

Collaborating Diversity of Thought; Need of the Time

Dr. Ghazal Khawaja Hummayun Akhtar
Assistant Professor
Department of Public Administration, University of Karachi, Main University Road, Karachi

Mr. Arif Hussain M. Phil Student Department of Public Administration, University of Karachi, Main University Road, Karachi

> Shaffaq Zubair Lecturer Federal Urdu University,Karachi,Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Karachi

Dr Lubna Ahsan Assistant Professor Department of Social Sciences, Hamdard University, Karachi, Madinat-al-Hikmah, Muhammad Bin Qasim Avenue

Abstract

Collective wisdom is a synergistic product derived from the diversity of thinking of various individuals having contrasting thoughts, views, opinions and outlook, thus proving essential to bring about qualitative improvements in the vast range of human activities. This paper sheds light on the fact that the human resource must capitalize on the assortment of thoughts and wisdom for overall advancement of the society. Keeping in view the above, different aspects of collaboration with regard to diversity of thought are considered. Detailed analysis elucidates that by elimination of impediments and strengthening of collaborative skills at individual and institutional level may prove remarkably beneficial. Steps should be taken for introducing development of collaborative skills as a training module in the education system to effectuate peace and harmony.

Keywords: Collaboration, Diversity, Positive Interdependence, Emotional Intelligence, Capability, Developing Common Understanding.

1. Introduction

Edward C, Register said, "None of us is as smart as all of us". Collaboration is the realization of the needs for collective determination to achieve similar goals. It is the amalgamation of well defined relationship of individuals or organizations to achieve common targets. (Wilder). It operates on mutual interactions and shared power (Al-Quran: 42/38). Hence strong interpersonal and organizational skills play a significant role in successful collaboration.

Diversity of thought implies that there exists more than one approach to reflect on aspects to accomplish a goal. (S, 2008). Greater diversity enhances the potential for finding the best possible solutions to intricate problems. Without diverse perspectives, no amalgamation of views occurs and quality of decision suffers (Gardner, Jan 31, 2005). Therefore conscious efforts are needed to optimize diversity of thought or perspective.

Information explosion coupled with technological advancement has made life more complex,. Hence, collaboration in diversity of thought can broaden the vision in the complete range of human activities. Some key features for making collaboration a core competency are being explored in this article followed by highlighting some benefits from collaborating diversity and its effects in the workplace.

2. Strategic Significant Terms:

2.1. Collaboration. Generally, collaboration is defined as integration of ideas or efforts by stake holders to achieve the desired result. However, a more plausible definition of collaboration is an environment providing a platform to individuals' to wage organized and coordinated efforts with the intent to optimize the output or achieve best possible results. Collaboration has many aspects. One such aspect of collaboration is an association of groups at workplace sharing ideas and thinking to accomplish a mutual goal. It classifies as a teamwork taken to a higher level which offers great advantages such as wide variety of solutions to simple problems, creative and practical ideas and equal participation of all parties involved. With the advancements in technology including web-based programs, file sharing, high speed internet, email and video-conferencing, collaboration has become a more industrious method of executing tasks.



2.2. Diversity. Diversity is a term which takes into consideration everything around us, however here it has been restricted to human thought only. Diversity of thought therefore identifies the perspective, perception, information, experience, expertise and creative ideas. It may also be defined as acknowledging, understanding, accommodating, appreciating and celebrating differences among people with respect to demographic characteristics such as gender, age, physical and mental ability, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, spiritual practices and public assistance status. (Goleman, 1998).

Collaborating diversity at workplace is the need of the present time. Diverse cognition results in creative problem solving that fulfills the requirements of larger groups and also results in a more productive work environment.

- **2.3. Positive Interdependence.** Positive interdependence ensures that all team members work and grow in a cooperative and collaborative learning environment for individual and collective benefit. (Holubec). Since success of a groups depends on the participation of all members it requires that no one shows less productivity and no one is reluctant or hesitant in working. Positive interdependence helps members with lower cognition improve their thought process and become more productive. This in turn increases the sense of responsibility amongst individuals and also arouses sensibility for each other's problems.
- **2.4. Emotional Intelligence**. The ability to monitor and discriminate one's own and other people's emotions and appropriate use of that emotional information to guide thinking and behavior has been labeled as Emotional intelligence. It is essential for individuals to cope up with their emotions and control their behaviors properly, neither inclining too much towards aggressive attitude nor showing too much cordiality which may result in disasters at workplace.
- **2.5.** Capability. Capability is uniqueness of character that contributes to effective or outstanding performance in a particular role and offers the individual an indication of the behavior that is valued, recognized and rewarded. However, in team work it is important that capabilities of all members of the team be considered and brought up to level with others by diligence and hard work.

