Collaboration in Action

"None of us is as smart as all of us." — Ken Blanchard

Warm up

- Have you had more positive or negative experiences working in teams?
- Do you prefer working alone or in a team? Why?
- What role do you usually take in team situations?
- What makes someone difficult to work with?
- Is disagreement healthy in teamwork?
- What usually causes teams to fail?
- Why do some teams overcomplicate simple problems?
- Is communication more important than intelligence in teamwork?

1. Take part in the teamwork challenge below.

Work in groups of 3–6. As a team, you must count from 1 to 20. However, there is no fixed speaking order, and only one person may speak at a time. You may not use gestures or signals to organise the order. If two people say a number at the same time, the group must start again from 1.

The challenge finishes when your group successfully reaches 20.

2. Discuss the questions

- What made the challenge difficult?
- Did your group develop a strategy? If so, what was it?
- Did somebody naturally become the leader of the group?
- How did your group react when mistakes happened?
- Which personality types appeared during the activity?

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3. Complete the quiz below to discover what type of team member you are. Then check your results on the following page.

1. Your team has only 15 minutes left to finish an important presentation. Two people are stressed, one person has stopped contributing, and nobody can agree on the next step. What would you probably do? A. Take control and quickly assign tasks to everyone B. Suggest a completely new or unexpected solution C. Try to calm the group and improve communication D. Organise the remaining time and create a clear plan	2. Your team receives a task with very unclear instructions, and nobody really understands what the final result should look like. A. Make a fast decision about the direction of the project B. Suggest trying several approaches to see what works best. C. Ask the team to discuss what a successful final result might look like. D. Break the task into smaller questions and clarify the requirements step by step.
3. During a brainstorming session, your group rejects every new idea almost immediately. A. Push the group to stop debating and choose something B. Continue suggesting more unusual ideas C. Encourage quieter people to join the discussion D. Ask the team to evaluate each idea using the same criteria.	4. Halfway through a project, your team suddenly discovers that the original plan is not working. A. Make a quick decision and change direction immediately B. See it as an opportunity to try something different C. Help the team stay positive and avoid panic D. Carefully reorganise the project step by step
5. Imagine you are working with a team of strangers under pressure. What would probably frustrate you MOST? A. People refusing to make decisions B. People rejecting creative ideas too quickly C. People creating conflict or tension in the group D. People working without a clear system or structure	6. Which team would you MOST enjoy being part of? A. A confident team with strong leadership B. A creative team that experiments with ideas C. A supportive team with good communication D. An organised team with clear goals and structure

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4. Count your A, B, C, and D answers. Then read about your team member type below. If you have a tie, read both profiles. Discuss the questions that follow.

Mostly A → The Director

Directors naturally take control in group situations and feel comfortable making quick decisions under pressure. They enjoy leadership, clear goals, and helping teams move forward efficiently. Directors are often confident and decisive, although they may sometimes dominate discussions without realising it.

Mostly B → The Trailblazer

Trailblazers enjoy experimenting with ideas and thinking differently from other people. They are creative, adaptable, and often willing to take risks that others avoid. Trailblazers bring energy and innovation to teams, although they may sometimes become frustrated by too many rules or routines.

Mostly C → The Harmonizer

Harmonizers focus on communication, teamwork, and positive relationships within a group. They are supportive, empathetic, and good at helping teams stay calm during stressful situations. Harmonizers often help people work well together, although they may sometimes avoid conflict too much.

Mostly D → The Stabilizer

Stabilizers enjoy structure, organisation, and clear systems. They help teams stay focused, manage details carefully, and keep projects on track. Stabilizers are dependable and methodical, although they may sometimes struggle with sudden changes or unpredictable situations.

- Do you agree with your result? Why / why not?
- Which type would probably perform best under pressure?
- Can a successful team contain only one type of personality?
- Which two types would probably work best together?

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5. Match the meanings (A–G) to the underlined teamwork and problem-solving expressions in sentences 1–7 below.

a. understand each other and agree *5*

b. too many people trying to control the same situation *7*

c. increase the pressure, risk, or difficulty of a situation *6*

d. stop making progress *3*

e. compete for control or leadership *2*

f. contribute fairly to the work *4*

g. a situation where success or failure is extremely important *1*

1. Once the prize money was introduced, the activity suddenly became much more high-stakes.
2. At the beginning of the challenge, several people immediately started jockeying for power instead of focusing on the task.
3. We were making good progress until we completely hit a wall near the end of the project.
4. Nobody in the team was really pulling their weight, so one person ended up doing most of the work.
5. At first, everybody had different ideas, but eventually the whole team was on the same page.
6. The company decided to up the ante by offering a large bonus to the winning team.
7. There were simply too many cooks in the kitchen during the presentation, and everything became confusing.

