

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.

REFERENCES

- Hillberg Jarl, F. (2024). The impact of leadership on the workplace learning of individuals and teams: A literature review and synthesis. *The Learning Organization*, 31(3), 411–439. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-11-2022-0144>
- Leblanc, P.-M., Harvey, J.-F., & Rousseau, V. (2024). A meta-analysis of team reflexivity: Antecedents, outcomes, and boundary conditions. *Human Resource Management Review*, 34(4), 101042. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmmr.2024.101042>
- Marlow, S. L., & Lacerenza, C. N. (2025). There is no end to learning, but how does it begin? A meta-analysis of the team learning pathway. *Journal of Management Studies*, 62(2), 597–631. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.13064>
- Rigolizzo, M., Zhu, Z., & Harvey, J.-F. (2022). Leader humility, leader authenticity and informal learning: How humble team leaders model everyday workplace learning. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 34(8), 691–706. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JWL-01-2022-0010>
- Son, S., & Yang, T. S. (2023). How leader humility influences team reflexivity: A team level analysis. *Team Performance Management: An International Journal*, 29(5/6), 225–241. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TPM-02-2023-0013>

