways to handle innovation barriers:

- Encourage team members to say “I don’t know” when seeking help
- Ensure communication flows between all parties

- Reduce the feel of competition – boost the need for group participation
- Remember there is no ‘I’ in team – no member is higher than another

SEARCH

The search barrier is a problem that occurs when a team member claims they are not able to find the answer to the question/problem they have, and cannot contribute to the group. Sometimes the search barrier occurs when the employee cannot legitimately find answers or information, such as if the problem is not very broad in scope or if there is not enough material provided in reference materials. It’s possible that the topic at hand could be difficult to find, and the employee may need to branch out into another area. In rare cases, the employee may have searched for the information, but the search was difficult so the employee decided to give up. If this happens, avoid disciplining the employee for their lack of results, but instead offer assistance in searching for additional information. If there is truly a lack of available information, offer to assist in helping search related topics or field of interest for related facts and information and help blend the information together.

Some ways to handle search barriers:

- Offer assistance in search for information
- Research similar topics for related information

- Acknowledge the employee's search instead of resulting to discipline

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Knowledge transfer is a barrier in which people find they are unable to work together. Unlike hoarding or information transfer, employees with knowledge transfer barriers do in fact want to work with the group, but may lack the tact or skills to do so. They may be unaware of procedures on sharing their ideas, lack rapport with the other team members or may not share some of the same visions or work habits as their coworkers. These team members do not lack information or values – they simply lack the basic knowledge of how to collaborate. This type of barrier can be very harmful to a group not only due to the lack of communication involved, but can also harm relationships among team members and hinder any real progress from being made.

Some ways to handle knowledge transfer barriers:

- Demonstrate open communication with the entire team
- Allow plenty of 'norming' time to let the group become familiar with each other
- For larger teams, group employees by 2-3 to allow an 'inner support system'

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Debby noticed she had some problems going on in her collaboration group. At the last meeting, she noticed several team members sat away from the group and refused to participate in the discussions. This concerned her that some of the members did not want to share any information, or if they simply didn't know anything to contribute. Later that day, some of her team members came to her and expressed how they felt as though they could not complete their research because they could not find any useful information. Debby decided she needed to tackle one problem at a time. For her worried writers, she gave several other topics to research and even offered several resources to check for them. At the next group meeting, Debby addressed each employee directly for input, including some of the members that were separated. By speaking to them directly, Debby was able to get their contributions as well, instead of allowing them to go unnoticed during the discussion.

*By prevailing over all
obstacles and distractions,
one may unfailingly
arrive at his chosen goal
or destination.*

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS



OVERCOMING COLLABORATIVE WRITING BARRIERS

As with any group or project, the team can experience collaborative barriers. Some can be caused by the work itself, such as writer's block or trouble with research, while other barriers are caused by team members and problems with leadership. It is important to address the possibility of any barriers at the beginning of the project and let employees know how they can be reported/handled.

PRACTICE T-SHAPED MANAGEMENT

The idea of T-shaped management refers to the emphasis on individual accountability and the group collaborative performance. T-shaped management allows for the performance objectives to be combined with the group goals, which leads to better collaboration and overall success of the project. Because of this, the team leader should look into what motivates the group and use this to set achievable goals that employees feel they can work toward. During this transition, it is also important for the team leader to provide timely feedback, leadership coaching as well as periodic reviews so employees can see their progress as an individual as well as how they are contributing to the group.

Tips for T-shaped management:

- Measure and track team member progress
- Create performance plans for the individual as well as the group
- Set realistic goals

BUILDING A NETWORK OF ALLIANCES

In many collaborative groups, a common barrier is the lack of communication or even consultation between team members. Some members can develop a problem with asking for help while another may not be so willing to share what they know. In cases such as these, it is a good idea to encourage team members to build a network of their alliances. Team members are more reluctant to seek information from their team mates if they do not know them very well, which can lead to try and finish their assignment with missing or incorrect information. This is not beneficial to the group. The team leader should implement ways in which team members are able to improve communication and intrapersonal relationships with each other, such as regular team meetings (both formal and informal), workflow diagrams with team member names and titles, communicate through social media and even hold team social events. Activities like these will help team members become more social with each other and eventually allow them to build better group relationships.

