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6 Working in Teams

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CONSIDERTHIS How You Speak Shows Where You Rank

Electronic Communication allows more and more writing to be done collaboratively, by teams who share information, expertise, ideas, and responsibilities. Successful collaboration brings together the best that each team member has to offer. It promotes feedback, new perspectives, group support, and the chance to test one's ideas in group discussion.

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

Our notion of a solitary engineer, scientist, or businessperson laboring in some quiet corner is quickly disappearing. For inspiration and feedback, workplace professionals collaborate with peers and coworkers—across the company, the nation, or the globe.

Various components and aspects must be considered once the [refrigerator's] size is determined. These include the compressor,...the structure of the motor that drives the compressor,...the control system,...aesthetic considerations [and so on]. The point is that various individuals work on each of the components or subsystems, and then share information as they design the entire refrigerator system. (Burghardt 209)

A team of civil engineers, ecologists, and biologists is designing new flowways and levees to transport unpolluted water into the Everglades ecosystem. Team members might work from various sites, meeting electronically to share and refine design ideas, compare research findings, and edit reports and proposals. (Boucher 32–33)

To study the effects of prolonged space travel on the human mind and body, and on plants and animals, American astronauts lived with Russian cosmonauts on the Russian space station, Mir. This was the first phase of the International Space Station, being built with the collaboration of 15 countries. This ambitious project requires experts worldwide to collaborate on problems in designing, building, staffing, and operating a multi-national space station ("From Mir to Mars").

Uniting each of these projects are the countless documents that must be produced: proposals, specifications, progress reports, feasibility reports, operating manuals, and so on. And, like other project assignments, the related documents are completed jointly.

Not all members of a collaborative team do the actual "writing"; the refrigerator *Owner's Manual*, for instance, is produced by writers, engineers, graphic artists, editors, reviewers, marketing personnel, and lawyers (Debs, "Recent

Research" 477). Others might research, edit, proofread, or test the document's *usability* (Chapter 16).

THE ROLE OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

The previous examples of collaboration all rely on one attribute: *teamwork*, a cooperative effort toward a shared goal. But to interact as a cohesive unit, a team needs to agree on what its goals are and on what process it will use to achieve them. This is where project management comes in.

A *project*, simply stated, is an organized effort to get something done. Whether it's a college research paper or the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, no successful project unfolds haphazardly; instead, it needs to be managed in a systematic way—especially when a team is involved. The following guidelines explain how to capitalize on a team's strength by establishing a shared sense of purpose and direction.

SOURCES OF CONFLICT IN COLLABORATIVE GROUPS

Workplace surveys show that people view meetings as "their biggest waste of time" (Schrage 232). This fact alone accounts for the boredom, impatience, or irritability that might crop up in any meeting. But even the most dynamic group setting can produce conflict because of differences like the following.

Interpersonal Differences

People might clash because of differences in personality, working style, commitment, standards, or ability to take criticism. Some might disagree about exactly what or how much the group should accomplish, who should do what, or who should have the final say. Some might feel intimidated or hesitant to speak out.¹ These interpersonal conflicts can actually worsen when the group interacts exclusively online (page 111).

Gender and Cultural Differences

Collaboration involves working with peers—those of equal status, rank, and expertise. But gender and cultural differences can cause some participants to feel less than equal.

GENDER CODES AND COMMUNICATION STYLE. Research on ways women and men communicate in

meetings indicates a gender gap. Communication specialist Kathleen Kelley-Reardon offers the following assessment of gender differences in workplace communication:

Women and men operate according to communication rules for their gender, what experts call "gender codes." They learn, for example, to show gratitude, ask for help, take control, and express emotion, deference, and commitment in different ways. (88–89)

Kelley-Reardon explains how women tend to communicate during meetings: Women are more likely to take as much time as needed to explore an issue, build consensus and relationship among members, use tact in expressing views, use care in choosing their words, consider the listener's feelings, speak softly, and allow interruptions. Women generally issue requests instead of commands (*Could I have the report by Friday?* versus *Have this ready by Friday.*) and qualify their assertions in ways that avoid offending (*I don't want to seem disagreeable here, but ...*).

One study of mixed-gender peer interaction indicates that women, in contrast to men, tend to: be agreeable, solicit and admit the merits of other opinions, ask questions, and admit uncertainty (say, with qualifiers such as *maybe*, *probably*, *it seems as if*) (Wojahn 747).

None of these traits is gender specific. People of either gender can be soft-spoken and reflective. But such traits often attach to the "feminine" stereotype. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, for example, recalls the difficulty of getting male colleagues to pay attention to what she had to say (Hugenberg, LaCivita, and Lubanwia 215).

ovic 215).

