

## COLLABORATION IN THE PROJECT TEAM

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### Abstract

*Project teams are increasingly committed by organizations to achieve an important organizational goal as they attempt to survive and grow in dynamic business environment. Decisions making in simple tasks and issues are definite and explicit and enough to resolve them and make individual effort. Meanwhile, team work is useful when you need information, knowledge and skills in various fields. Various ideas and collaboration are necessary to achieve project objectives when decision of the problem is not clear.*

*The main purpose of the paper is to identify the determinants of collaboration in project teams. The literature analysis shows that the collaboration is defined in many different ways. There is no unified definition of the collaboration and understanding of the process of collaboration. However, collaboration, reduced to its simplest definition, means a relationship between two or more parties who work together towards common goals. The main principles of the team work are collaboration and listening to the other team member's opinion, recognition and mutual support. Trust, flexibility, communication, interaction, respect, resources, environment have been identified as success determinants of project team of collaboration.*

**The type of the article:** *Theoretical paper.*

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**JEL Classification:** *A3, D83, J24, L2, O15.*

### 1. Introduction

Rapidly changing informational, technological, economical environment and globalization of markets determine increasing competition almost in all business sectors. Changing business environment makes organizations to analyze constantly the actions of competitors and look for attractive market niches. Evolutional changes, that are taking place, stimulate enterprises for quicker learning, to react and adapt to changing environment and change themselves. Organizations, striving for successful adaptation to dynamic business environment and to fit requirements of the market as well as stay competitive, are solving both single and strategic problems of development by projects. Project for organization is not only a tool for performance of complex processes but also allows organizations to create new strategies. In order to implement projects, teams are being created that have the same vision of common activity towards common goal. In order to implement project goals successfully, organization needs to start from creation of more deep trust, saturation, recreation of interconnection, strengthening and development of common informational, cultural knowledge. Organization's ability to develop collaboration in different levels is a way that allows practical and rapid use of accumulated potential, consolidate necessary resources and use them purposefully for implementation of common goals, and cooperating for successful participation in global competitive struggle.

**The problem.** Despite collaboration is being discussed more than 50 years already and problems related to collaboration have been analysed by foreign and Lithuanian scientists. Christauskas (2005), Smergeliene (2007), Kontautiene (2006) analysed the collaboration between employees of education institutions, Pumputis (2001), Raisiene (2007), Puskorius (2006), Black *et. al.* (2002) analysed inter-organizational collaboration, Gray (1989) and John-Steiner, Weber & Minnis (1998) developed the process of collaboration, Soller (2001), Swan, Shen & Hiltz (2006), Ostlund (2008) and Austin (2000)

revealed learning contexts of collaboration, Montiel-Overall (2005) proposed models that can guide the development of collaboration. The literature analysis shows that the concept of collaboration can be developed in *the process* (Gray, 1989; Friend & Cook, 1992; Jenni & Mauriel, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978; Schrage, 1990; Lieberman, 1986; John-Steiner, Weber & Minnis, 1998; Wood & Gray, 1991; Million & Vare, 1997; *et al.*), or in the *relations context* in the organization (Inger, 1993; Crow, 1998; Friend & Cook, 2000; Montiel-Overall, 2005; Drucker, 1999; Senge, 1990; Bruffee, 1999; Henneman *et al.*, 1995; Dipardo, 1997; Black *et al.*, 2002; *et al.*). However, there is a lack of unified definition of collaboration and understanding of collaboration process as well as determinants of collaboration in the project-based organization has been poorly investigated up to now.

The main purpose of the paper is to identify the determinants of collaboration in project teams.

Theoretical findings of collaboration are based on systematic and comparative analysis of the scientific literature.

## 2. Development of the Theoretical Background

Before the development of the elements of collaboration and interest within the project team, it is important to introduce theoretical aspects of the literature. In this part the review of collaboration philosophy is presented and its applicability to project team is based.

