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Collaboration--The Secret to Successful Six Sigma Projects

There's no "I" in "team."

by Praveen Gupta



Teamwork has always been considered a critical component of completing complex projects that require significant improvement. The process of teamwork has been well-documented, but teamwork is still often elusive. Why?

When teams succeed, it's often for the following reasons:

- Strong leadership
- Well-defined goals
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Commitment
- Effective meetings
- Action plans
- Good communication

The team model is like a wheel, with the hub as the goal and the spokes representing links with various team members. The model will work when the action items are broken down for individual team members. But what happens when the action items are such that a sub-team is needed, or when the action item requires support from a distant or remotely connected department, or even from a supplier or customer? For today's globally dispersed corporate operations, it's quite possible that some Six Sigma projects require working with people under such scenarios. This kind of teamwork requires collaboration.

When considering successful teams, it's clear that the key component of good teamwork is collaboration. According to definitions found on the Internet, teamwork and collaboration are described as follows:

"Teamwork is the concept of people working together as a team. The concept has spread from the world of sports, where it is well-known and accepted, to business; so much so that it is in danger of being considered by some as an empty buzzword, or a form of corporate-speak. In the 21st century, as people are becoming more sophisticated and society is becoming more technically advanced, working as a team makes it easier to accomplish goals."
(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teamwork)

"Collaboration is a mutually beneficial, well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals. Collaboration is the process of various individuals, groups or systems working together, but at a significantly higher degree than through coordination or cooperation. Collaboration typically involves joint planning, shared resources and joint resource management. Collaboration occurs through shared understanding of the issues, open communication, mutual trust, and tolerance of differing points of view."
(www.nccev.org/resources/terms.html)

Many Six Sigma projects are complex and require significant collaboration. The improvement goal is usually high, about 50 percent, which requires cross-functional expertise, new ideas and innovative solutions. Everyone benefits from the success of these projects. Team members must be very involved, and therefore, must collaborate.

When teams are formed, members volunteer to participate and projects are assigned. However, if the team is lacking in its drive to achieve results, the connectivity is not there. Roles are defined, action items are given, but the project doesn't succeed. Collaboration is missing.

When a team is collaborating, all members are connected with each other in pursuing the common goal. It's a network of fully connected people, communicating with each other, watching the project progress and contributing as necessary. In the case of collaboration, teamwork is intrinsic. Collaboration is more informal than procedural teamwork. In other words, collaboration is the informal, caring aspect of teamwork, which inspires the intellectual involvement of team members for making the project work through innovative solutions and excellent execution.

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When a project team is formed, the team leader must create an environment for collaboration to ensure full connectivity, mutual expectation and accountability, personal involvement and pride, and interest in and commitment to the project.

About the author

Praveen Gupta is president of [Accelper Consulting](#), which provides management consulting services for improving the bottom line through the use of innovation, business scorecards and Six Sigma.

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