6. In pairs or small groups, discuss the questions below.

(Possible answers)

Which is worse for teamwork: having no leader or having too many cooks in the kitchen?

- *Without a leader, teams often struggle to make decisions and maintain momentum.*
- *Too many people trying to lead can create confusion and conflicting priorities.*
- *Clear leadership is important, but teams also need collaboration.*
- *The real problem is often unclear roles rather than leadership itself.*
- *Different situations require different levels of leadership.*

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2. Have you ever worked in a group where people did not pull their weight? What happened?

- *A small number of people ended up carrying most of the workload.*
- *Deadlines became harder to meet because tasks were not completed on time.*
- *Frustration grew within the team and communication suffered.*
- *Expectations and responsibilities were not clearly defined from the start.*
- *The experience highlighted the importance of accountability.*

3. Do high-stakes situations improve teamwork or damage it?

- *High-stakes situations can bring out the best in teams by increasing focus and commitment.*
- *Pressure often encourages people to communicate more efficiently.*
- *However, excessive pressure can lead to stress and poor decision-making.*
- *Some teams become more collaborative, while others become more competitive.*
- *The outcome often depends on trust and leadership within the team.*

4. Which jobs or situations usually involve a lot of jockeying for power?

- *Political environments often involve competition for influence and control.*
- *Senior leadership positions can create power struggles.*
- *Large projects with multiple stakeholders may lead to competing priorities.*
- *Fast-growing companies sometimes experience internal competition.*
- *Any situation with limited resources can encourage jockeying for power.*

5. Why do even intelligent teams sometimes hit a wall?

- *Intelligent teams can overanalyse problems and delay decisions.*
- *Team members may become too attached to their own ideas.*
- *Different perspectives can make it difficult to reach agreement.*
- *Strong expertise does not automatically lead to effective communication.*
- *Teams sometimes focus so much on details that they lose sight of the bigger picture.*

6. Does upping the ante usually improve performance or create more stress? Why?

- *Raising the stakes can increase motivation and urgency.*
- *People often perform better when they feel challenged.*
- *However, too much pressure can reduce creativity and risk-taking.*
- *Stress can lead to mistakes and communication problems.*
- *The impact depends on the team culture and how the pressure is managed*.

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7. You are going to watch a TED Talk about teamwork and problem-solving. Before watching, match the vocabulary below to the correct definitions.

a. Prototype *5*	1. the skill of helping a group work effectively towards a shared goal
b. iterative process *6*	2. rewards or benefits designed to influence behaviour or performance
c. facilitation *1*	3. to carry out or put a plan into action
d. hidden assumptions *4*	4. beliefs or expectations that influence decisions without being openly recognised
e. incentives *2*	5. an early version of something used to test ideas before creating the final version
f. execute (a plan) *3*	6. a method of improving something through repeated testing, feedback, and revision

8. Discuss with a partner. Which group do you think performed best and which performed worst in the challenge below? Explain your answers.

In the Marshmallow Challenge, teams must build the tallest free-standing structure possible using only spaghetti, tape, string, and a marshmallow. The marshmallow must be placed on top of the structure. Teams have a limited amount of time to complete the challenge.

- ☐ Business students
- ☐ Lawyers
- ☐ Kindergarten children
- ☐ CEOs
- ☐ Architects and engineers
- ☐ Executive assistants

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9. Watch the TED Talk video[1] and complete the tasks below.

a. Were your predictions about the BEST and WORST groups correct?
b. What happened when a large prize was introduced? Tick (✓) the correct answer.

□ Teams became calmer and more organised.
□ The students performed better immediately.
□ No team managed to build a successful structure.
□ The kindergarten children lost the challenge.

c. According to the speaker, which TWO things improve team performance most? Tick (✓) two answers.

□ working individually
□ facilitation skills
□ process management
□ avoiding failure completely
□ overplanning
□ strong communication

d. Complete the sentence from the TED Talk.

"Every project has its own _____."

10. Work in pairs and complete the challenge below.

The Blind Drawing Challenge

One student receives an image from the teacher privately but must NOT show it to the group. The student must describe the image using only words while the other team members try to draw it as accurately as possible, either on paper or digitally.

Rules

- no showing the image
- no gestures or screen sharing
- no spelling words aloud
- team members may ask questions

The team with the most accurate drawing wins.

Teacher's Note: The downloadable PDF includes both a Standard and an Advanced version of the Blind Drawing Challenge. Choose the version that best suits your class and give the image to one student in each pair. The student must describe it without showing it to their partner. The images are available on the same download page as the worksheet.

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0_yKBitO8M

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