### The Philosophy of Collaboration

The concept of the collaboration, as many of scientists define, is a relationship between two or more parties who work together towards common goals. It is similar to team work. However collaboration is much more than working together, it is a philosophy. There are very different definitions of collaboration in the scientific literature. The concepts of collaboration are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Concepts of Collaboration

Author	Concept of Collaboration
Kukulka-Hulme, 2004	Collaboration is a „philosophy of interaction“, which has the main assumption in formation of consensus. Collaboration creates a shared meaning about processes, products or even events. There is nothing routine about it. Something is there that was not there before.
Mattessich & Monsey, 1992	Collaboration is a mutual benefit and well defined interrelationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals
John-Steiner, Weber & Minnis, 1998	Collaboration is a commitment to shared resources, power and talent: no individual's point of view dominates, but in decision making the influence depends on all group and work product reflects combination of contribution of all members and that base of collaboration constitutes of complementary areas of competencies.
D'Amor & <i>et al.</i> , 2003	Collaboration in structuring of collective action is based on sharing of information and common decision making.
Gray, 1989	Collaboration is a process during which parties envisage different aspects of the problem, can constructively examine their differences and search for decisions by trespassing own limited vision.
Schrage, 1990	Collaboration is a process of shared creation: two or more persons with complementary skills and abilities interacting to create a shared understanding that none had previously possessed working individually.
Bruce & Ricketts, 2008	Collaboration is a social process the success of which depends on effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in final result of process participants, and lack of communication knowledge and absence of motivation may become an interference.
Dettmer <i>et al.</i> , 1999	The base of collaboration constitutes of communication (contact), cooperation, coordination.
Tereseviciene & Gedviliene, 1999	Collaboration is cooperation in striving for common goal, a social link of people, which appears while working together.
Heide, 1994; Lawrence <i>et al.</i> , 1999; Phillips, <i>et al.</i> , 2000	Collaboration is like cooperation, inter-organizational relationship, when there is a constant negotiation in communication process and this is related neither to market nor to mechanism of hierarchical control.

Collaboration concept analysis shows that many authors (Gray, 1989; Schrage, 1990; Bruce & Ricketts, 2008; *et al.*) are talking about collaboration as process. However, it is stated that this process is complex enough and hardly achievable.

Collaboration process consists of four stages: *negotiating environment*, *environment of interests*, *implementation and evaluation of the result*. Characterization of common problem, finding of consensus on solutions to common problems, identification of parts interested and creation of their groups, acknowledgement of legitimacy of other participants and election of the member liable for invitation of all parties for general meeting are the main issues in the stage of *negotiating environment*. A stage of *environment of interests* is focused on identification of different parts' interests and ascertaining if and how these interests will differ from others. During this stage it is very important to create the main rules, set an agenda of meeting, present common information and facts, establish strategy and determine the results expected, create business plan and foresee the resources.

During the stage of *implementation*, parts interested communicate, a structure of implementation of collaboration is being determined, and agreements are being controlled and guaranteed. The results of collaboration are being analyzed and evaluated during the last stage of the process.

Beyond the process, collaboration reveals a relationship concept as well. In organization that chooses to develop a collaboration strategy, every member of organization has to be able to feel collaboration duty.

The existing collaboration literature highlights various factors of collaboration based on relationships in organization. The most important factors of collaboration based on relationships are trust (Montiel-Overall, 2005); reciprocity (Crow, 1998); congeniality (Inger, 1993); interaction between coequal parties (Friend & Cook 2000; Montiel-Overall, 2005); information sharing, shared vision (Drucker, 1999; Senge, 1990; Bruffee, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978; John-Steiner, Weber & Minnis, 1998; Black *et al.*, 2002); joint construction of knowledge (Million & Vare, 1997); complementarity of skills, efforts and roles (John-Steiner, Weber & Minnis, 1998); teaming, (Katenbach & Smith, 2001); creating new value together (Kanter, 1996).

In scientific literature, one more problem was noticed that is related to definition of collaboration. In scientific literature the term of collaboration often is confounded with other terms describing organizational relationship such as corporation, coordination or even up with communication. Atkinson & Kensler (2004), Brown & Keast (2003) also highlight that in many cases "collaboration" is used intuitively, often alternately with other terms as coordination, cooperation, communication, partnership and so on. The concepts of collaboration are presented in Table 1. Every term describing organizational relationship has individual characteristics determining specific results and different interpretations of concepts may have unacceptable consequences (D'Amor *et al.*, 2004; Brown & Keast, 2003).