IMPLEMENTING ENABLERS

Enablers are a business tool used by team leaders that allow group members to be equipped with the necessary information and 'know-how' to collaborate successfully with other team members, as well as 'enable' other team members to do the same. The theory of implementing enablers is that once one or more employees are enabled with the right information and structure to collaborate in the group, they will in turn spread to other team members as well. Once every team member feels confident they have the right information to contribute to the group, they will be able to collaborate more successfully. Enablers are a great tool for strengthening intergroup communication, improving problem solving skills in team members, and help keep teammates focused on the project by keeping everyone involved.

ASSESSING THE CULTURE AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

A common mistake that occurs when leaders try to improve collaboration is the absence of assessing the group culture and determining what elements of the group should be improved. Often times leaders may assume the group is not collaborating because they do not get along or they are having trouble working together, when in reality the group may simply lack the knowledge of the project or need assistance with establishing communication among each other. Before the team leader can attempt to improve the collaboration, they must find the root problem first.

Some tools that can help assess areas for improvement include:

- Self-assessment tools, such as surveys or employee quizzes
- Group meetings
- One-on-one employee meeting
- Request employee feedback and opinions

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Robert was concerned about his collaboration group. When he assessed some of the problems, he found that many of his members seemed to lack the motivation to participate in group activities while others seemed to only work well when they worked individually. One of the first things Robert did was held a group meeting and took this time to encourage everyone to get to know everyone better. They used this time for socialization so that the team could build an alliance within their team and feel confident about speaking with each other. Secondly, Robert pulled aside two of his top workers and shared his concerns with them. He asked them to ask as group ‘enablers’ and asked that they interact with more of the other team members to help them interact more with others, hopefully pulling other team members ‘out of their shell’. Roberts hoped these actions would help solve some of the barriers the team was experiencing and improve group morale.

*Start out with an ideal
and end up with a deal.*

KARL ALBRECHT



STYLES OF DEALING WITH CONFLICT

Conflict is a normal part of any group – whether it is between two people or several. It is better to confront and manage conflict rather than avoid it, so it is important to know different strategies and methods to use. If conflict is not handled properly, it can lead to more harm for the group. But when handled in a positive manner, it can provide an opportunity for growth a development.

ENSURE THAT GOOD RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE FIRST PRIORITY

When conflict arises, one of the first points employees will seek is to determine who is right/wrong in the situation. However, a good team leader should remember that is it more important to stress good work relationships than to seek blame or justification. Employees may not see this at first, but the team leader should act as somewhat of a mediator and focus on a team resolution. Always allow both parties to speak and air their complaints. Each employee should feel as though they are being heard and that their feelings matter. When speaking between each other, ensure that team members speak calmly and respectfully and encourage them to remain constructive even through the tension. In the end, employees may find the answer they were seeking (or not), but they should leave the

situation with a strong work relationship with each other in tact. They do not always have to agree and may not like each other's answers, but they should remain respectful and courteous to their teammates.

KEEP PEOPLE AND PROBLEMS SEPARATE

In many cases of conflict, the team member may classify someone as 'just being difficult' or 'being unreasonable', but this does not point out the root problem. Just because Bob is acting aggressively does not mean that is necessarily the problem. The key goal in conflict resolution is to come to a solution that can satisfy those involved while still maintaining good working relationships. The mediator, typically the team leader, should separate the problem presented from the person themselves and examine what is going wrong. Is the employee acting differently? What would cause them to act like this? What are they *telling* me is wrong? Questions such as these can help the mediator to separate the actual problem or conflict from the person that is either presenting it or accusing it. Once employees focus on resolving the problem itself, instead of fighting with each other, they are more likely to resolve the conflict and still maintain a professional relationship.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE INTERESTS THAT ARE BEING PRESENTED

When conflict arises, those involved are quick to blame each other and focus on what actions the other person is doing rather than on what is causing the problem. At this point, team members are forgetting to listen

to each other and are focused more on emotions and opinions that are arising from the conflict. Instead, try to have each party focus on the problem itself and what the other person is asking from them.