Any woman who breaches the gender code, say, by being assertive, may be seen as "too controlling" (Kelley-Reardon 6). Studies suggest women have less freedom than male peers to alter their communication strategies: less assertive males often are still considered persuasive, whereas more assertive females often are not (Perloff 273). In the words of one researcher, fitting into the workplace culture requires that women decide "to be quiet and popular, or speak out, and not be accepted" (Jones 50).

As one consequence of these gender differences, males tend "to become leaders of task-oriented groups, whereas women emerge as social leaders more frequently than men" (Dillard, Solomon, and Samp 709).

Entrenched attitudes about gender in the U.S. workplace do appear to be changing: Ratings by peers, subordinates, and bosses indicate that women excel in a variety of interpersonal areas such as motivating others, listening to others, being flexible, keeping people informed, coaching, and team building. Not only are such "people skills" now being recognized as legitimate business skills, but they are also in high demand at a time in which teamwork is more and more essential (Sharpe 75+). As a result, books,² seminars, and training programs in "qualities typically associated with women" are becoming increasingly popular among male managers (Gogoi 84).

NOTE Despite apparent changes in U.S. attitudes, negative views toward women in the workplace persist in many cultures. Surveys show that female executives in U.S. company branches outside this country continue to be underrepresented ("The Big Picture" 14).

CULTURAL CODES AND COMMUNICATION STYLE.

International business expert David A. Victor describes cultural codes that influence interaction in group settings:

- Some cultures value silence more than speech, intuition and ambiguity more than hard evidence or data, politeness, and personal relationships more than business relationships (145–46).
- Cultures differ in their perceptions of time. Some are "all business" and in a big rush; others take as long as needed to weigh the issues, engage in small talk and digressions, chat about family, health, and other personal matters (233).
- Cultures differ in willingness to express disagreement, question or be questioned, leave things unstated, touch, shake hands, kiss, hug, or backslap (209–11).
- Direct eye contact is not always a good indicator of listening. In some cultures it is offensive. Other eye movements, such as squinting, closing the eyes, staring away, staring at legs or other body parts, are acceptable in some cultures but insulting in others (206).

For detailed and up-to-date information about any of 181 cultures around the world, go to *Culturgrams* at </www.culturgrams.com>. Here you can access "free country pages" or, for a modest fee, purchase a full report on a particular country.

MANAGING GROUP CONFLICT

No team can afford to assume that all members share one viewpoint, one communication style, one approach to problem solving. Conflicts must be expressed and addressed openly. Pointing out that "conflict can be good for an organization— as long as it's resolved quickly," management expert David House offers these strategies for overcoming personal differences (Warshaw 48):

- Give everyone a chance to be heard.
- Take everyone's feelings and opinions seriously.
- Don't be afraid to disagree.
- Offer and accept constructive criticism.
- Find points of agreement with others who hold different views.
- When the group does make a decision, support it fully.

Business etiquette expert Ann Marie Sabath offers these additional suggestions for maintaining civility during meetings (108–10):

- If someone is overly aggressive or insists on wandering off track, respond politely and try to acknowledge valid and constructive reasons for this person's behavior: "I understand your concern or frustration about this, and it's probably something we should look at more closely." If you think the point might have some value, suggest a later meeting: "Why don't we take some time to think about this and schedule another meeting to discuss it?"
- Never attack or point the finger by using "aggressive 'you' talk": "You should," "You haven't," or "You need to realize," for example, imply blame, and only increase animosity. See page 252 for ways to avoid a blaming tone.

Ultimately, collaboration requires compromise and consensus: In order for people with different views to reach agreement, each person has to be willing to give a little. Before any meeting, review the persuasion guidelines on page 66, and try really *listening* to what other people have to say.

OVERCOMING DIFFERENCES BY ACTIVE LISTENING

Listening is key to getting along, building relationships, and learning. Information expert Keith Devlin points out that "managers get around two-thirds of their knowledge from face-to-face meetings or telephone conversations and only one-third from documents and computers" (163). In a recent manager survey, the ability to listen was ranked second (after the ability to follow instructions) among thirteen communication skills sought in entry-level graduates (cited in Goby and Lewis 42).

Nearly half our time communicating at work is spent listening (Pearce, Johnson, and Barker 28). But poor listening behaviors cause us to retain only a fraction of what we hear. How effective are your listening behaviors? Assess them by using the questions below.

When you communicate, are you "listening or just talking" (Bashein and Markus 37)? Many of us seem more inclined to speak, to say what's on our minds, than to listen. We often hope someone else will do the the listening. Effective listening requires *active* involvement—not just passive reception.

