

Shared Values for Effective Collaboration

The world of work is changing—rapidly. Technology, expanding markets, and growing customer demands for quality and service are challenging organizations. To stay competitive, organizations are exploring ways to improve what they do and how they do it. They're shifting their focus from serving local or national markets to serving global ones, from directing how work gets done to involving more people in decisions and problem solving.

Recognizing the Benefits of Collaboration

To flourish, organizations and the people in them must explore broader skills and wider perspectives. Knowing how to collaborate and develop effective partnerships is one of these skills. Collaboration lets you share responsibility and combine the knowledge, creativity, and experience of others. These benefits are significant when you take on a new role or partner with individuals and groups inside and outside the organization.

Establishing collaborative relationships is not always easy, particularly when people have backgrounds and viewpoints different from your own. However, when you and those you work with share a basic set of values or standards, collaboration becomes easier. Both parties begin with a common understanding. Both hold the same expectations for how they will be treated and how they will treat others. Behavior is more predictable. Discussions begin from a shared knowledge of how problems will be addressed.

Establishing a Common Ground for Collaboration

To establish this kind of commonality, many organizations are identifying and communicating shared values: qualities like innovation, teamwork, and dedication to customers. Shared values like these provide standards for how organizations operate. They guide people through hard times and tough decisions. When people share a few essential values, they can shape their actions to reflect those qualities.

Shared values build a stronger workplace. When you and the people around you hold the same values, collaboration works better, relationships grow stronger, and everyone benefits.

The trick is to make sure your behavior and values do, in fact, match. To match actions to intentions, what you do must connect directly to what you believe. People have to see your values demonstrated in your behavior. Doing that consistently is not always easy.

Using The Basic Principles

This unit offers five principles to help you match actions and values. Applying these principles at work can lead to strong, positive interactions with others. This unit will introduce The Basic Principles and show you how to use them to demonstrate shared values and develop collaborative relationships.

The Basic Principles Overview

The Basic Principles serve as guidelines for behavior that puts the organization's shared values into practice while developing a strong network of relationships at every level of the organization.

1. Focus on the situation, issue, or behavior, not on the person.

Blaming people doesn't solve problems. Focusing on the situation, issue, or behavior will help you remain objective when faced with challenges. You will solve problems more effectively, make better decisions, and maintain constructive relationships with your co-workers when you look at the big picture and consider others' point of view with an open mind.

2. Maintain the self-confidence and self-esteem of others.

Contributing fully is easier in an atmosphere of acceptance and approval. When people feel free to express their ideas without fear of ridicule or personal criticism, they are more willing to take risks and stretch their capabilities. By showing respect for others and recognizing the contributions of co-workers, you give people the self-confidence to share their ideas openly and to ask for feedback and help in expanding their knowledge and skills on the job.

3. Maintain constructive relationships.

The best work comes about when co-workers support one another's efforts. This doesn't mean that you need to be "close friends" with everyone you deal with at work. Your work interactions will go smoother, however, if you approach everyone with a positive attitude and communicate support and confidence in the other person's ability. By sharing information, acknowledging problems, and sorting out conflicts early on, you create strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

4. Take initiative to make things better.

By surveying your own area and finding improvement opportunities, you not only increase the organization's chances for success—you also increase your personal satisfaction by taking control of your work and creating visible improvement. Initiative follows naturally when you stay informed and alert to changes, focus on ways to avoid similar problems in the future, and expect to find solutions to the problems you face now.

5. Lead by example.

As organizations face new challenges, everyone is expected to be a leader. Being a good leader means setting a good example. Modeling the kind of behavior you want to see in others is the surest way to influence them. By actively honoring your commitments, admitting your mistakes, and staying receptive to new ideas, you will motivate others to do the same.

Basic Principle 1

Focus on the situation, issue, or behavior, not on the person.

How:

Take a broad perspective.

Step back and look at the big picture when you analyze a situation, issue, or behavior. Ask yourself:

- How is this similar to past events and what knowledge and experience apply?
- How is this likely to affect the future?

However, looking at the past doesn't mean dredging up old problems and throwing them in someone's face. It means looking for past solutions that might help in the present.

Last quarter, three customers reported similar problems. Let's find out how those problems were handled and what the results were.

Maintain an objective outlook.

Don't let personality differences keep you from dealing with a problem. Focus on the facts and base your decisions on information—not personalities.

Regardless of where the errors are coming from, customers are receiving incorrect shipments 8 percent more often than last year.

Consider other points of view.

Ask yourself, how would a business partner view this situation? A co-worker? A customer? A supplier?