For example, Susan comes to you and says she is angry that Diana has asked for her assignment a week early. Diana is upset that Susan yelled at her about it. If each party took the time to set emotions aside and presented their interested first, they will realize that possibly Diana asked for the assignment early to see how it was coming, while Susan only became angry because she didn't want Diana to think she wasn't working on it at all. By taking the time to listen carefully to each other and put their feelings simply, the employees were able to better understand why the other was acting the way they were and take the position that they had chosen.

LISTEN FIRST, TALK SECOND

The number one rule in any form of conflict resolution is to *always* listen. More importantly, it is best to listen first and then talk. Anger will often lead people to say mean or hurtful things, although many times it is unintentional. Team members involved with conflict will be quick to speak of mean words or try to find the right phrase to defend themselves, but they fail to listen to what the other party has to offer. But if either party is going to come to some sort of solution they must, as the old saying goes, "Close the mouth and open the ears". Some employees may need some sort of mediator to help them reach this point. Each person should be given a certain amount of time to talk and express what they are feeling

and what the problem is while the other party simply listens. Then reverse the roles. From here, employees should be able to better understand where the problem stemmed from and can work together to resolve the problem without being weighed down by emotions.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Linda is holding a disciplinary meeting for two of her team members, Gwen and Stacy. Stacy was complaining that Gwen was trying to tell her what to do all the time and didn't like her acting like a manager. Gwen is angry at Stacy because she has to constantly ask for her share of the work and feels as though Stacy never contributes. Linda spoke with the two of them and reminded that the goal here was to solve the problem while keeping a professional relationship. Linda gave each person a few minutes to speak, uninterrupted; in order to express what they felt was wrong. When both parties stop to listen to what the other was trying to say, they better understood that they were actually trying to help each other – even though it did not come across that way. When Gwen and Stacy left the meeting, they were not necessarily any less mad at each other, but they understood where the other one was coming from and were able to keep working together.

*The law of Win/Win
says, 'Let's not do it your
way or my way, but let's
do it the best way'.*

GREG ANDERSON



TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS WRITING COLLABORATION

Even with exceptional team members, collaborative writing cannot be done without good project structure. Collaborative writing is most successful when a clear outline or guide for the project has been established and used as a tool of reference for everyone. Once the various tasks of assigning the group leader and outlining team responsibilities has been completed, the group is much more prepared to work and will know what is expected of them.

DETERMINE PURPOSE

Before any collaboration process can begin, the purpose of the project must be identified. One of the most common questions a leader can receive is “*Why are we doing this?*” or “*What’s the point?*” Once the collaboration team has been assembled, it is best to have some sort of group meeting to discuss the purpose of the project and what their role in this purpose is. Take this time to define the group goal and what specific objectives you hope to accomplish over the course of the project. The goal of the introductory meeting is to ensure that everyone is aware of the purpose of the project and will have the same goals/purposes in mind. It

is best to start everyone out on the same page now than trying to reach a consensus after the ball has started rolling.

FORMULATE OUTLINE AND ORGANIZATIONAL FORMAT

Once a collaboration project has been introduced and team members are aware of what needs to be done, they can then move on to outlining and organizing the project. Determine the major parts of the project and outline how they are linked together. Although this is not the stage in which to assign tasks and duties, it is alright to introduce team members to the area they may be working on and prepare them to be more informed about it later. Once the format and outline are determined, lay out any standards for aspects such as heading, titles and general format rules. Explain to the group that while it is reasonable to stray from the outline to some degree, the structure is firm and will need to be followed as close as possible so the group can collaborate smoothly and effectively.

WHEN CHOOSING A TEAM LEADER, REMEMBER...

Before the team can be divided into different task areas and responsibilities, there must be a team leader assigned to manager and oversee the group as a whole. When addressing the group and introducing the team leader, define what this leader's roles and responsibilities will be. In many cases, the team leader is someone who does not necessarily have more power over any other team member or have the ability to make stand-alone decisions, but they are responsible for organizing the project, facilitate team progress and help coordinate team member activities and tasks.

