

## 5 Reasons Collaboration Fails and How to Fix It

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Collaborations are not one-person shows, or a theater for the ambitious. They are a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship of two or more people or teams to achieve common goals.

More often these days, collaborative efforts require new teams with different skill sets to achieve a specific goal. Coming together for the first time, they will be unfamiliar with their personalities and level of expertise. It may take time to resolve initial teething problems.

So, what are the major stumbling blocks to collaboration?



### 1. Lack of buy-in

This happens when members of the new team feel the project they are working on is of little benefit to them. Some may also feel superior to other teams, hardly conducive to fostering relationships and team spirit.

A "what's in it for us" attitude may infect the environment and disinterest and demotivation will ensue, which will affect ongoing work on the project, and deflect from the overriding goals. One team may also fear another may reap more benefits from the collaborative effort, or has more decision-making power.

**Solution:** Laying the groundwork begins at that first meeting where goals are outlined and the parameters set for true collaboration. Explain why everyone has to work together for the common good and that success will be measured not by how good teams are, but the collaborative outcome.



## 2. Absence of trust

Trust is one of the building blocks of high performance teams and true collaboration. Without it there is an absence of respect in one another's work, and a dysfunction that erodes confidence and works against true collaboration.

Distrust eats at the heart of any team or collaboration, eroding confidence, delaying tasks, sparking tension and inhibiting workflow and ideas.

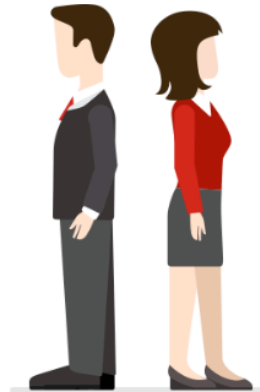
**Solution:** Build trust from the beginning of a collaboration. Facilitators should encourage people to speak their minds, and also encourage them to listen. Ensuring everyone has the time and space to air their views will foster collaboration.



## 3. Groupthink

Sometimes collaboration falls into the habit of groupthink, where there is an acceptance of the prevailing idea and little or no discussion of others. As Lisa Quast says in [7 Steps to Prevent Disastrous Decisions](#), agreement isn't always a good thing.

**Solution:** Ensure at the outset that everyone is clear about what collaboration entails, and how important each view is. As teams are drawn from other parts of the organization, they may have fresh thinking on areas outside their usual scope, so it's vital that all voices are heard.



## 4. Poor relationships

Poor relationships can happen when teams view themselves as rivals, competitors rather than collaborators, or remain unreceptive to the ideas of others. When teams work together for the first time, they will be unfamiliar with personalities and what they bring. It may take time to resolve initial teething problems. Failure to recognize and resolve them will impede collaboration, cause friction and delay outcomes. Building good relationships ensures creativity flows and collaboration is fostered. Its absence will blunt the dynamic you are trying to create.

**Solution:** Poor relationships can be avoided at the outset by holding an initial meeting introducing each other, so that everyone can learn a little about one another and what they bring to the collaboration. One-on-one meetings are also useful as the project continues to ensure everyone is on message.

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## 5. Not enough conversations

Identified by the writers of *Committed Teams: Three Steps to Passion and Performance* as the single most important impediment to collaboration. If people are afraid to talk, and can't express their ideas or views, then they disengage. They may see problems or potential pitfalls in proposals or processes; they may also have excellent suggestions. However, they feel discouraged about saying anything.

There may also be issues that need to be addressed, such as poor or obstructive behaviour.

**Solution:** It's good to talk. At the initial meeting to set up the collaboration, the groundwork should be laid. Explain why it's important for all voices to be heard, and create a climate where one-on-one conversations can help team members along, and remove any potential barriers to collaboration. Conversations help the process.

### Takeaway

True collaboration works when everyone is working together, putting acrimony or jealousies aside and seeking a positive outcome. Deal with the issues and focus on the outcome.