THINKING CREATIVELY

Today's rapidly changing workplace demands new and better ways of doing things:

More than one-fourth of U.S. companies employing more than 100 people offer some kind of creativity training to employees. (Kiely 33)

Creative thinking is especially effective in group settings, using the following techniques.

Brainstorming

When we begin working with a problem, we search for useful material: insights, facts, statistics, opinions, images—anything that sharpens our view of the problem and potential solutions ("How can we increase market share for Zappo software?"). *Brainstorming* is a technique for coming up with useful material. Its aim is to produce as many ideas as possible (on paper, screen, whiteboard, or the like). Although brainstorming can be done individually, it is especially effective in a group setting.

- 1. Choose a quiet setting and agree on a time limit.
- 2. Decide on a clear and specific goal for the session. For instance, "We need at least five good ideas about why we are losing top employees to other companies."
- 3. Focus on the issue or problem.
- 4. As ideas begin to flow, record every one. Don't stop to judge relevance or worth and don't worry about spelling or grammar.
- 5. If ideas are still flowing at session's end, keep going.

- 6. Take a break.
- 7. *Now confront your list*. Strike out what is useless and sort the remainder into categories. Include any new ideas that pop up.

Because of intimidation, groupthink, and other social pressures (page 75), group brainstorming often fails to achieve its "nonjudgmental ideal" (Kiely 34). Lower-status members, for instance, might feel reluctant to express their ideas or criticize others.

Brainstorming online, using email or asynchronous "chat" software, can relieve social pressure on participants. Some software allows participants to create pseudonyms and mask their identities.

BRAINWRITING

An alternative to brainstorming, *brainwriting*, enables group members to record their ideas—anonymously—on slips of paper or on a networked computer file. Ideas are then exchanged or posted on a large screen for comment and refinement by other members (Kiely 35).

Mind-Mapping

A more structured version of brainstorming, *mind-mapping* (Figure 6.4A) helps visualize relationships. Group members begin by drawing a circle around the main issue or concept, centered on the paper or whiteboard. Related ideas are then added, each in its own box, connected to the circle by a ruled line (or "branch"). Other branches are then added, as lines to some other distinct geometric shape containing supporting ideas. Unlike a traditional outline, a mind-map does not require sequential thinking: as each idea pops up, it is connected to related ideas by its own branch. Mind-mapping software such as *Mindjet* automates this process of visual thinking.

A simplified form of mind-mapping is the *tree diagram* (Figure 6.4B), in which major topic, minor topics, and subtopics are connected by branches that indicate their relationships. Page 120 shows a sample tree diagram for a research project.

Storyboarding

A technique for visualizing the shape of an entire process (or a document) is *story-boarding* (Figure 6.4C). Group members write each idea and sketch each visual on a large index card. Cards are then displayed on a wall or bulletin board so that

others can comment or add, delete, refine, or reshuffle ideas, topics, and visuals (Kiely 35–36). Page 231 shows a final storyboard for a long report.

REVIEWING AND EDITING OTHERS' WORK

Documents produced collaboratively are reviewed and edited extensively. *Reviewing* means evaluating how well a document connects with its intended audience and meets its intended purpose. Reviewers typically examine a document for these specific qualities:

- accurate, appropriate, useful, and legal content
- material organized for the reader's understanding
- clear, easy to read, and engaging style
- effective visuals and page design
- a document that is safe, dependable, and easy to use

In reviewing, you explain to the writer how you respond as a reader. This commentary helps a writer think about ways of revising. Criteria for reviewing various documents appear in checklists throughout this book. (See also Chapter 16, on Usability).

Editing means actually "fixing" the piece by making it more precise and readable. Editors typically suggest improvements like these:

- rephrasing or reorganizing sentences
- clarifying a topic sentence
- choosing a better word or phrase
- correcting spelling, usage, or punctuation, and so on

Criteria for editing appear in Chapter 13 and Appendix C.

NOTE *Your job as a reviewer or editor is to help clarify and enhance a document—but without altering its intended meaning.*

FACE-TO-FACE VERSUS ELECTRONICALLY MEDIATED COLLABORATION

Should groups meet in the same physical space or in virtual space? Face-to-face collaboration seems preferable when people don't know each other, when the issue is sensitive or

controversial, or when people need to interact on a personal level (Munter 81).

Electronically mediated (virtual) collaboration is preferable when people are in different locations, have different schedules, or when it is important to avoid personality clashes, to encourage shy participants, or to prevent intimidation by dominant participants (Munter 81, 83).