**Table 2.** Concepts related to collaboration

Organizational relationship	Attribute
<b>Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• very high trust level;</li> <li>• thorough sharing of resources, risk, responsibility and reward;</li> <li>• formal relationship;</li> <li>• extensive time commitment.</li> </ul>
<b>Cooperation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high trust level;</li> <li>• average extent of mutual sharing of resources, partial sharing of risk, responsibility and reward;</li> <li>• formal and informal relationships;</li> <li>• substantial time commitment.</li> </ul>
<b>Coordination</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• average trust level;</li> <li>• none or minimal need for mutual sharing of resources;</li> <li>• formal relationships;</li> <li>• moderate time commitment.</li> </ul>

<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high trust level,</li> <li>• no necessity for mutual sharing of resources;</li> <li>• informal relationship;</li> <li>• minimal time commitment.</li> </ul>
<b>Partnership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• low risk;</li> <li>• defined but biased sharing of roles and responsibility, limited commitments, limited investment (use) of resources to support participants</li> <li>• formal relationship</li> </ul>

Table 2 presents distinctive features of the concepts related to collaboration which allow defining every organizational relationship separately. Collaboration is clearly distinguishing from other terms describing organizational relationship. The analysis of concepts related to collaboration allows to identify three core features: very high trust, thorough sharing of resources and extensive time.

### Project Team

The organizations, striving to be competitive, to work efficiently in conditions of constant development as well as to implement changes in the organization and to tackle arising problems, are supported by projects that are realized by teams. Teams are the groups of employees working towards a common goal. A team is defined as “an interdependent collection of individuals who work together towards a common goal and who share responsibility for specific outcomes of their organizations” (Sundstrom, DeMeuse & Futrell, 1990). Project team is a team responsible for the project activities from planning to execution of the project, whose members usually belong to different functions and are assigned to activities for the same project. For the most part, project team tasks are non-repetitive in nature and involve considerable application of knowledge, judgment and expertise, as project is a temporary activity to produce a new product or service. Human resources of the organization, which implements more than one project, are devoted from one project to another successively or simultaneously. This forces to coordinate supply and demand of employees and adapt resources available for the best use at the same time (Stulgiene & Ciutiene, 2012). Therefore most project teams require involvement from more than one department. Project teams can be classified as cross functional team. Therefore, there is required a collaboration not only between project teams but also in the entire organization. Because project teams need to have the right combination of skills, abilities and personality types to achieve project goals, collaboration is needed, as collaboration gives possibility to thorough sharing of information, knowledge experience, tackling problems and search for common decision of problems, help each other. Every member of the team has to understand that working together towards a common goal by connecting intellectual strength, an efficient way of interaction to transfer “*know how*” between team members is a base to contribute the finish of successful project.

