

Definition of Collaboration

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Collaboration (co+labor+ation) refers abstractly to all processes wherein people work together —applying both to the work of individuals as well as larger [collectives](#) and [societies](#). As an intrinsic aspect of human society, the term is used in many varying contexts such as [science](#), [art](#), [education](#), and [business](#).

In certain political contexts (such as a state of [war](#)) the term "[collaboration](#)" ([ism](#)) or "collaborator" may refer ([pejoratively](#)) to individuals who are claimed to have been working with an outside entity *against* their own societies.

Research into the properties of and process of collaboration has intensified with the advent of the [Internet](#), [collaborative editing](#), and computer mediated communication (CMC). As software designers, [facilitators](#) and [theorists](#) from diverse fields of study strive to create more useful and effective collaborative environments and methods, more light is shown on this ubiquitous and taken for granted practice, and the nature of collaboration is coming under more intensive study.

Questions

More research into the nature of collaboration is needed to answer such questions as:

- **How does collaboration differ from cooperation?** (dictionary definitions are generally more or less equivalent)
- **What qualifies as a collaboration?** (is Wikipedia a collaboration in the same way that a work of art is when two artists collaborate face-to-face? and for that matter, does a family, city, nation or species qualify? Is the vivid representation of collaborative activity on the internet inducing changes in the very definition of art and authorship? Just as the printing press, photography and the telegraph once inspired the Futurists, Cubists and Surrealists, we are beginning to see the emergence of new kinds of collective creative practice such as Wiggism, Submodernism, etc.)
- **What are the defining principles or elements of this process?** (understanding these might help to draw conclusions on the previous questions)

Currently there exists no unifying [general theory of collaboration](#).

Etymology

Dating from 1871, collaboration is a back-formation from *collaborator* (1802), from the [French](#) *collaborateur*, ultimately from the [Latin](#) *collaboratus*, past participle of *collaborare* ("work with"), itself derived from *com-* ("with") and *labore* ("to work").

Nuances

"Collaborate" implies "to work together on a project". When individuals work together as in an academic setting, "collaborate" includes the nuance "to be jointly accredited" for the work completed. When individuals and organizations work together, or organizations with other organizations, nuances include "usually but not necessarily willingly" and "with another organization with which one is not normally connected".

Barriers To Collaboration

One opinion is that whilst collaboration is natural in some societies, and is generally natural in pre-existing teams, collaboration is unnatural in new groups and western society. Some of the perceived barriers to collaboration are:

- "stranger danger"; which can be expressed as a reluctance to share with others unknown to you
- "needle in a haystack"; people believe that others may have already solved your problem but how do you find them
- "hoarding"; where people do not want to share knowledge because they see hoarding as a source of power

- "[Not Invented Here](#)"; the avoidance of previously performed research or knowledge that was not originally developed within the group/institution.

Whilst much of the discussion around the topic of collaboration refers to the use of IT, perhaps more research is required on how to provide an effective social process that will help overcome the barriers.

Differentiating coordination, cooperation, collaboration & teamwork

The differences between these terms can be illustrated by considering these criteria:

Preconditions for success ("must-haves")

- **Coordination:** Shared objectives; Need for more than one person to be involved; Understanding of who needs to do what by when
- **Cooperation:** Shared objectives; Need for more than one person to be involved; Mutual trust and respect; Acknowledgment of mutual benefit of working together
- **Collaboration:** Shared objectives; Sense of urgency and commitment; Dynamic process; Sense of belonging; Open

communication; Mutual trust and respect; Complementary, diverse skills and knowledge; Intellectual agility

Enablers (additional "nice to haves")

- **Coordination:** Appropriate tools (see below); Problem resolution mechanism
- **Cooperation:** Frequent consultation and knowledge-sharing between participants; Clear role definitions; Appropriate tools (see below)
- **Collaboration:** Right mix of people; Collaboration skills and practice collaborating; Good facilitator(s); Collaborative 'Four Practices' mindset and other appropriate tools (see below)

It is debatable if sanctions are necessary to secure productive collaboration and motivate free-riders to give inputs. "[behavioral economics](#)", see *Fehr, Rockenbach; Detrimental Effect of sanctions on human altruism ([download](#))*. The findings of the research employing game theory are that voluntary compliance is most important. Sanctions should not be outspoken and applied frequently but fair sanctions should be in place in order to support altruism with the players. Gächter and Thöni conclude in their paper *Social learning and voluntary cooperation among like-minded people, Dec. 2004 ([download](#)) that provenience i.e. similar set of values is an enabler of collaboration.*