Here are some technologies that erase distance and enable people to work together in the same virtual space:

- basic email, for exchanging ideas as schedules permit
- *text messaging and chat systems,* for communicating in real time
- groupware, for group authoring and editing
- *digital whiteboard*, a large screen that allows participants to write, sketch, and erase in real time, from their own computers
- *Web conferencing*, using a password-protected site or company intranet
- *teleconferencing*, using speakerphones.
- *videoconferencing*, for live online meetings in which participants at different sites can see each other

Research indicates that electronic meetings are more productive than face-to-face meetings (Tullar, Kaiser, and Balthazard 54). Written ideas can be more carefully considered and expressed, and they provide a durable record for feedback and reference. On the negative side, equipment crashes are disruptive. And the lack of personal contact (say, a friendly grin or handshake or small talk) makes it hard for trust to develop. Even worse, opposing but anonymous participants might engage in open hostility, as in email flaming (Clark, "Teaching" 49–50).

Some experts argue that computer-based meeting tools eliminate equality issues that crop up in face-to-face meetings. Thus, some people feel more secure about saying "what they really think" (Matson, "The Seven Sins" 30). Also, "status cues" such as age, gender, appearance, or ethnicity are invisible online (Wojahn 747–48).

NOTE Many cultures value the social (or relationship) function of communication as much as its informative function (Archee 41). Therefore, a recipient might consider certain communications media more appropriate than others, preferring, say, a phone conversation to text messaging or email.

ETHICAL ABUSES IN WORKPLACE COLLABORATION

Our "lean" and "downsized" corporate world spells fierce competition among coworkers, often creating this dilemma: Many companies send mixed signals...saying they value teamwork while still rewarding individual stars, so that nobody has any real incentive to share the glory. (Fisher, "My Team Leader" 291)

The resulting mistrust interferes with genuine teamwork and promotes the following kinds of unethical behavior.

Intimidating One's Peers

A dominant personality may intimidate peers into silence or agreement (Matson, "The Seven Sins" 30). Intimidated employees resort to "mimicking"—merely repeating what the boss says (Haskin, "Meetings without Walls" 55).

Claiming Credit for Others' Work

Workplace plagiarism occurs when the team or project leader claims all the credit. Even with good intentions, "the person who speaks for a team often gets the credit, not the people who had the ideas or did the work" (Nakache 287–88). Team expert James Stern describes one strategy for avoiding plagiarism among coworkers:

Some companies list "core" and "contributing" team members, to distinguish those who did most of the heavy lifting from those who were less involved. (qtd. in Fisher, "My Team Leader" 291)

Stern advises groups to decide beforehand—and in writing what credit will be given for which contributions.

Hoarding Information

Surveys reveal that the biggest obstacle to workplace collaboration is people's "tendency to hoard their own knowhow" (Cole-Gomolski 6) when confronted with questions like these:

- Whom do we contact for what?
- Where do we get the best price, the quickest repair, the most dependable service?
- What's the best way to do X?

Despite all the technology available for information sharing, fewer than 10 percent of companies succeed in persuading employees to share ideas on a routine basis (Koudsi 233).

People hoard information when they think it gives them power or self-importance, or when having exclusive knowledge might provide job security (Devlin 179). In a worse case, they withhold information in order to sabotage peers.

EXERCISES

- 1. Describe the role of collaboration in a company, organization, or campus group where you have worked or volunteered. Among the questions: What types of projects require collaboration? How are teams organized? Who manages the projects? How are meetings conducted? Who runs the meetings? How is conflict managed? Summarize your findings in a one- or two-page memo. *Hint:* If you have no direct experience, interview a group representative, say a school administrator or faculty member or editor of the campus newspaper. (See page 151 for interview guidelines.)
- 2. On the Web, examine the role of global collaboration in building the International Space Station. Summarize your findings in a memo to be shared with the class. Trace the sequence of links you followed to reach your material, and cite each source.

Hint: You might begin by exploring the Personal Space link at <www.nasa.gov> for profiles of

the people behind the Space Station. Also explore the International Space Station link at <www.pbs.org>.

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

- 1. Gender Differences: Divide into small groups
 - of mixed genders. Review pages 101–04 and 113–14. Then test the hypothesis that women and men communicate differently in the workplace.

Each group member prepares the following brief messages—without consulting with other members:

- A thank-you note to a coworker who has done you a favor.
- A note asking a coworker for help with a problem or project.
- A note asking a collaborative peer to be more cooperative or to stop interrupting or complaining.
- A note expressing impatience, frustration, confusion, or satisfaction to members of your group.
- A recommendation for a friend who is applying for a position with your company.
- A note offering support to a good friend and coworker.
- A note to a new colleague, welcoming this person to the company.
- A request for a raise, based on your hard work.
- ^{*c*} The meeting is out of hand, so you decide to take control. Write what you would say.
- ^{*c*} Some members of your group are dragging their feet on a project. Write what you would say.

