

Starter Kit
1e: Establishing Team Leadership

Navigating the Roadmap

Activity 1: Build a genuine, collaborative policy team.

Introduction

Successful justice system collaboration depends on effective leadership. While much has been written about the composition of a collaborative team and its role *as a whole* in carrying out the mutually established vision, mission, and goals for criminal justice system improvements in a local community, there has been less emphasis on the leadership of these teams. And yet, the critical role of the team leader is undeniable. Indeed, when Carl Larson and Frank LaFasto (1989) studied the work of groups from fields as diverse as business, sports, community development, and public health in order to determine what makes teams succeed, the presence of leadership was among the most important characteristics of effective teams.

Collaborative leadership is different from management leadership of an agency. We typically think of leadership in the context of managing an agency. In the criminal justice world, the jail administrator, chief judge, director of a public defender's office, elected prosecutor, community corrections director or probation chief, sheriff, and human services director are the *positional or hierarchical* leaders. They manage agencies that provide key functions in the justice system. However, qualities long associated with top management of an agency (e.g., being fair, efficient, consistent) are not necessarily the same qualities needed to lead a collaborative team.

Common qualities of effective collaborative leaders include the following:¹

- **Willing to take risks.** Great leaders are dissatisfied with the status quo and “business as usual.” They are willing to take risks because they understand that the benefits of success outweigh the setbacks that may be encountered on the way.
- **Eager listeners.** Collaborative leaders are open to all viewpoints; they seek input of all kinds and from all places. It shapes their thinking, and they expect that fresh ideas and varying points of view will have a similar impact on other members of the EBDM team.
- **Passionate.** One of the most important characteristics of a collaborative leader is a highly visible passion for the cause. As Larson and LaFasto wrote, “Their visions or intentions are compelling and pull people toward them. Intensity coupled with commitment is magnetic.”²

¹ Carter, 2006.

² Larson & LaFasto, 1989.

- **Optimistic.** Great leaders are effective, at least in part, because of their attitude. They believe in the possible, and they encourage that optimism among all members of the policy team as well as among the managers and staff of the criminal justice agencies that will implement evidence-based improvements in policy and practice.
- **Able to share knowledge, power, and credit.** Effective leaders are not concerned with garnering individual recognition for their work; instead, they choose to acknowledge the achievements of others and emphasize the success of the group over the success of specific individuals.
- **Garner the respect and trust of team members** and have no hidden agendas.
- **Have adequate time** to serve as the collaborative leader of the policy team and complete the required tasks of team chair.

Defining Collaborative Leadership

In their work *Collaborative Leadership*, David Chrislip and Carl Larson describe collaborative leadership in the following way:

“[Positional] leaders are those who articulate a vision, inspire people to act, and focus on concrete problems and results. [But] collaboration needs a different kind of leadership; it needs leaders who can safeguard the process, facilitate interaction, and patiently deal with high levels of frustration. Collaboration works when...leaders...keep the process going.”

–Chrislip & Larson, 1994, p. 42.

In addition, effective leaders possess an important skill set that serves to facilitate and support the collaborative process. Common skills of effective collaborative leaders include the following:³

- **Political and substantive knowledge and skills.** Effective leaders have sufficient expertise to a) assist with the identification of the key officials who will serve on the team, b) ensure that the vision, mission, and goals of the group are clearly defined, c) negotiate relationships and sensitive issues, and d) secure external support for the team’s work.

Specific actions leaders may take towards these ends include

- ensuring that the team is balanced in membership and includes all those who have a vested interest in the outcome of the work, whether they are initially on board or not.
- taking the initiative to expand their substantive knowledge of evidence-based practice literature so that they are able to guide and support the team’s work. While leaders may appropriately defer to the expertise of team members, they do not neglect their need to be knowledgeable.
- developing a keen understanding of the interests at stake—those who support the team’s vision, mission, and goals, and those who don’t and why—and devising strategies to advocate for and garner cooperation and resources from outside of the team.

³ Carter, 2006.

