



— FROM THE BLOG —
A Team Conversation Guide

Stop Asking People to Collaborate. Ask What They Need to Learn.

A facilitated conversation for leadership teams, staff, project groups,
boards, and professional learning communities

1 COLLABORATION IS NOT AUTOMATICALLY LEARNING.

People can meet regularly, exchange information, coordinate tasks, and share ideas without substantially changing what they understand or what they do.



What do our clients, students, projects, and context need us to learn?

Use this conversation guide to examine whether collaboration in your context is helping people notice more, understand more deeply, and act differently.

2 BEFORE YOU BEGIN



a current project



a recurring organizational challenge



student or client evidence



implementation of a new initiative



a decision that is not producing the results you expected

You do not need to solve the issue during this conversation. The purpose is to discover what the situation may be asking you to learn.

3 START HERE

“

What are we seeing in our work that our current understanding does not fully explain?

”

4 THINK TOGETHER



1 Where has collaboration become an activity rather than a learning process?



2 What are our clients, students, projects, evidence, or current conditions asking us to learn?



3 What might we not be seeing?



4 What happens when someone says: “I don’t know,” “I disagree,” or “I’m not sure this is working”?



5 What assumptions are shaping our current response?



6 How often does collaboration change something?

5 MOVE FROM CONVERSATION TO LEARNING



Something we are noticing differently is...



Something we still need to understand is...



A perspective or source of evidence we need to include is...



One thing we might try differently is...

6 BEFORE YOU LEAVE



What will we do?



What will we pay attention to?



When will we come back and ask what we have learned?



ONE QUESTION TO CARRY FORWARD
What does this situation need us to learn?



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Try This in Practice

Change One Question on the Agenda.

A 15–20 minute practice for turning collaboration into learning

Teams do not necessarily need another meeting. Sometimes they need a different question inside the meeting they already have. This simple practice shifts the conversation from solving to learning—so your next steps are based on better understanding.



What does this situation need us to learn?

1

BRING A REAL SITUATION

Choose a current real issue, not a hypothetical.

- Evidence not matching expectations
- A client or student need not yet understood
- An implementation challenge
- A stalled initiative
- A recurring problem
- A difficult decision

2

NOTICE BEFORE EXPLAINING

- What are we actually noticing?
- What evidence do we have?
- What surprised us?
- What does not fit our current explanation?

3

LOOK FOR WHAT YOU DO NOT KNOW

- What do we not understand yet?
- What assumption are we making?
- Whose perspective are we missing?
- What evidence would help us think differently?

4

NAME THE LEARNING DEMAND

Frame the response as a learning question, rather than a solution.

Instead of: "We need to improve communication."
→ Use: "What do we need to learn about where communication is breaking down and how people experience it?"

Instead of: "Teachers need more professional development."
→ Use: "What do we need to understand about why current practice is producing different results across classrooms?"

5

TAKE A SMALL LEARNING ACTION

What could we do that would help us learn more?

- Gather different evidence
- Talk with someone
- Test an assumption
- Try a small change
- Observe what happens
- Invite another perspective

6

BUILD THE RETURN INTO THE WORK

- What will we look for?
- What would surprise us?
- When will we return to this question?

WHEN YOU COME BACK



What did we learn?

What do we understand now that we did not understand before?

What should change because of that learning?



Collaboration is not the goal.
Better understanding. Better decisions. Better practice.



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— FROM THE BLOG —
Concept Graphic

Collaboration Is Not the Goal.

What matters is what becomes possible
because we worked together.



“
What do our clients, students,
projects, and context need us to learn?
”

COLLABORATION $\neq$ MEETINGS



What
we notice



What
we understand



What
we decide



What
we do

Better understanding. Better decisions. Better practice.



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When Does Collaboration Actually Produce Learning?

Five findings from research on leadership, workplace learning, team learning, and reflexivity



Organizations invest in collaboration because it promises better decisions, innovation, and results. But bringing people together does not guarantee learning. Current research shows that relational, motivational, cognitive, and leadership conditions shape what collaboration makes possible.

1



Leadership shapes workplace learning.

A review of 40 studies found leaders influence workplace learning through role modelling, relational support, and helping people negotiate meaning together.

Source: Hillberg Jarl (2024)

2



Team learning requires more than access to one another.

A large meta-analysis linked team learning with psychological safety, trust, team potency, and motivational, affective, and cognitive team processes.

Source: Marlow & Lacerenza (2025)

3



Reflection becomes powerful when teams can change their own work.

Team reflexivity—questioning and improving how the team works—drives outcomes. Participation-supportive leadership and psychological safety are important.

Source: Leblanc et al. (2024)

4



Leaders model whether learning is safe.

Leader humility and authenticity signal that it is okay to ask questions, admit uncertainty, and learn together—which supports informal workplace learning.

Source: Rigolizzo et al. (2022)

5



Humility can also support team reflexivity.

Leader humility is positively related to team reflexivity—especially when trust and shared leadership are present.

Source: Son & Yang (2023)



WHAT THE RESEARCH SUGGESTS



Leadership influences workplace learning.



Relational conditions matter.



Psychological safety and trust matter.



Reflection and reflexivity matter.



Collaboration creates value when working together changes what people notice, understand, decide, and do.



The question is not only whether people are collaborating.
It is what they are learning together.

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