As a group, compare messages, draw conclusions about the original hypothesis, and appoint one member to present findings to the class.

2. As an "observer" (page 99), keep a journal during a collaborative project, noting what succeeded and what did not, what interpersonal conflicts developed and how they were resolved, what other issues contributed to progress or delay, the role and effectiveness of electronic tools, and so on. In a memo report to classmates and instructor, summarize the achievements and setbacks in your project and recommend improvements.

Avoid attacking, blaming, or offending anyone. Offer constructive suggestions for improving collaborative work *in general*.

3. *Listening Competence:* Use the questions on page 106 to:

- a. assess the listening behaviors of one member in your group during collaborative work,
- b. have some other member assess your behaviors, and
- c. do a self-assessment.

Record the findings and compare each selfassessment with the corresponding outside assessment. Discuss findings with the class.

4. Use your listserv (or email instant messaging network) to confer electronically on all phases of the collaborative project, including peer review (page 109) and usability testing (Chapter 16).

When your project is complete, write an explanation telling how electronic conferencing eased or hampered the group's efforts and how it improved or detracted from the overall quality of your document.

- 5. Form teams of three to six people and draw up a one-page set of guidelines, or ground rules (in memo form), for helping your team meetings run efficiently and with minimum conflict. Supplement material from this chapter with ideas from your own group brainstorming. Compare your memo with those from other groups.
- 6. Hold two brainstorming sessions for Exercise 5: one face-to-face and one via email. Decide on the benefits and drawbacks of each version and record your findings in a memo to be shared with the class.
- 7. Web pages from The Writer's Block <www. writersblock.ca/spring95/team.htm> describe the relationship between writers and editors in the workplace. Prepare a one-page summary of this information, in your own words, for class discussion. (Page 199 offers guidelines for summarizing.) Attach copies of relevant Web pages to your summary.

SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT

Plan a group visit to one of the agencies or organizations your class is working with. Include in your planning document instructions detailing who will be in charge of notetaking, leading interviews or conversations, research, and photographing the site. Review and edit the planning document until all of your team members feel comfortable and knowledgeable about their role in the agency visit.

The power of collaboration Companywide collaboration to design a new refrigerator Nationwide collaboration to restore the Everglades Worldwide collaboration to build the International Space Station **6.1**

Read "Does the File Cabinet Have a Sex Life?" at <www.ablongman.com/ lannonweb> How a collaborative document is produced

GUIDELINES for Managing a Collaborative Project*

- 1. *Appoint a group manager*. The manager assigns tasks, enforces deadlines, conducts meetings and keeps them on track, consults with supervisors, and generally "runs the show."
- 2. *Define a clear and definite goal.* Compose a purpose statement (page 42) that spells out the project's goal and the group's plan for achieving it. Be sure each member understands the goal.

- 3. *Decide on the type of document required.* Will this be a report, proposal, manual, brochure, or pamphlet? Are visuals and supplements (abstract, appendices, and so on) needed? Will the document be in hard copy or electronic form, or both?
- Decide how the group will be organized. Here are two possibilities:
 a. The group researches and plans together, but each person writes a different part of the document.
 - b. Some members plan and research; one person writes a complete draft; others review, edit, revise, and produce the final version.
- **NOTE** *The final version should display one consistent style throughout—as if written by one person only.*
- 5. *Divide the task.* Who will be responsible for which parts of the document or which phases of the project? Should one person alone do the final revision? Which jobs are the hardest? Who is best at doing what (writing, editing, layout, design and graphics, oral presentation)? Who will make final decisions?

NOTE Spell out—in writing—clear expectations for each team member.

- 6. *Establish a timetable.* Specific completion dates for each phase keep everyone focused on what is due, and when. Charts for planning and scheduling, as in Figure 6.1, help the team visualize the whole project and each part, along with start-up and completion dates for each phase (Horn 41, 45). See pages 312, 314 for more on Gantt charts.
- 7. *Decide on a meeting schedule and format.* How often will the group meet, and where and for how long? Who will take notes (or minutes)? Set a strict time limit for each discussion topic. Distribute copies of the meeting agenda and timetable beforehand, and stick to it. Meetings work best when each member prepares a specific contribution beforehand.
- 8. *Establish a procedure for responding to the work of other members.* Will reviewing and editing be done in writing, face-to-face, as a group, one-on-one, or online? Will this process be supervised by the project manager?
- 9. *Develop a file-naming system for various drafts*. When working with multiple drafts, it's too easy to save over a previous version and lose something important.
- 10. *Establish procedures for dealing with group problems*. How will gripes and disputes be aired (to the manager, the whole group, the offending individual)? How will disputes be resolved (by vote, the manager)? How will irrelevant discussion be avoided or curtailed? Expect some conflict but try to use it positively, and try to identify a natural peacemaker in the group.
- 11. *Select a group decision-making style beforehand.* Will decisions be made alone by the group manager or be based on group input or majority vote?
- 12. Appoint a different "observer" for each meeting. At Charles Schwab & Co., the designated observer keeps a list of what worked or didn't work during the meeting. The list is then added to that meeting's minutes (Matson, "The Seven Sins" 31).

