



The Ethics of Collaboration

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Upcoming Events

With [David Gleason](#)

Community Roundtable Meetings:

2nd & 4th Wednesdays, 8:30-10AM at [Bob's Chocolate Cafe](#), 1 Main St., Franconia, NH 03043

- ***The Ethics of Collaboration***, June 10 & 24
- ***Doing Well by Doing Good***, July 8 & 22

All are Open to the Public

Good Morning!

Building on May's [Conscientious Use of AI](#), we now turn to people working together and using technology to solve problems.

Homo sapiens brought down mammoths (and possibly the Neanderthals) by using tools and cooperating in groups. We survived by forming tribes and, later,

villages after agriculture emerged about 10,000 years ago. We created stories and passed down oral traditions.

Tribes were small and vulnerable. Today, by contrast, farming and trade sustain billions. U.S. life expectancy is now 79 years (73 globally, it was 30 in 1500), and most people are better fed than ever before. By those measures, we're doing well.

Zoom alone enables collaboration on a scale unmatched in history, and it's already "old tech." To the extent that we are civilized, humanity got here by working together over time. Learning, evolving (and often backsliding into cruelty), we still live far better than people did in the 13th century.

We have so much opportunity right now—and so much risk. How could we do better?

—David

Summary

Collaboration is one of humanity's great strengths. Nearly every major achievement—from scientific discovery to thriving communities—depends on people working toward shared goals. Because it involves relationships, trust, and shared responsibility, collaboration is an ethical as well as a practical activity.

We thrive when we preserve what humans have developed over millennia, adapt to change, and distribute resources more fairly.

The intentions and values of the people and systems behind collaboration matter deeply. Feeding everyone is a collective act; so is invading another country. What values, morals, and ethics guide those decisions?

Working and Creating Together

Musicians play, volunteers serve committees, and workers build bridges. You can do these things well or poorly, but you can't do them alone.

Cooperation has been critical to human survival for 50,000 years. Today, challenges requiring it arise on an almost unimaginable scale. Even so, we can usually avoid violent conflict when we are intent on creating solutions together.

On a personal level, we are interdependent. The happiest societies embrace that interconnectedness. We thrive when we team up, especially with people we love.

We need one another and a structured, governed society in order to get along. That's why the US Constitution was adopted in the first place. That's what

Core Ethical Principles of Collaboration

Effective collaboration is grounded in several fundamental values:

- Respect for each person's dignity.
- Trust – integrity and reliability.
- Fairness – equitable opportunities and treatment.
- Accountability – responsibility for actions.
- Communication & Transparency – simple truthfulness.
- Inclusion – diverse perspectives.
- Shared Responsibility – common purpose.
- Healthy Conflict – constructive disagreement.

Respect and Trust

Ethical collaboration begins with respect for everyone's dignity and sovereignty, followed by trust based on shared values. Collaborative environments emerge from there: open information sharing, acknowledgement of errors, creative risks, and reliance on one another. Trust is built with:

- Honesty
- Reliability
- Transparency
- Accountability

Failing trust, teamwork becomes inefficient and participants grow defensive.

Fairness and Recognition

Collaboration requires fairness in both participation and outcomes. People bring different skills and expertise, and ethical collaborators:

- Acknowledge contributions genuinely
- Share recognition generously
- Don't take credit for others' work
- Respect intellectual and creative contributions

Responsibility and Power

Successful collaboration requires clear accountability and defined roles, expectations, commitments, and learning from mistakes.

In collaborative settings, ethical use of power requires:

- Humility
- Fairness
- Transparency
- Encouragement of honest feedback
- Protection of dissenting viewpoints

Those with greater authority have greater ethical responsibilities.

Diversity

Diverse teams often produce better ideas because participants bring different perspectives and experiences. But it only works when paired with real inclusion and respect.

Technology and AI

Ethical collaboration requires using technology and AI transparently, responsibly and inclusively. AI is proving to be an excellent collaborator in an of itself -- [sometimes too much so](#).

Strategies for Effective Collaboration

Practice Active Listening

- Listen and understand: Focus completely on the speaker.
- Paraphrase: Summarize what the other person said.
- Soften your approach, ask gentle, open-ended questions to draw out more information.
- Use "yes, and" instead of "no, but" -- get a dialog going

Develop a Collaboration Mindset

- Shift your perspective from individual success to collective results.
- Prioritize shared goals - Focus on your team's objective rather than who gets the personal credit.
- Lead with empathy - If you need to raise an issue, explain how you or the team are affected, rather than accusing or criticizing.
- Embrace flexibility - Be willing to shift your perspective or compromise when new information is introduced.
- Competition can motivate (sports, markets) - purpose matters

Communicate with Clarity and Intent

- Be direct and concise, avoid jargon and vague language.
- Share the space: ensure everyone participates.
- When defining a task with someone be clear about deadlines, expectations, and current status of the work.

Seek Feedback and Reflect Afterwards

- Ask trusted colleagues how they perceive your collaborative style and what specific areas you can improve.
- After every project or meeting, evaluate what went well and where your contributions could have been stronger.

In Sum

The key values of collaboration are:

- Respect;
- Trust;
- Fairness;
- Accountability;
- Transparency;
- Inclusion and
- Shared responsibility

When these values guide collaboration, it becomes more than a way to achieve goals. It becomes a model for how people, organizations, and societies can work together effectively while honoring human dignity and promoting the common good.

Read More

- [*14 Companies That Love Collaboration – And Are Good At It*](#) from Purpose.jobs
- "[*The REAL Lord of the Flies*](#)" - Seth Meyers with Rutger Bregman, YouTube Short
- [*4 Essential Collaboration Skills & How to Develop Them for Workplace Success*](#) from FranklinCovey
- [*My Partner's Dependence on Chatbots Is Becoming a Problem. How Do I Tell Him?*](#) from NYT ethicist Kwame Anthony Appiah, 5/30/26

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