

# Collaborative Leadership: Eight Factors That Lead to Success

Building collaborative leadership teams is crucial to a company's leadership strategy. Following are eight factors, reprinted from the November 2007 issue of the Harvard Business Review, that lead to success when building such teams.

- 1 Investing in signature relationship practices.** Executives can encourage collaborative behavior by making highly visible investments that demonstrate their commitment to collaboration.
- 2 Modeling collaborative behavior.** At companies where the senior executives demonstrate highly collaborative behavior themselves, teams collaborate well.
- 3 Creating a "gift culture."** Mentoring and coaching, especially on an informal basis, help people build the networks they need to work across corporate boundaries.
- 4 Ensuring the requisite skills.** Human resources departments that teach employees how to build relationships, communicate well and resolve conflicts creatively can have a major impact on team collaboration.
- 5 Supporting a strong sense of community.** When people feel a sense of community, they are most comfortable reaching out to others and most likely to share knowledge.
- 6 Assigning team leaders that are both task- and relationship-oriented.** The debate has traditionally focused on whether a task or a relationship orientation creates better leadership, but in fact both are key to successfully leading a team. Typically, leading more heavily on a task orientation at the outset of a project and shifting toward a relationship orientation once the work is in full swing works best.
- 7 Building on heritage relationships.** When too many team members are strangers, people may be reluctant to share knowledge. The best practice is to put at least a few people who know one another on the team.
- 8 Understanding role clarity and task ambiguity.** Cooperation increases when the role of individual team members are sharply defined yet the team is given latitude on how to achieve the task.

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# Leadership Matters

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## The Learning Network: A New Approach to Developing Capable and Committed Leaders

The group of leaders involved in The Learning Network program enthusiastically looked forward to their regular sessions. Why? This new approach to leadership development provided a much-needed place to discuss real problems, real issues and real situations that each of these leaders faced. Not only that, the cooperation and collaborative spirit built into the program created a special bond and mutual accountability that for many participants was a first-time experience.

This program was extraordinary for leaders: **collaborative learning differs from traditional approaches because everyone works together.** Rather than compete with each other individually, participants are all focused on the same goal — enhanced leadership effectiveness.

### Not Your Usual Training

Right from the start, leaders knew that this was not going to be "the usual training." First the group learned about the collaborative framework and fundamentals. The skills needed to work together in groups are quite distinct from those used to succeed in solving problems on one's own. This session, though, wasn't just an introduction. In today's world where being a "team player" is often a key part of business success, **collaborative learning provides experience with a very relevant way of learning and coaching others.**

Then the leaders in the program discussed which subjects would be most useful to them. They chose such things as teamwork and team building, influence skills and motivation techniques. The consultant, in this case Paulette Gabriel, provided some content, but the main idea was that the leaders themselves explored the issues and developed solutions with the light guiding hand of the consultant facilitating the learning.

### Why Develop a New Approach?

Why develop a new way of approaching long-standing issues? **Research suggests that collaborative learning bring positive results such as deeper understanding of content, improved self-esteem, and higher motivation to remain engaged.** The Learning Network helps leaders become actively and constructively involved in content, to take ownership of their own learning, to resolve group conflicts and improve teamwork skills.

The assumptions that drive the structure of The Learning Network are (Smith and MacGregor, 1992):

- **Learning is an active, constructive process:** To learn new information, ideas or skills, leaders have to work actively with them in purposeful ways. They need to integrate new material with what they already know — or use it to reorganize what they thought they knew. In collaborative learning situations, learners are not simply taking in new information or ideas — they are creating something new with the information and ideas. These acts of intellectual processing, of constructing meaning or creating something new, are crucial to learning.
- **Learning depends on rich contexts:** Recent research suggests learning is fundamentally influenced by the context and activity in which it is embedded (Brown, Collins, and Duguid, 1989). Collaborative learning activities immerse leaders in challenging tasks or questions. Rather than beginning with facts and ideas and then moving to applications, collaborative learning activities frequently begin with marshal problems, for which leaders must marshal pertinent facts and ideas. Instead of being distant observers of questions and answers, or problems and solutions, students become immediate practitioners. Rich contexts challenge students to practice and develop higher order reasoning and problem-solving skills.
- **Learners are diverse:** Learners bring multiple perspectives to the classroom-diverse backgrounds, learning styles, experiences and aspirations. The facilitator does not assume a one-size-fits-all approach. When leaders work together on their learning in class, we get a direct and immediate sense of how they are learning — and what experiences and ideas they bring to their work. The diverse perspectives that emerge in collaborative activities are clarifying but not just for us. They are illuminating for our students as well.
- **Learning is inherently social:** As Jeff Golub (1988) points out, "Collaborative learning has as its main feature a structure that allows for student talk: students are supposed to talk with each other...and it is in this talking that much of the learning occurs." Collaborative learning produces intellectual synergy of many minds coming to bear on a problem, and the social stimulation of mutual engagement in a common endeavor. This mutual exploration, meaning-making, and feedback often leads to better understanding.