- 13. Decide how to evaluate each member's contribution. Will the manager assess each member's performance and, in turn, be evaluated by each member? Will members evaluate each other? What are the criteria? Figure 6.2 shows one possible form for a manager's evaluation of members. Equivalent criteria for evaluating the manager include open-mindedness, ability to organize the team, fairness in assigning tasks, ability to resolve conflicts, or ability to motivate. (Members might keep a journal of personal observations for overall evaluation of the project.)
- 14. *Prepare a project management plan.* Figure 6.3 shows a sample planning form. Distribute completed copies to members.
- 15. *Submit progress reports regularly*. Progress reports (page 388) enable everyone to track activities, problems, and progress.

*Adapted from Debs, "Collaborative Writing" 38–41; Hill-Duin 45–50; Hulbert, "Developing" 53–54; McGuire 467–68; Morgan 540–41.

6.2

Learn more about using project-planning software and tools at <www.ablongman.com/ lannonweb>

FIGURE 6.1 Charts for Planning and Scheduling a Project A PERT (Program Evaluation and Review Technique) chart maps out the major activities (rectangles) and events (ovals) for a complex project. Heavy arrows indicate the *critical path* (straightest line) through the project. A Gantt chart depicts specific beginning and ending dates for each phase of the project and shows overlapping phases as well. Note that these are simplified versions; your own charts may need to include additional activities such as "updating," "usability testing," "legal checks," and so on. **6.3**

Read about a team assessment controversy at Microsoft at <www.ablongman.com/ lannonweb>

¹Adapted from Bogert and Butt 51; Burnett 533-34; Debs, 'Collaborative Writing'' 38; Hill-Duin 45-46; Nelson and Smith 61. FIGURE 6.2 Sample Form for Evaluating Team Members Any evaluation of strengths and

weaknesses should be backed up by comments that explain the ratings. A group needs to decide beforehand what constitutes "effort," "cooperation," and so on. **6.4**

For more on gender and workplace culture visit <www.ablongman.com/

lannonweb>

FIGURE 6.3 Sample Project Planning Form for Managing a Collaborative Project To manage a team project you need to (a) spell out the project goal, (b) break the entire task down into manageable steps, (c) create a climate in which people work well together, and (d) keep each phase of the project under control.

How gender codes influence communication

Collaborative writing

"Most of our writing happens in teams. Typically, our project teams (or sometimes just the Project Director) develop a detailed outline for a written product. The team then goes over it together and writing assignments are made (intentional use of the passive voice there). The assignments usually match the content areas for which team members have been responsible. The Project Director (generally me) is responsible for the introduction that describes the purpose or importance of the work and the conclusions/implications. The middle part is "technical" and I usually review those sections without getting into the details. We have a writing style that is consistent across most of our products. It takes about six months for team members to learn to write in that style. One of the biggest team writing

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challenges we have is the tendency for recent graduates to overwrite. They have learned in their academic programs to write very formally, with ponderous vocabulary and lots of passive voice. Our stuff has to get the point in a hurry."

---Paul Harder, President, mid-sized consulting company



ON THE

How cultural codes influence communication

²See, for example, Daniel P. Goleman's best-selling management book, *Emotional* Intelligence.

How to manage group conflict

Collaborative writing

"Unfortunately in my experience, whenever I've had to create documents with a team it's been a small agony. I am good at this process, but it only takes one clueless person on the team to grind the process to a halt. Usually these documentations or reports are created IN ADDITION TO your normal workload, so everyone involved is under pressure because every minute they're collaborating they're not doing the backlog of their normal workload. Then you get the weirdo or two who has a job of no timely responsibility and they find the meetings to be the high point of their careers to date, and they want to shine out and prolong the talking as much as possible, and then nothing gets done. I would much rather create these types of documents alone or with one or two sensible colleagues, and then put the shaped-up document out for review."