2.6. Developing: Common understanding

Common understanding plays an important part in managing collaboration effectively. It is required to ensure that people think cordially and communicate effectively.

3. Spence's Basic Rules for Collaboration

Spence identifies following seven rules for all collaboration. (Spencer)

- **3.1. Look for Common Ground.** Find shared values, consider shared personal experiences, pay attention to and give feedback, be yourself and expect the same of others, be willing to accept differences in perception and opinions.
- **3.2. Learn About Others.** Consider their needs and perspectives, appeal to the highest motives, and let others express themselves without restraint.
- **3.3.** Critique Results, not People. Do not invest time on personal hostility, make other people feel good and avoid criticism.
- **3.4. Give and Get Respect.** Pay high regard to other's opinions, be considerate and friendly, be responsive to emotions, speak with confidence but remain tactful.
- **3.5. Proceed slowly.** Speak in an organized and logical sequence. Present one idea at a time, wait and check for understanding and acceptance of each idea before moving on to the next.
- **3.6. Be Explicit and clear:** Share your ideas and feelings, pay attention to nonverbal communication, speak clearly and make eye contact, select words that have meaning for your listeners.
- 3.7. Remember the Five "Cs" of Communication. Clarity, completeness, conciseness, concreteness, and correctness

The seven rules of Spence supported that vague ideas may result into failure thus to maintain collaboration in diversity to work, all individuals involved must clearly be aware of the antagonism and the intention of collaboration.

4. Key Competencies for Collaboration

Following competencies are imperative for effective and constructive collaboration: (Osbom, 1963)

- **4.1.** Know yourself because the one, who knows himself, knows the reality.
- **4.2.** Valuing diversity.
- **4.3.** Developing constructive conflict management and resolution skills.
- **4.4.** Focusing on win-win situations.
- **4.5.** Fostering social relationship skills.
- **4.6.** Patience for slow and gradual process.

Collaborations succeed when all individuals are conscious of their position. Thus, thorough introspection is required to find out personal strengths and weaknesses. Managing conflicts between all individuals makes them



realize that it is for their betterment that they work harmoniously together. Harnessing social reliability is also a key component for collaboration; people being friendly generally receive admiration from all team members, which results in maintaining long term performances of all team members. Showing patience in taking advice and gradually materializing it in a worthwhile manner help people open their mind and broadening their horizon for creative ideas.

5. Patterns of Behavior

The patterns of behavior of any individual, group or organization can be categorized along following lines (Global):-

- **5.1.** Win-lose situation.
- **5.2.** Lose- win situation.
- **5.3.** Partially win- win situation.
- **5.4.** Win-win situation.
- **5.5.** Lose-lose situation.

It is generally perceived that members of a team are more considerate towards each other. Collaboration allows individuals to take full responsibility of the consequences; be it success or failure, depending on the efforts put in by all the members.

6. Mechanics of Collaboration

When in collaboration, people operate in line with following mechanics:-.

- **6.1.** Finding and expanding commonalities.
- **6.2.** Reducing defensiveness and building culture of openness.
- **6.3.** Encouraging opposing views on issues and avoiding personality clashes.

Affinities are usually judged by commonalities resulting in strong teams. Collaboration by a diverse set of individuals reduces defensiveness amongst team members as they know that their ideas and opinions are being given consideration, they extend their scope of thought and devise truly creative and worthwhile suggestions. Managers must also realize that they should value difference of opinions and avoid personality clashes; they must effectively steer clear of any hostile views and make conscious efforts to strengthen bonds amongst members by reducing their differences.

7. Impediments to Collaboration

Although there could be host of impediments to constructive collaboration but following factors are likely to have profound effects either way. The misuse of these factors can ruin the working environment and instead of collaboration the people may be at loggerhead:-

7.1. Use of Attributes. The use of attributes either way; positive or negative has a profound effect on people working in a team environment. Stanford Professor Eisenhardt and her colleagues studied top management teams of renowned high-tech companies and found out that productive teams classified each other with the terms such as smart, best in the business and team players. (Thomas K.). Contrarily, less productive teams bogged down in personality clashes and called each other burned out, manipulative and political. Moreover Allah all-knowing did not only ordained us to be good to the people, say good things, give hope but also proclaimed adversity to those who taunt and tease others unnecessarily (Al-Quran104/1). Hence use of appropriate attributes encourages and motivates individual team members to improve and pursue excellence. Whereas, hurling of bad attributes and negative labeling do not only discourages and de-motivate the team members but also promote antagonism.