Purpose of using this approach

- **Coordination:** Avoid gaps & overlap in individuals' assigned work
- **Cooperation:** Obtain mutual benefit by sharing or partitioning work
- **Collaboration:** Achieve collective results that the participants would be incapable of accomplishing working alone

Desired outcome

- **Coordination:** Efficiently-achieved results meeting objectives
- **Cooperation:** Same as for Coordination, plus savings in time and cost
- **Collaboration:** Same as for Cooperation, plus innovative, extraordinary, breakthrough results, and collective 'we did that!' accomplishment

Optimal application

- **Coordination:** Harmonizing tasks, roles and schedules in simple environments and systems

- **Cooperation:** Solving problems in complicated environments and systems
- **Collaboration:** Enabling the emergence of understanding and realization of shared visions in complex environments and systems

Examples

- **Coordination:** Project to implement off-the-shelf IT application; Traffic flow regulation
- **Cooperation:** Marriage; Operating a local community-owned utility or grain elevator; Coping with an epidemic or catastrophe
- **Collaboration:** Brainstorming to discover a dramatically better way to do something; Jazz or theatrical improvisation; Co-creation

Appropriate tools

- **Coordination:** Project management tools with schedules, roles, critical path (CPM), PERT and GANTT charts; "who will do what by when" action lists
- **Cooperation:** Systems thinking; Analytical tools (root cause analysis etc.)

- **Collaboration:** Appreciative inquiry; Open Space meeting protocols; Four Practices; Conversations; Stories

Degree of interdependence in designing the effort's work-products

(and need for physical co-location of participants)

- **Coordination:** Minimal
- **Cooperation:** Considerable
- **Collaboration:** Substantial

Degree of individual latitude in carrying out the agreed-upon design

- **Coordination:** Minimal
- **Cooperation:** Considerable
- **Collaboration:** Substantial

One way to think of differentiating definitions

- **Coordination:** The organization of efforts of different parties to reach a common goal. High-stakes issues are not often involved, and parties need not carry a relationship beyond the accomplishment of the task at hand. The goal is static.
- **Cooperation:** A means to an end that involves gains and losses on the part of each participant. This can sometimes

foster a competitive environment, and parties need not carry a relationship beyond the accomplishment of the task at hand. The goal is static.

- **Collaboration:** All parties work together and build consensus to reach a decision or create a product, the result of which benefits all parties. Competition is a nearly-insurmountable roadblock to collaboration, and the relationship among parties must continue beyond the accomplishment of the task in order to assure its viability. The goal is dynamic.

Where do teams, partnerships, think-tanks, open-source and joint ventures fit in this schema? The general definition of a team is an interdependent group, which suggests that collaborative groups are teams, coordinated groups are not, and cooperative groups may or may not be. Partnerships and joint ventures are both primarily cooperative undertakings, whose objectives evolve over time. Open-source developments can run the gamut among all three types of undertaking. So theoretically can think-tanks, though in reality much think-tank work is solitary and not really collaborative. Even the work of scientists on major international projects is substantially individual, with a lot more coordination and cooperation than true collaboration.

Wartime collaboration

Main article: [Collaborationism](#)

As a pejorative term, the word "collaboration" can describe the [treason](#) of cooperating with enemy forces occupying one's country.

As such it implies criminal deeds in the service of the occupying power, including complicity with the occupying power in murder, persecutions, pillage, and economic exploitation as well as participation in a [puppet government](#).

The use of "collaboration" to mean "traitorous cooperation with the enemy," dates from 1940, originally in reference to the [Vichy Regime](#) in [France](#), as well as the French civilians who sympathised with [Nazi Germany](#)'s doctrine and voluntary troops ([LVF](#)) who fought against the [Fighting France](#) and later [De Gaulle's French Force](#). Since then, the words *collaboration* and *collaborateur* have this very pejorative meaning in French (the shortened form *collabo* only has this pejorative and insulting meaning).

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaborative>

Collaboration in Minnesota: Supporting Families & Youth in the Jordan Neighborhood

Julie Kenney, MPA

Pathways Center

6611 Lynnwood Blvd.

Richfield, Mn. 55423

612.861.3215

Julie_Kenney@ksg02.harvard.edu

www.ipsiiiinc.com