-Terry Vilante, Chief Financial Officer, small public relations company

How to reduce animosity

JOB... JOB...

ON THE

QUESTIONS FOR ASSESSING YOUR LISTENING BEHAVIORS

- Do I remember people's names after being introduced?
- Do I pay close attention to what is being said, or am I easily distracted?
- Do I make eye contact with the speaker, or stare off elsewhere?
- Do I actually appear interested and responsive, or bored and passive?
- Do I allow the speaker to finish, or do I interrupt?
- Do I tend to get the message straight, or misunderstand it?
- Do I remember important details from previous discussions, or forget who said what?
- Do I ask people to clarify complex ideas, or just stop listening?
- Do I know when to keep quiet, or do I insist on being heard?

Creativity is a vital asset

GUIDELINES for Active Listening*

- 1. *Don't dictate*. If you are the group moderator, don't express your view until everyone else has their chance.
- 2. *Be receptive*. Instead of resisting different views, develop a "learner's" mind-set: take it all in first, and evaluate it later.
- 3. *Keep an open mind*. Judgment stops thought (Hayakawa 42). Reserve judgment until everyone has had their say.
- 4. Be courteous. Don't smirk, roll your eyes, whisper, fidget, or wisecrack.
- 5. *Show genuine interest*. Eye contact is vital, and so is body language (nodding, smiling, leaning toward the speaker). Make it a point to remember everyone's name.
- 6. *Hear the speaker out*. Instead of "tuning out" a message you find disagreeable, allow the speaker to continue without interruption (except to ask for clarification). Delay your own questions, comments, and rebuttals until the speaker has finished. Instead of blurting out a question or comment, raise your hand and wait to be recognized.
- 7. *Focus on the message*. Instead of thinking about what you want to say next, try to get a clear understanding of the speaker's position.
- 8. *Ask for clarification.* If anything is unclear, say so: "Can you run that by me again?" To ensure accuracy, paraphrase the message: "So what you're saying is.... Is that right?" Whenever you respond, try repeating a word or phrase that the other person has just used.
- 9. *Be agreeable*. Don't turn the conversation into a contest, and don't insist on having the last word.
- 10. *Observe the 90/10 rule*. You rarely go wrong spending 90 percent of your time listening, and 10 percent speaking. President Calvin Coolidge claimed that "Nobody ever listened himself out of a job." Some historians would argue that "Silent Cal" listened himself right into the White House.

*Adapted from Armstrong 24+; Bashein and Markus 37; Cooper 78–84; Dumont and Lannon 648–51; Pearce, Johnson, and Barker 28–32; Sittenfeld 88; Smith 29.

Multiple ideas are better than one

6.5 For more on other writing processes visit <www.ablongman.com/ lannonweb> A procedure for brainstorming

Limitations of brainstorming

FIGURE 6.4 Visual Techniques for Thinking Creatively Each of these techniques helps participants develop a concrete mental image of an otherwise abstract process (i.e., the thinking process).

Collaborative writing

"My work in preparing user manuals is almost entirely collaborative. The actual process of writing takes maybe 30 percent of my time. I spend more time consulting with my information sources such as the software designers and field support people. I then meet with the publication and graphics departments to plan the manual's structure and format. As I prepare various drafts, I have to keep track of which reviewer has which draft. Because I rely on others' feedback, I circulate materials often. And so I write email memos on a regular basis. One major challenge is getting everyone involved to agree on a specific plan of action and then to stay on schedule so we can meet our publication deadline."

-Pam Herbert, technical writer, software firm



ON THE

What reviewers look for

Ways in which editors "fix" writing

GUIDELINES for Peer Reviewing and Editing

- 1. *Read the entire piece at least twice before you comment.* Develop a clear sense of the document's purpose and its intended audience. Try to visualize the document as a whole before you evaluate specific parts or features.
- 2. *Remember that mere correctness does not guarantee effectiveness.* Poor usage, punctuation, or mechanics do distract readers and harm the writer's credibility. However, a "correct" piece of writing might still contain faulty rhetorical elements (inferior content, confusing organization, or unsuitable style).
- 3. Understand the acceptable limits of editing. In the workplace, editing can range from fine-tuning to an in-depth rewrite (in which case editors are cited prominently as consulting editors or coauthors). In school, however, rewriting a piece to the extent that it ceases to belong to its author may constitute plagiarism (pages 87, 682, 684).
- 4. *Be honest but diplomatic*. Most of us are sensitive to criticism—even when it is constructive—and we all respond more favorably to encouragement. Begin with something positive before moving to material that needs improvement. Be supportive instead of judgmental.
- 5. *Always explain why something doesn't work.* Instead of "this paragraph is confusing," say "because this paragraph lacks a clear topic sentence, I had trouble discovering the main idea." (See page 379 for sample criteria.) Help the writer identify the cause of the problem.
- 6. *Focus first on the big picture*. Begin with the content and the shape of the document. Is the document appropriate for its audience and purpose? Is the supporting material relevant and convincing? Is the discussion easy to follow? Does each paragraph do its job? Then discuss specifics of style and correctness (tone, word choice, sentence structure, and so on).
- 7. *Make specific recommendations for improvements*. Write out suggestions in enough detail for the writer to know what to do. Provide brief reasons for your suggestions.
- 8. *Be aware that not all feedback has equal value*. Even professional editors can disagree. If different readers offer conflicting opinions of your own work, seek your instructor's advice.