In view of the foregoing when individuals or groups who constructively engage in collaboration, they do not only improve decision making power but also set examples. On the contrary those who indulge in personality clashes or blame game are bound to lose. Thus wise uses of attributes will help in energizing the members for further exploring new and innovative ideas to find better solutions to their problems.

7.2. Defensive Attitudes: (Corley, 2004) We all are born with our senses and some basic instincts with which every one of us starts experiencing and developing a world view. The surrounding environment plays important role in shaping and refining the individual world views. So it is quite natural to get attached to the respective world view but rejecting any thing different from one's views leads to defensive attitude. Thus each individual or organization has a built in mind set or cognitive map that serves as beacon to interact with others. As a result, different groups or organizational cultures prefer different approaches to interact and deal amongst each other. However, while this confidence in one's own world view is good and appreciable but at best, it is imperfect due to lack of or incomplete information available to every one of us. This void has to be filled by exposing to new knowledge, ideas and information. As long as the barrier of defensive attitude remains in place; the suitable learning environment and refining our world view is not possible. Susan Heathfield, a human resource expert said, the underlying cause of defensive attitude or negativity is based on incorrect assumptions, incomplete information, or deliberate disinformation. Thus under such environment the collaboration becomes too far



fetched dream. Hence defensive attitude is one of the key factors that need to be tackled right at the outset; otherwise whole process can become non starter. The most appropriate way forward to collaboration is to adopt measures that reduce defensiveness. Patient listening, challenging own views and recognizing that every one's preference should be respected may be a good start to reduce defensiveness and instill openness to collective world views (Bold).

7.3. Extreme Behaviors. (Eisenhardt, Jean, & Bourgeois, 1997) Excessive behavior like aggressive or too pessimistic leads to bad attitude. As they adversely affect the decision making, slow down the implementation and impedes the productivity. Furthermore the antagonistic environment hardens the stances or view points, spread skepticism and accentuates the problems. It so because an over assertive individual or group may monopolize a discussion, may ignore others, exaggerate or block a discussion while an over defensive pessimistic may delay or with hold information. Collaborators have the potential to overanalyze and waste precious time on decisions which may require immediate action (Thomas K.). For a harmonious workplace; managers or the team leaders must make an effort to reduce or eliminate all impediments in the way of collaboration. They should manage diverse opinions and thoughts to a certain degree of comfort and allow all stakeholders to share ideas and opinions in a friendly environment.

8. Strengthening Collaborative Skills

For effective and constructive collaboration following skills should be imbibed, refined and strengthened:-

- **8.1. Inculcating Openness into Organizational or Group Cultures.** The culture of procrastinating, withholding or giving the incomplete/ incorrect information leads to poor decisions. On the contrary, forthcoming opinions, free and frank sharing of information or ideas promote and highlight the usefulness of substantive diversity in reaching innovative and creative solutions to problems. World renowned CEOs, Jack Welch and Bill Gates encouraged the diversity of views in their organization and made it unacceptable to ignore or suppress opposing views. (Caldwell, 1992) The model of free and frank atmosphere introduces unscripted informality and invitations of questions that in turn can help breed the culture of openness in the organizations. This culture of openness leads to a variety of innovative ideas, where some ideas may be unacceptable however their presentation may result in solving a complex problem. Since technological advancements in the field of communication and computerization have hastened the pace of transformation and globalization, therefore it is imperative that managers must measure up with impending requirements. They should encourage diversity of thought to make people of different races, cultures and ethnicities settle into their new environment and are comfortable with presenting their ideas to a variety of audiences. Researchers have proved beyond any doubts that organizations with open cultures are more successful than organizations those with restricted cultures and are resistant to change.
- **8.2. Developing Emotional Intelligence**. Understanding and managing the state of emotions in varying situations is the hall mark for effective and constructive collaboration. While collaborating, people need to emphatically listen to each other's point of view and build on one another's arguments with an exploratory and open minded atmosphere. Question arises, how the people with different perceptions, experiences and expertise can manage the conflict and develop the ability to collaborate on issues of immense significance to all the stake holders? Here comes the role of emotional intelligence that can facilitate the process in a befitting manner. Hence there is a requirement to passionately put in action all the key skills of emotional intelligence identified to overcome challenges that are likely to interfere with the collaboration. The challenges and remedies would be different behavior patterns and organizational cultures.