Common responsibilities of a team leader:

- Keeping the project flowing over time
- Define tasks and duties for other team members
- Enforce deadlines and group communication
- Help mediate conflict and disagreements

ASSIGN WRITING TASKS AND ASSOCIATED DUTIES

One of the final steps of establishing the collaboration group is determining what writing tasks need to be completed and which employees will be assigned to do them. When making the assignments, remember to consider the talents and areas of expertise of each team member as well as any background experience in the current field. It is also not uncommon to assign some of the more complicated or complex assignments to more experienced personnel. For the writing crew, determine who will be content writers and if there will be separate editors to assist them. Each writer may need to be given a different portion of the task if the project is larger. For the staff not directly involved in the writing portion, don't forget to assign any other various duties needed, such as conducting research, gather information from different sources, distributing/making copies, or producing document samples. When the team knows what part they play in the project ahead of time, they are more likely to realize the value of their contribution and will be more willing to participate.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Today Daniel was assigned to manage his first collaboration group. He was nervous about running the group successfully, so he spoke to his manager, Sherry, and got some helpful advice. Daniel told his manager what the purpose of the assignment was and had partially outlined what areas would need to be worked on. Sherry suggested Daniel assign specific duties and tasks to certain team members to allow them to become familiar with their role in the project. Once the project was outlined and organized, Daniel scheduled a meeting with his team in order to tell them all about it.

*No one can whistle a
symphony. It takes a whole
orchestra to play it.*

H. E. LUCCOCK



EXAMPLES OF COLLABORATIVE BUSINESS WRITING

Collaborative writing is an important part of any business and can be done for a number of purposes. Writing in groups and teams has proven its ability to aid in problem solving, critical thinking and even social skills. For these reasons and more, companies will take advantage of the knowledge employee's offer and use collaborative writing on a number of projects/tasks.

WRITING EMAILS

Although collaborative writing is more commonly done for larger group projects, it is not entirely overlooked for smaller projects as well, such as writing memos or emails. Collaborative emails are common among a group of employees because the internet allows members to connect online and submit their portion when it is convenient for them. Many collaborative emails are sent from a group representative to a third party, such as a manager or supervisor; although they can also be used for a mass email campaign. Some examples include an email report, in which a group of employees send their portion of the work or update to a designated editor. This editor then combines everyone's information into one solid email

and then sends this to the appropriate manager/team leader/supervisor. From this point, the recipient can see everyone's contributions at once, but can still reply with individual messages if needed.

Common examples of collaborative emails:

- Project status report emails (which include email updates from team members)
- Email marketing campaigns (different parts written by different writers)
- Email newsletters (including articles written by a group of contribution writers)

WRITING REPORTS

Collaborative reports are a very common business tool because they allow employees from different departments and job titles to combine information into one source. Although there are many different ways of forming and designing collaborative reports, the process is generally the same. The different components needed for the report are usually divided up among a team of people and they are assigned to complete them by a certain deadline. A person is normally designated as the team leader or editor, who is in charge of gathering the different aspects of the project from the various contributors and putting things together for some sort of presentation. Once assembled, the report can display information from a number of different departments and offer different perspectives from those involved in the project or task.

Common examples of collaborative reports:

- Annual reports presented to shareholders
- Sales and marketing reports for a certain department
- Progress reports presented to upper management

WRITING TRAINING MANUALS

Training manuals can be written for a number of purposes, including employee training, training for learning something new, or simply teaching how to operate materials and equipment. They are often a very big task to finish. Although they can be done solely by one person, it is usually not recommended due to the complexity of the project as well as the need for unbiased instruction. When assigned with creating some form of training manual, it is best recommended to divide these topics into different sections for writers/trainers to create. Common sections include the introduction to the new material, forms of instruction, teaching and learning examples, some form of conclusion and a section for additional help and resources. If several writers work on one section individually and then collaborate their work with the other writers at the end of the project, these manuals can be created in no time and can reach its trainees much faster!

Common examples of collaborative training manuals:

- Training manual for new employees
- Training manual for a certain skill (i.e. public speaking, creative writing, etc.)