For more on effective electronic collaboration visit <www.ablongman.com/ lannonweb> When face-to-face meetings are preferred When electronic meetings are preferred Tools for electronic collaboration Benefits and drawbacks of electronic meetings Teamwork versus survival of the fittest 6.7 For more on power dynamics in the workplace visit <www.ablongman.com/ lannonweb> How to ensure that the deserving get the credit Information people need to do their jobs

CONSIDER THIS How You Speak Shows Where You Rank*

Popular discussion of communication style in recent years has centered on differences between the sexes. The subject has been fodder for TV talk shows, corporate seminars, and bestsellers, notably Deborah Tannen's You Just Don't Understand and John Gray's Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus. But Sarah McGinty, a teaching supervisor at Harvard University's school of education, believes language style is based more on power than on gender—and that marked differences distinguish the powerful from the powerless loud and clear. As a consultant, she is often called on to help clients develop more effective communication styles. FORTUNE's Justin Martin spoke with McGinty about her ideas:

What Style of Speaking Indicates That Someone Possesses Power?

A person who feels confident and in control will speak at length, set the agenda for a conversation, stave off interruptions, argue openly, make jokes, and laugh. Such a person is more inclined to make statements, less inclined to ask questions. They are more likely to offer solutions or a program or a plan. All this creates a sense of confidence in listeners.

What about People Who Lack Power? How Do They Speak?

The power deficient drop into conversations, encourage other speakers, ask numerous questions, avoid argument, and rely on gestures such as nodding and smiling that suggest agreement. They tend to offer empathy rather than solutions. They often use unfinished sentences. Unfinished sentences are a language staple for those who lack power.

How Do You Figure Out What Style of Communication You Lean Toward?

It's quite hard to do. We're often quite ignorant about our own way of communicating. Everyone comes home at night occasionally and says, "I had that idea, but no one heard me, and everyone thinks it's Harry's idea." People like to pin that on gender and a lot of other things as well. But it's important to find out what really did happen. Maybe it was the volume of your voice, and you weren't heard. Maybe you overexplained, and the person who followed up pulled out the nugget of your thought.

But it's important to try to get some insight into what your own language habits are so that you can be analytical about whether you're shooting yourself in the foot. You can tape your side of phone calls, make a tape of a meeting, or sign up for a communications workshop. That's a great way to examine how you conduct yourself in conversations and in meetings.

Does Power Language Differ from

Company to Company?

Certainly. The key is figuring out who gets listened to within your corporate culture. That can make you a more savvy user of language. Try to sit in on a meeting as a kind of researcher, observing conversational patterns. Watch who talks, who changes the course of the discussion, who sort of drops in and out of the conversation. Then try to determine who gets noticed and why.

One very effective technique is to approach the person who ran the meeting a couple of days after the fact and ask for an overall impression. What ideas were useful? What ideas might have a shot at being implemented?

How Can You Get More Language Savvy?

You can start by avoiding bad habits, such as always seeking collaboration in the statements you make. Try to avoid "as Bob said" and "I pretty much agree with Sheila." Steer clear of disclaimers such as "I may be way off base here, but...." All these serve to undermine the impact of your statements.

The amount of space you take up can play a big part in how powerful and knowledgeable you appear. People speaking before a group, for instance, should stand with their feet a little bit apart and try to occupy as much space as possible. Another public-speaking tip: Glancing around constantly creates a situation in which nobody really feels connected to what you're saying.

Strive to be bolder. Everyone tends to worry that they will offend someone by stating a strong opinion. Be bold about ideas, tentative about people. Saying "I think you're completely wrong" is not a wise strategy. Saying "I have a plan that I think will solve these problems" is perfectly reasonable. You're not attacking people. You're being bold with an idea.

*"How You Speak Shows Where You Rank," interview by Justin Martin with Sarah McGinty, from FORTUNE,

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