Diverse groups include many different types of personalities and all people have different thought processes thus leaders should know all team members well using an intelligent approach and provide support and comfort to all. Leaders and managers should always be friendly, approachable and socially reliable. The emotionally intelligence is an instrumental tool in this regard that can help in strengthening these traits and create the right kind environment for constructive collaboration.

- **8.3.** Selecting Mode of Collaboration: One of the fundamental skills in collaboration is choosing the right mode for any complex situation. Some of the important issues that can be high lighted include negotiation for resource allocation, on disagreements about decision making and combining variety of insights into more accurate holistic understanding and creative solutions. On the contrary, where there is competitiveness and personality conflicts which can lead to excessive behaviors, a different mode is required to be selected. Differences of view become personalized when people start finding faults with each other instead of substantive issues. Thus resultant negatively charged environments do not only undermine cohesiveness but also affect decision making and reduce job satisfaction. Expression of assertiveness must remain within the bounds of mutual respect and focused on important issues at hand. Promoting freedom of speech under controlled environments makes all employees feel independent and also gain confidence in sharing ideas.
- **8.4.** Practical Manifestation of Selected Mode. The emphasis should be on the solution to the problem rather than method adopted to find solution. Thus flexibility on account of choosing the method to be adopted in



satisfying people's requirement can be adopted but targeted need has to be fulfilled at all cost. This will create a win - win situation for all stake holders. When people frame issues in terms of way of satisfying their interests then finding collaborating solutions becomes impossible because the logical possibility is win-lose and lose-win situations. In the process for collaboration it is necessary that all participants gain advantage to the extent that every ones feels satisfied. Hence, effective and constructive collaboration is achieved when all members of the team are successful. Thus for promoting effective collaborations mangers and leaders should keep in mind individual as well as team goals and strive for simultaneously achieving the both.

8.5. Reducing the Frictional Forces. Another key skill for collaborative solutions involves reducing the negative consequences. It is important that management must learn, how to compete without annoying or creating opposition, how to avoid an issue and accommodate without looking weak.

Managers and leaders should strive to practice emotional intelligence for handling conflict at work place. They should devise methods to reduce the intensity of conflicts within their groups; one way to steer clear of conflict is to consider all suggestions and then make final decisions. This inculcates a sense of satisfaction and security among members and they connect well with their leader.

8.6. Ameliorating Decision Making. Constructive collaboration in top leadership does not only improve decision making but also sets examples for others. Professor Kathleen and her colleagues carried out a study on top management of high tech companies. They found that proficient leadership collaborate difference of views without entangling in personal animosities. Whereas, less experienced leadership indulges in personality conflicts. Professor Sydney Finkelstein studied 51 companies that had suffered major business failures. (Finkelstein, 2003) The finding of this study reveal that all of these organizations operated in a way that did not entertain dissenting views, did not pay heed to simmering problems and allowed bad decisions to be made. Although CEOs of these failed organizations had impressive and successful past track records yet their non adherence to emerging realities and shifting paradigms made them failure in their current positions. Instead of focusing on new information and realities, they insisted on demonstrating their expertise and knowledge particularly in risky situations like new business ventures, innovational changes and unexpected moves from opponents that ushered in new uncertainties. Finkelstein's major recommendation was to create culture of openness and multiple levels of feedback and creative thinking. Hence time and again it is proved that with the changing world, managers need to bring changes to their leadership styles. Since celebrating diversity seems to be the current order of the time, therefore this calls for encouraging and intelligently managing dissenting views for improving upon decision making.

9. Benefits of Collaborating Diversity

Steve Jobs said, "The source of wealth and capital in this new era is not material things ... it is the human mind, the human spirit, the human imagination and our faith in the future." When we enlighten and inspire our people to harness their creativity to generate value in an inclusive culture, we nurture fertile soil where seeds of innovation can blossom into opportunity of sustained future growth. (Fan, 2014)

Earlier in this article many aspects of diversity has been discussed; now in this concluding section salient benefits that collaborating diversity entails for global and dynamic organizations are listed as follows:-