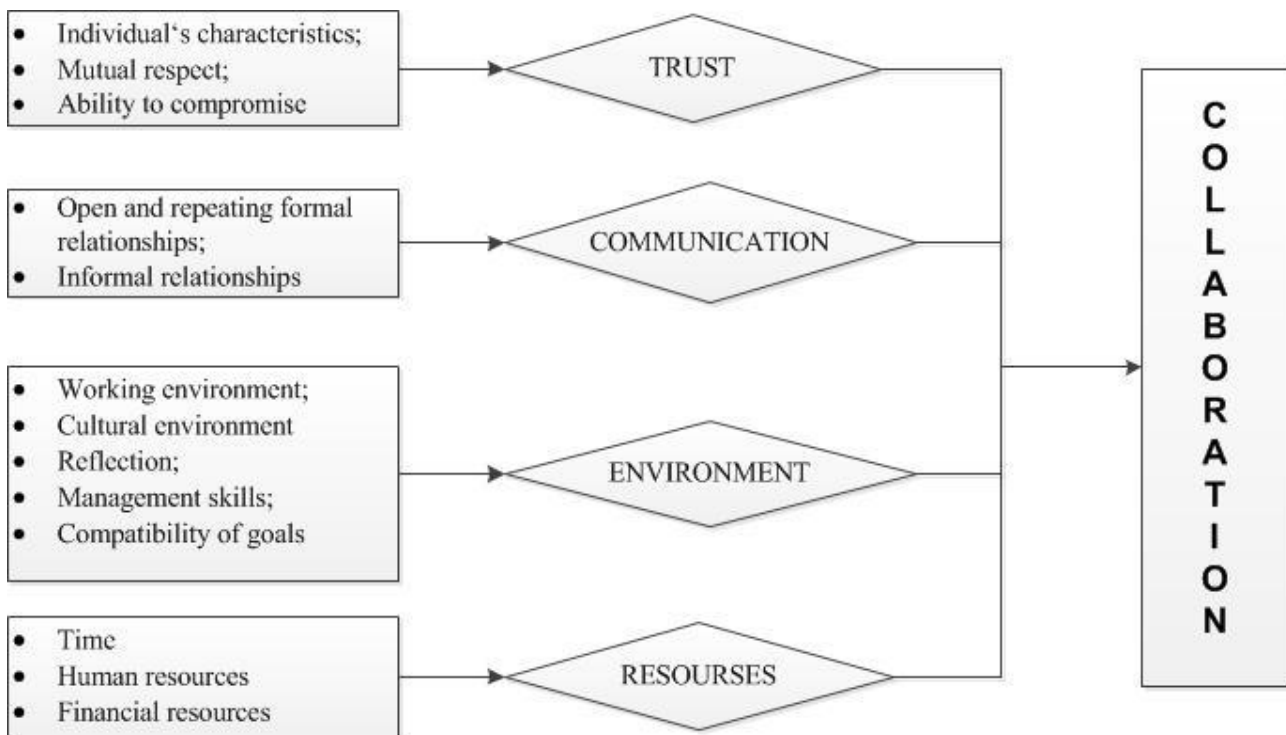
Organizations striving for collaboration have to take into account the main elements of collaboration that determine not only the success of the project team but the success of entire organization as well.

## 3. Results

### Determinants of Project Team of Collaboration

The section two provided literature review on variety of perspectives about collaboration. This section discusses aforementioned issues in order to identify determinant of collaboration.

In the scientific literature, many characteristics describing collaboration could be found. Performed analysis of collaboration concept revealed that the main characteristics describing collaboration that have been identified as success determinants of project team of collaboration are trust, communication, environment and resources. The determinants of collaboration are presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Determinants of collaboration

When thinking appears in collaboration, it is related together with strong trust and is based on fairness and integrity of associates. The researches performed in the area of collaboration (Black *et al.*, 2002) revealed that trust plays the main role for knowledge and efficiency of information sharing in organizational relationship and organization's learning. Dipardo (1997) studied how trust influences successful collaboration teams and ascertained that team members need time to investigate each other's thinking in order to determine sort of trust that will allow ascertaining of contention possibility. Many authors acknowledge trust as the most meaningful element of collaboration.

Trust in a broad sense is described as belief when the person to whom there was an agreement will perform his/her duty as promised (da Costa, 1995). Others envisage that the trust is developing during the particular time as well as individual who learns how to create relationship without trespassing ethical boundaries („an ethic of caring“) (Noddings, 1992), mutual respect and completion of work promised by participants of a collaborative endeavour. Trust is one of the fundamental ingredients of any successful relationship. Trust is especially important in high-risk projects that could affect the very survival of organization. Leadership, which can come from any team member, plays an important role in facilitating trust, mutual respect and understanding of the project goals. Without trust, project team can find itself spending all their time battling one another rather than getting work done.

