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# How To Improve Cross-Team Collaboration: 11 Experts Weigh In

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Tags: Cross team collaboration



*Teamwork makes the dream work* is a popular saying. But it's a sentiment that's often easier said than done, especially when it comes to cross-team collaboration.

When teams work across functions, or with partners or clients, there's added complexity in dealing with people outside your normal team. There's often conflicting ways of working and differing levels of

knowledge. These quickly test the limits of standard collaboration tools and processes used within your team.

So, how do you improve collaboration between teams? We reached out to several collaboration experts across a number of industries to answer this burning question. Read on to see the interesting tips they shared on the subject.

## Cross-Team Collaboration: Advice From The Experts

### 1. Create key performance indicators

“As a marketing director, I once found myself feeling like I was partly responsible for how the leads I was helping to generate were getting dropped by the sales team. The strategy to be more constructive about the problem turned out to be some clear KPIs, or key performance indicators, that both teams could agree on that held us both accountable for ‘our side of the street.’

“That way, each month, both teams checked in and reported on the handful of numbers they were responsible for. Sometimes we had to acknowledge our numbers weren't that great, and sometimes they had to acknowledge theirs weren't. With clarity around who's responsible for what, clear check-in times, and specific goals, cross-team collaboration is a lot more productive.”



*Tim Brown, Marketing Director at Hook Agency*

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### 2. Establish a centralized communication method

“My number-one tip for improving cross-team collaboration is to make sure there is a centralized way for teams to communicate. Communication is one of the most important parts of any type of cross-team interaction. Without good cross-team communication, collaboration falls apart. For example, being able to share real-time updates on team progress is invaluable. This ultimately allows projects to run smoothly. Software that enables team members to ask questions and post messages is a necessity in this type of endeavor.”



*Andrew Rawson, Chief Learning Officer at Traliant*

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### 3. Be clear on which tasks require collaboration (and which do not)

“My tip is simple and one many teams surprisingly miss—be super clear about specifically which tasks or initiatives require team collaboration. Before all the trust building and conversations about ways of

working, know exactly where you want to focus your collaborative efforts. And, by extension, get clear about which tasks *don't* require collaboration or teamwork; put these tasks in the hands of capable individuals and let them get to work.

“Collaboration is more time-consuming, costly, and messy than individual work. Save it for the highest-leverage pieces of work that you are certain will benefit you and your partners. Then, work out the details of your collaboration—things like who will be involved, how often you need to connect, who will own which pieces of the task, etc.”



*Carlos Valdes-Dapena, Managing Principal at Corporate Collaboration Resources*

[Email Carlos]

#### 4. Bring technology into the picture

“Integrating collaboration software to act as a central hub during the life cycle of a cross-team project is a great way to improve communication and enhance project management and productivity. Centralized information provides real-time visibility for project managers. It also allows progress to be monitored without asking for updates, and enables problems to be identified early on. Working from a single system also makes teams more efficient and accelerates results by reducing rework, removing unnecessary meetings, and shortening planning time.”



*Paul Jardine, Technical Lead at English Blinds*

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#### 5. Assign a single point of contact for each team

“To improve our collaboration with our clients, we always ensure there's only one contact person on both sides. This avoids confusion on different directions from the client, eliminates overlap of tasks, and helps in managing expectations. Of course, both contact persons are expected to consolidate messages from their respective organizations or teams to make the setup effective.”



*Jomel Alos, Online PR Lead at Spiralytics*

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#### 6. Create a team charter

“One of the best tips for improving cross-team collaboration at your business is to create what is commonly known as a team charter, which is basically a blueprint for how the team will work together toward achieving its goals.

“A high-quality team charter includes things like the basic purpose of the formation of the team; its objectives, mission, and general goals; and each team member’s responsibilities. It will also state the expectations from the cross-team collaboration, and a schedule for when the teams will meet. The added benefit of this approach is that the creation of the charter also acts as an initial team-building effort.”



*Andrew Schrage, CEO at Money Crashers*

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## 7. Inform the team when work is finished

“Sometimes when we collaborate with others, we forget the simple things, like informing others that you completed your work. Figuring out who’s doing what next becomes more complicated when people aren’t aware that preceding work has been completed.

“So make sure your team knows they need to pass the baton—whether that means updating a task in the project management software, sending their teammate a chat message, or tapping them on the shoulder. The simple act of telling a teammate ‘You’re up next’ promotes accountability, clarifies direction, and lessens team stress.”



*Lionel Valdellon, Content Marketing Manager at CleverTap*

*[Connect with Lionel on LinkedIn]*

## 8. Have team members share their work

“You can improve collaboration between teams by having them share their work with one another. Teams collaborate better when they understand each other and have a better idea of what everyone is actually doing. We all have a tendency to underestimate how much effort is involved with work outside of our domain!

“A great way to share work is to make each team member’s daily action list transparent across teams. You can use a whiteboard, chat system, or a designated productivity tool to achieve this. Regular work-in-progress meetings are also a great forum to have team members share their work with the rest of the team. When everyone can see how others are working toward a shared goal, it’s much easier to collaborate effectively. This also makes each team member accountable and motivates them to get things done.”

*Fiona Adler, Founder of Actioned*



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## 9. Focus on the positive during conflict

“Conflict is unavoidable with cross-functional project teams. People are accustomed to working in their silos, and coming together with another function can be challenging, especially when those functions operate differently. That’s why our firm continually focuses on cross-collaboration.

“One of our conflict strategies is my 3P Method—pausing to pivot to a positive. We realized we were spending too much time and energy focused on the negatives of the situation, which didn’t help with resolution. Now we acknowledge that a conflict exists and quickly pivot to a positive possibility or a lesson learned, which puts us back on track. We’ve found this strategy quite successful and have also implemented it within our clients’ organizations.”



*Kerry Wekelo, Managing Director of HR & Operations at Actualize Consulting*

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## 10. Share progress with stakeholders

“There’s nothing worse than getting to the end of a project and having key stakeholders say, ‘I wouldn’t have done it that way!’ This is a reminder that collaboration needs to happen not just with team members but also team sponsors and other stakeholders.

“It’s important to share the results outside the core team regularly, especially on larger projects. When a project takes months to complete, you need to keep stakeholders in the loop and give them opportunity to weigh in on progress. For example, we include large, cross-functional products in our weekly meetings with a showcase. This way, we make sure that these projects stay grounded and are fully accepted.”



*Jennifer McDermott, Head of Communications at Finder*

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## 11. Ensure all team members know how and where they fit in

“For any project or program to be successful, everyone needs to understand how their efforts contribute to the end goal. Knowing how they fit in enables each team member to have a clear vision of their individual efforts.

In addition, they should feel the importance or weight of their efforts. Sometimes one team or function, such as sales or development, thinks their efforts are the most important. However, it should be made clear that all efforts impact whether and how the goal is achieved. You need to break down

these ego barriers so that all functions understand their unique value. This is how you establish the best cross-team collaboration."



*Andrew de Bray, Managing Director at Factum Ltd.*

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