The Learning Network

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**Our Mission**  
**Key Leadership Initiatives:**  
**Providing expertise to you and your organization in critical areas where business issues and people issues intersect.**

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# Developing Better Leaders Faster

An Interview with Rick Lash

Organizations worldwide are faced with a massive leadership tsunami. How will organizations face these leadership gaps?

In a recent Thought Leaders interview with Rick Lash of the Hay Group's Management Development Practice, Rick talked about Hay's survey of the world's most admired companies for leadership development. But even there, it was clear that *no matter where you look around the globe, organizations are faced with a leadership drain*. In the interview, Lash said that in the U.S. alone companies will face a 30-million person gap over the next five years as they look to replace key leaders who are moving toward retirement. Much of the gap is driven simply by demographics.

As the huge number of baby boomers near retirement, they take with them lots of organizational knowledge, experience and leadership capability that isn't easy to replace. Based on Hay's global surveys, Lash said that most organizations recognize there are going to be significant leadership gaps — and that these gaps will have a direct impact on companies' ability to grow and develop their businesses. This is true across all industries, from finance to pharmaceutical, within public service or healthcare. Lash said it's also becoming harder to make senior leadership roles attractive for people so they want to move into them.

## Building Strong Leaders: What Participants Had to Say About the KLI Learning Network Approach

“ The program allowed my team to reflect — and the ability to reflect builds a strong leader.

I expected a lecture hall, but instead the program was about team building and interaction.

The sessions allowed the team to learn something new each time.

This program far exceeded my expectations.

I found that, through this program, I was able to build perspective.

The program was personalized to the people as well as the team. ”

## A CASE STUDY IN :

# Increasing the Overall Effectiveness of a Company's Leaders

A large, well-respected global company sought to increase the overall effectiveness of their managers. Senior management wanted a more interactive experience — not a lecture-style approach — in a program that would encourage managers to be curious and learn from each other.

Further, the company wanted a program that would build on case studies, whereby participants could provide input and share ideas. The company also wanted a program that would focus on several broad themes, including:

- Teamwork and Diversity
- Performance Management
- Manager's Roles and Skills
- Change and Commitment
- Influencing Peers and Senior Managers

### The KLI Solution

Key Leadership Initiatives proposed a program whereby employees who were identified by the company as leaders would work together to share materials and key learnings — with the goal of becoming more effective leaders. The information would be used to evolve and improve the leadership program over time so that it would be an ongoing part of the company's growth and leadership development strategy.

KLI facilitated a highly successful program at the company's headquarters. Building on the materials from a UK program called First Step, KLI added materials so that its program included the following elements:

- **Introduce the session**, perhaps explaining the philosophy of learning from each other.
- **Organize into small groups** of managers who will work together in the session.
- **Request each group to have one person** outline a particular issue for the group.

- **Explore issues in each small group**; each group rotates the role of “presenter” for the case study.
- **Discuss how this approach** may be used in the workplace daily — consulting with others and gaining ideas and input from colleagues.

During the program, participants read two case studies and chose the one of most interest to them individually. Working with the facilitator, they then formed small groups with other participants who chose the same case.

Participants outlined the goals in each case study, potential options, impacts of each option, and what steps they would recommend as leaders in those situations. From there, participants planned subsequent sessions, identifying topics for focus and how to prepare for the sessions.

### Results

The program was so well received that the company requested a second be added. The program met all of the company's initial goals, most notably, the company was able to develop a leadership program that would evolve and improve over time — a program that would be a continual part of the company's growth and leadership development strategy. This type of end-to-end program, where a learning network is embedded in a company, where it becomes a legacy, is exactly what this company was looking for as part of its overall leadership strategy.



# Benefits of Collaborative Learning

There are several benefits to the collaborative learning approach, including:

- **Resilience and flexibility.** Leaders are working with different types of people. During small-group interactions, they find many opportunities to reflect upon and reply to the diverse responses fellow learners bring to the questions raised. Small groups, perhaps of three to five people, also allow for adding their perspectives to an issue based on their cultural, professional and other differences. This exchange inevitably helps leaders realize the value of other points of view. With large teams, it's sometimes difficult to keep everyone involved in the discussion.
- **Interpersonal development.** Leaders enhance their ability to relate to their peers and others as they work together in groups. The value of networking with others as well as the idea of continuing opportunities for professional collaboration make the experience as valuable as the content.
- **Builds critical thinking and accountability.** Each leader has opportunities to contribute in small groups and are apt to take more ownership of their material and to think critically about related issues when they work as a team. They also take seriously their opportunities to help others. Accountability also translates into commitment to each other to attend and be prepared for meetings, and to take responsibility for tasks. Group members are also secure that confidentiality in the group sessions is respected.
- **More opportunities for personal feedback.** Because there are more exchanges in small groups, people receive individualized attention to problems or issues they have a keen interest in discussing. This feedback is often not possible in large groups, in which one or two students exchange ideas and the rest of the class listens.
- **Diversity.** Collaborative learning brings diverse experiences, backgrounds and skill levels to the table. Not only does each individual bring his or her own unique strength to the group, but each member helps each other understand the source of their strength. A diversity of perspective also helps influence the learning experience in a positive way, and increases the options for problem solving.