Let's think about this from purchasing's point of view. What reasons could they have for recommending this vendor?

This order-entry process would make things easier for us, but I'm concerned about what customers will think. If I were a customer, I wouldn't want to track down those code numbers before I could place an order.

Basic Principle 2

Maintain the self-confidence and self-esteem of others.

How:

Express and show your confidence in others.

Give people the reinforcement they need to feel good about themselves.

Doug, you've worked with Information Services and know what their work involves. I think you'd have a lot to contribute to their reengineering project.

Recognize accomplishments.

Acknowledge the value of people's ideas and experiences. Recognition reinforces the value of their contributions. It also encourages them to contribute more in the future.

Jill, I like your idea for a new billing screen format. It will make it much easier for the operators to answer customers' questions.

Encourage people to express their ideas.

Let people know you're interested in what they have to say. Listen closely to their ideas. Ask questions to help you understand their points of view. Assume that others may know something you don't.

Roberto, you work with the sales force quite a bit. What's your take on the new pricing structure?

Encourage people to use and expand their skills, knowledge, and abilities.

Look for opportunities where others can apply newly acquired skills or develop their abilities in new areas.

Pat, this project could give you a chance to try out that new technique you learned about at the seminar.

Basic Principle 3

Maintain constructive relationships.

How:

Use every interaction as an opportunity to build relationships.

A single interaction now can affect how people work with you for a long time to come. Always treat people openly and supportively. Assume they are acting in the best interests of the organization. Undertake projects with a positive attitude that conveys confidence in the abilities of everyone involved.

Acknowledge problems openly and honestly.

Problems won't go away unless you address them. When you see a problem, be honest with yourself and others.

I've usually coordinated these meetings with sales, but this month I'm really under the gun. I don't think I'll be able to do it without some extra help.

Deal with conflicts as they arise.

Don't let conflicts build up or get out of hand. Look for ways to work with people you find difficult. Try to figure out what motivates them and what steps you can take to minimize friction.

Tom, I'll do what I can to help meet the deadline. But in general, I need some advance warning so I can build time into my schedule for this sort of thing. Can we talk about how to handle this more smoothly in the future?

Share information.

You will help create an environment where everyone can work together productively if you:

- Talk about changes that affect the organization and your work group
- Share news about how your group's work affects other areas

I thought you might want to look at this article. It talks about how multimedia in the home could revolutionize our industry within 10 years.

Basic Principle 4

Take initiative to make things better.

How:

Look for improvement opportunities.

Look for ways to refine work processes, to reduce cycle times and cost, and to increase customer satisfaction.

The new production quotas are tough, but if we go over our procedures step by step, maybe we can find places to reduce time and effort.

Stay informed.

Change is a fact of life. By staying alert to changes inside and outside the organization, you make sure you're not caught off guard.

There's a good chance that we'll deal with engineering directly next quarter instead of working through Karen's group. We need to educate ourselves now about engineering's processes and concerns.

Take the approach that there is a solution to every problem.

You and your work group are a powerful resource for making improvements. Look for ways to overcome the inertia and fear of embarrassment that often stifle initiative. If a problem seems too large to tackle, look for ways to break it into smaller, more manageable parts.

Plan ahead.

No matter what happens, always stay focused on the future. For example:

- If you're handling a crisis, take some time to think about how you might avoid similar situations in the future.
- If you hear about a coming change, think about the challenges it might present and plan how you and your work group can meet them.

Basic Principle 5

Lead by example.

How:

Follow through on your commitments.

For people to work together effectively, it's important to know that each person will follow through on his or her responsibilities. Make sure you accomplish what others expect of you. Don't make commitments that are unrealistic.

Admit your mistakes.

In an environment of constant change, mistakes are inevitable. By admitting your mistakes, you and others in the organization can avoid repeating them.

We've been getting a lot of complaints lately because of the new procedures I lobbied for. I can see now where things went wrong, and I have some ideas about how to fix them.

Acknowledge your feelings about change.

Acknowledge that change can be difficult, and look for ways to help yourself and others deal with change.

There have certainly been a lot of changes here in the past few years, and it looks like they'll be continuing into the foreseeable future. I'm going to have to get with the program and stay light on my feet.

Push yourself and others to try new ways of doing things.

Finding improvement opportunities often means moving out of your comfort zone. To keep pace with organizational change, you and others in your group should be willing to take risks and to continuously look for ways to expand skills and knowledge.

We'd all feel more comfortable sticking with the old process. But there's a fair chance this new method will increase output dramatically.