15 Properties of Effective Collaboration

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Some working groups are monofunctional e.g., all job seekers. Many project teams are cross-functional.

Many articles describe advantages of cross-functional teams, but a Harvard Business School study found that **75% of cross-functional teams are dysfunctional**.

To quote Michael Jordan – Talent wins games, but **teamwork and intelligence win championships**.

To quote Kermit – **It isn't easy being cross-functional**.

15 properties of effective collaboration in cross-functional teams are:

1. **Purpose**: Team members find a sense of individual purpose in the work itself or its results and believe the work matters to the company and its customers. They also view a project as a learning opportunity.

2. **Commitment**: Team members understand the advantages of collaboration. They resolve to collaborate despite the challenges of working with others.

3. **Flexibility**: Team members accept the need for functional diversity i.e., perspective and terminology, and individual diversity, e.g., in perception and decision-making style (Myers-Briggs). They understand and adjust to the challenges of diverse viewpoints and styles.

4. **Communication**: Accept the challenge of effective communication between unfamiliar specialties. Help develop a clear definition of the problem/opportunity and your role in achieving the goals. Help develop a communication strategy that encourages free and frequent communication. Understand the benefits of sharing both information and knowledge. Invite questions and comments often.

5. **Shared Planning**: Team members help to define goals and develop achievement strategies.

6. **Structure**: Effective collaboration entails clearly defined roles, responsibilities, goals, and strategies, both primary and other. Assignments should be flexible but enable focused effort.

7. **Ownership**: Members understand they share responsibility for success and failure. There is no assignment of individual blame. Problems must be identified and addressed.

8. **Safety**: Psychological safety **engenders confidence** and entails shared talk time, active listening and respect for concerns and alternative viewpoints, and high social sensitivity to the feelings and moods of others. It entails a team environment that encourages personal risk-taking in sharing thoughts and information. Concerns and negative behavior are identified and addressed. Conflict resolution tactics are identified and ranked.

Effective collaboration entails safe co-creation

Amy Edmonson's TEDX talk about psychological safety (11:26 minutes)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhoLuui9gX8&feature=youtu.be&app=desktop

9. **Defensiveness**: Identify defensive behaviors and examine the fears that trigger them.

10. **Trust**: When members trust one another, they work interdependently. They consider and explore one another's ideas. They recognize the value of practical skeptics. Over time, members become familiar and even vulnerable.

11. **Candor**: Team members need to monitor progress and be honest about what's not working. Honesty enables strategy or performance adjustment and rework if necessary.

<p style="text-align:center">Culture can help or impede</p>

12. **Ability**: Each team member has or can quickly pick up the skills needed to carry out their responsibilities.

13. **Dependability**: Effective collaboration needs members do their jobs and meet their deadlines. Team control replaces individual control.

14. **Humility**: You may not know enough. Seek knowledge from others. To err is human. Seek skeptical analysis of your work. Team ego replaces individual ego.

<p style="text-align:center">The devil's in the details
Everyone makes mistakes. Oh yes they do.</p>

15. **Support**: Members are expected to know their limitations and ask for help. Helping others is also expected. Identify accessible subject matter experts outside the team.

<p style="text-align:center">"A man's got to know his limitations" - Dirty Harry</p>

An Excel-generated bar chart can monitor the status of cross-functional collaboration in a project or working group. An Excel 365 generator sheet displaying a status chart is shown below.
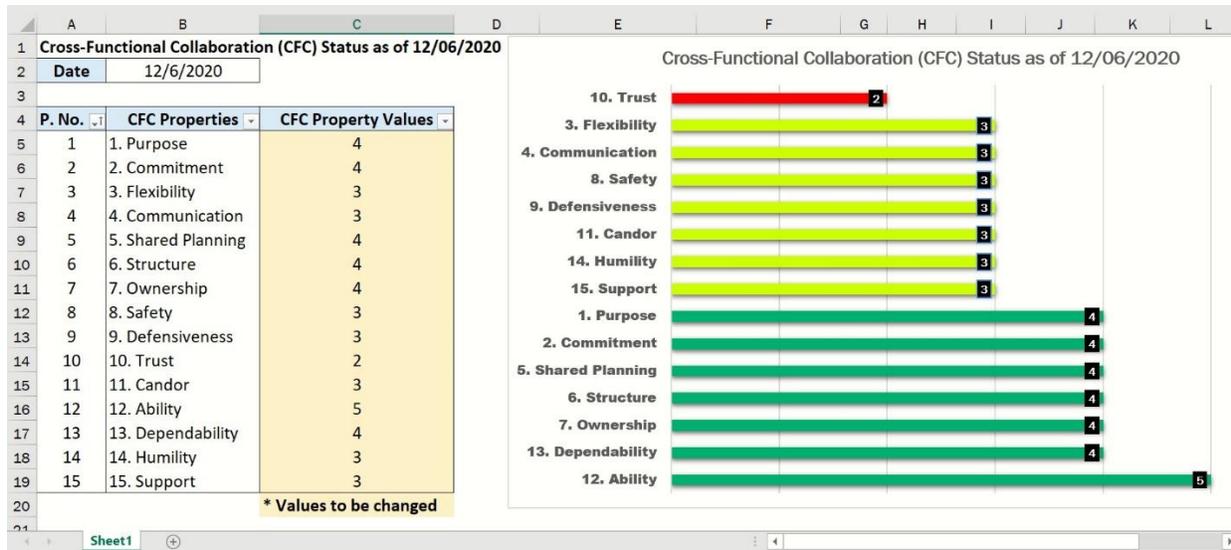
Assume team members are surveyed periodically e.g., every 2 weeks, about their personal experiences with each of the 15 properties of effective collaboration (described above) on an integer scale from 1 to 5. Then, team collaboration can be worst-case assessed using the lowest value assigned to a property by one or more team members. The resulting bar chart identifies (red and yellow) those properties that need to be investigated and improved.

It is likely that just understanding these properties and making their status visible will cause improvements in cross-functional collaboration.