- **9.1.** Collaboration amongst diverse individuals brings to light a variety of creative, effective and constructive solutions.
- **9.2.** Collaboration also entails harmonious bonding among diverse individuals.
- **9.3.** It provides for better job satisfaction; and also inculcates a sense of security in individuals.
- **9.4.** The freedom of speech that comes with collaboration allows individuals to be more responsive and participative.
- **9.5.** Collaboration among diverse individuals allow them to open their minds to difference of opinions and it is noticed that by considering this difference in opinions managers tend to make better decisions.
- **9.6.** When diverse members work together, they support each other and try to fulfill any and all discrepancies amongst themselves.
- **9.7.** Since all individuals in collaboration think differently and look at problems differently, thus collaboration amongst diverse individuals ensures that all aspects of a problem are comprehensively discussed and appropriate solutions are presented.
- **9.8.** Collaboration helps develop higher cognition abilities among individuals.
- **9.9.** It also helps promote a sense of high achievement in all team members.
- **9.10.** Collaboration results in better self esteem in participating individuals.

10. Advantages of Collaboration:

Collaboration has many more advantages and these can be noticed in globally successful organizations; as it is nowadays becoming common knowledge that organizations that consider diversity and value diverse views are more successful than those undermining the worth of collaboration.



Members of a homogeneous group feel somewhat assured that they will agree with one another; that they will understand one another's beliefs and perspectives; that they will be able to easily come to a consensus. But when members of a group notice that they are socially different from one another, they change their expectations. (Diversity Management, 2014) The anticipation of difference makes them assume they need to work harder to generate consensus. This logic helps to explain both the upside and the downside of social diversity: people work harder in diverse environments both cognitively and socially. They might not like it, but the hard work can lead to better outcomes.

Effective collaborations bring about positive changes in the workplace and its environment. Following are the some of the effects of collaboration identified by researchers in the workplace:-

- **10.1.** It has considerable impact on team performance. Knowledge sharing have a greater impact on work-unit performance than the quality of direct managers.
- **10.2.** Collaborative work environments foster innovation and interpersonal bonding. The employees retention and loyalty levels increases considerably.
- **10.3.** Employees who agree that their co-workers share knowledge with one another are half as likely to consider leaving their agency in the next year as those who disagree with that statement. (Christopher Cattie)
- **10.4.** When individuals from different professional and technical backgrounds work on a project they consider results from all angels which reduce the possibility of errors.
- **10.5.** Workplace Collaboration Encourages Creativity. It helps in bringing together several different views which eventually raise the profile of ideas.
- **10.6.** Collaboration Takes Advantage of Synergies. The formation of collaborative teams often involves the separation of duties based on their expertise. This kind of arrangement helps to bring the benefit of synergy to the project because areas of overlap are more easily identified and the incidences of re-doing work can be eliminated.
- **10.7.** Workplace Collaboration Brings Balance to Decision Making. The workplace collaboration can root out the occurrence of biased or partisan decisions because of the influence and presence of all interested parties.
- **10.8.** Collaboration May Improve Delivery Times. If the stakeholders are able to recognize their synergies and leverage the experience of all the parties represented, a project that is a collaborative effort has the potential to be completed on or even before schedule. (Jones)
- **10.9.** Collaboration increases the overall productivity of the organization thereby allowing growth and development on personal and professional levels. Collaborative teams work harmoniously and all employees enjoy equal freedom of speech which in turn ensures equal participation and responsiveness from all employees.
- **10.10** Collaborative process increases the quality of work produced by different teams and units of the organization. Thus by inculcating collaboration in organizations managers can reap tremendous benefits and come up with better and innovative products and creative solutions to otherwise complex problems.

11. Summary

This article explored certain key elements of collaborating diversity of thought for making them core competence of a leadership or an organization. Besides dilating upon the importance of developing common understanding, realizing different aspects of collaboration, identifying patterns of behavior/ modes of collaboration, impediments to collaboration and sharpening collaborative skills, the effects of collaboration has been amply high lighted. People dealing with various affairs may focus on these elements and introduce them on situational basis in ways that suit their culture and overall strategy. However, they need to imbibe in their training modules for capacity building. At the end of this article certain benefits of collaboration have been discussed. It has been observed that organizations with collaborative work environments are more successful and more productive. The diverse nature of the workforce and collaboration among employees ensures that the organization is productive and constantly brewing innovative solutions and products. Collaboration in thought has many positive effects on the environment of an organization, thus with globalization on the rise, the need for collaboration among diverse workforces is indeed the need of time. It is also noticeable that organizations that provide for collaboration of diversity are more prosperous, productive, innovative, inventive and creative. Together, diversity and collaboration have considerably elevated excellence worldwide; forcing individuals to strive for improvement with each passing day.

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