The collaboration is one of key factors of the project success. Project will be at a risk due to poor communication of project team. Lack of critical information, misinterpretation of information and unclear orders are the main reasons of poor communication. Lack of communication creates situations where project errors can occur. These errors have the potential to cause serious reasons for project failure. However, effective communication among team members is crucial to successful collaboration in project (Abramson & Mizrahi, 1996; Fagin, 1992). Effective communication within project teams can improve trust and confidence between team members. Communication is the main value of organization both inside and outside, and creates a possibility to work together. By the means of communication all interested persons, who are familiar with project requirements and project development, are involved in project management, and these communication channels have to be open during all the phases of the project lifecycle. Obviously, that project teams often have a different type of membership. For decision-making tasks, diversity in group or team membership – both inherent (age, ethnicity, gender, etc.) and role-related (occupation, status) – increases the

number of solutions offered and alternatives considered in meetings (Maznevski, 1994). Team meetings are a critical aspect of project team functioning, and effective communication between all members is needed, but often lacking (Cooley, 1994; Gage, 1998). However, when there is clear communication and relationship between project team members and parts interested, then harmony will be secured in the practice of project management. Communication of project team can be performed in following ways: one-to-many; one-to-one; many-to-one; written and formal; written and informal; oral and formal; oral and informal; nonverbal gestures (Badiru, 2007).

Efficient communication of the team is one of the means to reach project's success because inefficient communication determines misunderstandings, destructive conflicts, complaints and low working efficiency.

The literature review shows that effective teams are characterized by common purpose and intent, trust, respect, and collaboration. Team members value familiarity over formality and watch out for each other to make sure mistakes are not made. Project teams that do not trust, respect, share knowledge and collaborate with one another are more likely to make a mistake that could negatively impact the success of project. Success of activity of project team and entire organization also depends on both internal environment, i.e. technology, structure, culture and associates, and external environment, i.e. energy, raw materials, suppliers, economical, political and other environment. In particular period project team needs qualitatively new attitude and new endeavours. Then collaboration oriented towards sharing of resources becomes useful (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). When the team acquires some experience and knowledge (Hamel *et al.*, 1989), it needs to adapt that knowledge in own activity, but it might be lacking some resources as technical infrastructure, particular competencies, financial resources. Thus, collaboration and team work are creating the environment where the conditions for prosperity of team knowledge and skills of every team member are created. In accordance with Jensen (1999), reflection is created by different opinions, attitudes and different methods to solve problems. There is a sharing of resources also. Every member has to understand that formation of team spirit and learning to work together is a condition necessary to finish the project. Project leader has to stimulate collaboration, help team to understand that project is not responsibility of one person's, and give a possibility to every team member to contribute successful finishing of the project by collaboration. Otherwise, when groups of individuals are lacking skills of team work or collaboration, thinking stagnates and limits possibilities and ideas of decisions.

It is important to point out that fostering a team collaboration environment may have hurdles to overcome: additional time; perceived loss of autonomy; lack of confidence or trust in decisions of others; clashing perceptions; territorialism; and lack of awareness of one provider of the education, knowledge, and skills held by colleagues from other disciplines and professions (Catlett, Halper, 1992). However, most of these hurdles can overcome with an open attitude and feelings of mutual respect and trust (Flin, Fletcher, McGeorge *et al.*, 2003).

#### 4. Discussion

Performed analysis of the scientific literature revealed that there is no one definition that could describe collaboration, however in the scientific studies, collaboration by its nature is connecting organizations because of common activity and interchange of information and resources. Collaboration includes not only work of project team, but all members of the organization have to be involved into collaboration. Despite collaboration is the activity that requires a lot of endeavours and organizational resources, however organizations by invoking collaboration as essential strategy of successful activity will create a synergy, additional value of interaction, there will be increased informational availability, minimized lack of organizational knowledge or information, revealed interrelationship between organization's subdivisions, use of available human and financial resources will be more optimal, positive image of the organization will be created.

Having performed theoretical review of collaboration concept, the authors of the article suggest treating the collaboration as "interaction philosophy" that includes different levels that are acting in collaboration – individual, team, organization and created relationship based on equal

rights in striving for common goal. Organizations striving for collaboration must take into account the main elements of collaboration that determine not only the success of the project team, but the success of entire organization as well. The main factors of collaboration that could be helpful for successful activity are very high trust level, open communication, environment in which the collaboration is being developed and thorough sharing of the resources.

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