- **Interpersonal knowledge and skills:** Good leaders have the ability to work effectively with others. Key skill areas are consensus building, conflict management, the ability to build trust, and the ability to “read” individuals’ needs and to manage their strengths. Specific actions include
 - communicating their personal belief in the power of the collaborative process;
 - communicating their personal commitment to the team and its work;
 - demonstrating respect for the team as a whole and for its individual members;
 - modeling the standards for individual and group interaction and behavior;
 - consistently following through with commitments;
 - sharing control of the team process, decision-making, and work;
 - identifying the unique contributions of each team member and drawing upon these routinely;
 - seizing the opportunity of conflict to surface and resolve hidden disagreements;
 - developing and encouraging leadership qualities in other team members; and
 - sharing opportunities to demonstrate leadership.

- **Process knowledge and skills:** Effective leaders are also skilled in collaborative team management. This involves the ability to organize the team’s work activities and discussions, design and manage meeting agendas, and define work processes that will accomplish the team’s goals. Leaders demonstrate these abilities by
 - focusing attention on both the team’s substantive work and its work processes;
 - helping the team be clear about its shared vision, mission, and goals, and routinely revisiting these to maintain focus;
 - conducting productive, goal-oriented meetings that start and end on time—using every meeting as an opportunity for meaningful exchange;
 - helping the group understand the work processes of the “EBDM roadmap” and the strategic planning steps;
 - ensuring group discussions stay on track—guiding the group toward consensus and action after full and appropriate discussion of issues;
 - ensuring regular participation from all group members—drawing out less vocal members, balancing the contributions of more vocal members, encouraging diversity of opinion, and following up immediately on members’ absences from meetings; and
 - ensuring that the team develops, monitors, and updates a specific work plan that is tied to its EBDM vision, mission, goals, and systemwide logic model and to the scorecard that defines the jurisdiction’s overall harm reduction goals.

Purpose

The purpose of this Starter Kit is to help teams identify the individuals who are best suited to assume responsibility for leadership of the teams by describing the common qualities and skills of effective team leaders and by guiding teams through an open and candid discussion that will result in consensus-based determination about who will fill the leadership role.

Participants

All policy team members should be involved in this discussion and the resulting decision.

Instructions

1. Review the qualities and skills of collaborative leaders contained in this document.
2. Discuss each key point and determine whether the group agrees that each quality/skill is an important attribute of your team's leader. Make a list of the qualities that the group agrees upon.
3. From this list, identify the skills/qualities the group deems most important.
4. Identify the individual(s) who best fit these attributes. If there are several candidates, discuss the pros of each and form a consensus decision.

Tips

The following are some effective meeting techniques for EBDM policy team chairs:

- Stay neutral.
- Listen actively.
- Ask questions for clarification. ("I'm not sure I understood what you just said. Can you say more about that?")
- Ask for examples.
- Paraphrase. ("Let me make sure I got that right.")
- Synthesize ideas.
- Stay on track.
- Give and receive feedback.
- Summarize or ask for summary. ("Can someone summarize what we just agreed upon?")
- Ask for feelings and opinions. ("John, how do you react to this?")
- Encourage participation. ("Before we go on, I'd like to hear from Elena.")
- Test for consensus. ("Before we move, let me check to make sure we are all in agreement.")
- Do a quick survey. ("Let's go around the room and have everyone indicate whether or not they support this.")
- Initiate action. ("How would you suggest we proceed on this?")
- Explore an idea in more detail. ("In what other ways could we approach this problem?")
- Suggest a break.
- Suggest a procedure. ("Would it help if we developed criteria to decide this issue?")
- Stop the action. ("Let's stop the discussion for a moment and go back to where we started.")
- Reflect. ("Darius, I get the impression you have concerns about this.")
- Be supportive. ("Let's give Mary a chance to explain her position before we comment.")
- Question and test assumptions. ("Your proposal assumes that we are not doing it correctly now. Is that right?")
- Check targets. ("Are we asking the right questions?")
- Confront differences. ("Jim, I am getting the impression you do not like the way this is going. Tell us what you are thinking.")

Additional Resources/Readings

Carter, M. M. (2006). *The importance of collaborative leadership in achieving effective criminal justice outcomes* (text rev.). Retrieved from <http://www.collaborativejustice.org/docs/The%20Importance%20of%20Collaborative%20Leadership.pdf>

Chrislip, D. D., & Larson, C. E. (1994). *Collaborative leadership: How citizens and civic leaders can make a difference*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Larson, C. E., & LaFasto, F. M. J. (1989). *Teamwork: What must go right/what can go wrong*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.