- Training manual for operating equipment

WRITING COMPANY HANDBOOKS

Company handbooks can be created for a number of reasons, but generally they are used to define a company and inform its readers about the different parts of the company. These handbooks can include information such as company mission statements, history or facts, employee information and even ways of obtaining more information about the company (such as through a public relations manager or human resources). Company handbooks can range in sizes and depend on what information the company is choosing to publish. Handbooks designed for new employees or clients will have more information about the company's history and what sort of business they are doing currently. Company handbooks for places such as universities or charity organizations may focus more on the reader and how the reader can learn more about the company. In any manner, handbooks are best divided among a team of members to complete. Since handbooks require information about the company as a whole, it is best to obtain written pieces from the various departments, such as human resources, accounting, marketing, or even administration. When the representative of the department contributes to the project, the information is well informed and unbiased, so the final handbook is a great example of the many different aspects of the company.

Common examples of collaborative company handbooks:

- Company handbooks presented to potential clients
- Company handbooks distributed to students at a university/college
- Company handbooks given to new employees

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Angela was excited about working on a collaborative project for the new training manual being produced. She had worked on collaborative reports in the past, but she knew that working on the manual would be a larger project. After the first meeting, Angela was assigned her portion to work on and set out to complete it. In between sessions, Angela spoke with some of her other team members and found out what they were working on. Many of them had different sections or objectives of the manual to work on, so it was interesting to Angela to see what parts everyone else had. When the deadline approached, Angela and her team came together to put all of the finished parts into one final piece. Angela enjoyed working on the manual more than she did her other collaborative projects, so she asked the team leader to keep her in mind for any future projects.

*Individually, we are
one drop. Together,
we are an ocean.*

RYUNOSUKE SATORO

CLOSING THOUGHTS

- **Vince Lombard:** Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.
- **David Hume:** Your corn is ripe today; mine will be so tomorrow. ‘Tis profitable for us both, that I should labor with you today, and that you should aid me tomorrow.
- **Napoleon Hill:** It is literally true that you can succeed best and quickest by helping others to succeed.
- **Althea Gibson:** No matter what accomplishments you make, somebody helped you.
- **Rise B. Axelrod:** Collaboration not only draws on the expertise and energy of different people but can also create an outcome that is greater than the sum of its parts.



Rick Chisholm made history when he single-handedly changed the professional Audio Visual industry by breaking all the rules and capitalised over 50% market share in Australia with very little capital, no partners, mergers or lenders and set up the first franchise operation of its kind in the world in the late 1990's and early 2000's.

As a 7x founder of companies and 30x businesses such as Innovest, AI Machine, Lightsounds, LSW, Light Emotion with revenue in excess of \$300 million and having employed more than 1,000 staff over the last 35 years. Rick is known as the Start-Up and SME Guru and is Author of a number of books including Business Success for Life. Unlike many mentors, he actually walks the talk and has a number of businesses under management in such areas as Automation, Events management, Importing, Distribution, Retailing and E-commerce.

His BIG passion is Business Education empowering Businesses Owners through knowledge and skills. Whilst Rick has experienced great success, he has also endured many failures. Rick has faced and overcome the exact same challenges you are facing now.



Tala Chisholm is an SME specialist who has owned and managed several small to medium sized businesses in the last 20 years, several of which were eventually sold. She has extensive experience in the fields of retail, franchising, licensing, dealerships, education, importing, distribution and consulting.

Her expertise lies in building and implementing customised cross-platform database and software solutions for businesses, automation, IT, web marketing, advertising, graphic design, business administration, process refinement and implementation. Her business experience ranges from bricks-and-mortar Giftware retailing to highly technical fields such as Security, CCTV, Entertainment Lighting and Audio sales, hire and installations as well as e-commerce.

Throughout her career she also trained and mentored Franchise business owners as well as internal division managers. Some areas of training included retail operations, management practices, business strategy, accounting, cash-flow, marketing, customer service and IT. She has also headed up the drafting of Operating Compliance Manuals for Franchise operations and implementation of all the elements involved.

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