

### SETTING RESPONSIBILITIES IN YOUR TEAM - PART 8 OF 9 DIMENSIONS OF COLLABORATION

Early in my career, while working on a tightly knit project team, I encountered the structured world of defined responsibilities. We knew who was doing what, by when, and how. This clarity brought efficiency, yet I often found it stifling, craving the space to step beyond my outlined duties. In contrast, a later experience with a culturally diverse team threw me into the deep end of the Organic approach. Here, tasks flowed, and responsibilities shifted based on immediate needs, fostering a dynamic yet sometimes chaotic environment. These contrasting experiences laid the groundwork for my understanding of the delicate balance between structure and flexibility in teamwork.

One of the most memorable moments of bridging these approaches came when I had to mediate between a Danish colleague's preference for order and the more fluid style of Mediterranean teammates. The challenge seemed daunting, with both sides firmly rooted in their ways. However, through open conversation and a willingness to understand each other, we found a middle ground that combined the best of both worlds. This not only helped us achieve our goals but also enriched our team's dynamics.

These personal anecdotes from navigating global teams illustrate the broader journey from the Seven to the Nine Dimensions of Collaboration. The addition of "Setting Responsibilities" as the eighth dimension was a pivotal moment, highlighting the diverse ways teams approach task allocation. Whether through the lens of my structured early days or the adaptable chaos of later projects, each story underscores the importance of recognizing and embracing different work styles.

These reflections offer more than just lessons; they underscore the evolution of our collaborative model. Understanding the spectrum from Organized to Organic approaches to responsibilities is crucial for fostering effective teamwork. By sharing these stories, we move beyond academic concepts, offering practical insights into creating a cohesive team dynamic that leverages diversity for growth and innovation. This journey isn't just about adapting to different styles; it's about seeing the value in every approach and finding the harmony within diversity.

#### The Revised Nine Dimensions of Collaboration

The concept of collaboration in diverse teams has evolved significantly from my initial exploration, inspired by Professor Erin Meyer's work in *The Culture Map*. While Meyer's seven dimensions provided a solid foundation for understanding cross-cultural collaboration, my continued exploration and feedback from implementing these concepts in a real-world organizational context highlighted the necessity for an expanded framework. This led to the development of the Nine Dimensions of Collaboration, integrating two additional dimensions: "Setting Responsibilities" and "Handling Change."

These additions were not mere expansions but essential components that addressed previously unexplored areas critical for effective teamwork. The complexity and richness of team dynamics demanded a more comprehensive model, one that could cater to the intricacies of modern, diverse teams. The Nine Dimensions are:

1. **Building Trust:** Task-Based vs. Relationship-Based Trust
2. **Communicating:** Low Context vs. High Context Communication
3. **Power Dynamics:** Egalitarian vs. Hierarchical Leadership
4. **Decision Making:** Consensual vs. Top-Down
5. **Disagreement Management:** Confrontational vs. Avoiding Confrontation
6. **Feedback:** Direct vs. Indirect
7. **Planning and Results:** Linear vs. Flexible Planning
8. **Setting Responsibilities:** Organized vs. Organic Teamwork
9. **Handling Change:** Optimistic vs. Realistic Mindset

As we embrace these Nine Dimensions of Collaboration, the goal remains unchanged: to foster environments where diverse teams can thrive, driven by mutual understanding and respect. This expanded framework is not just about identifying differences but about leveraging them to build stronger, more cohesive teams.

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I fully recommend everyone read Erin Meyer's book, especially if you are ever working with someone from a different culture. But even if all of your colleagues and customers are from the same country, there is a ton of value in understanding the seven dimensions. Most people do not match the average cultural profile from their country. That is why I recommend trying to understand their individual preferences across the seven dimensions. By trying to understand their individual preferences you will be able to form more productive relationships in your teams and more valuable relationships with your customers.

### **Dimension 8 - What is Your Approach to Assigning Responsibilities in the Team?**

Working together in a team requires that some people are responsible for some things while others are responsible for other things. It is impossible for entire teams to be involved in every decision, task, or project. So, it is critical for teams to split up responsibilities amongst their team members. The problem is that there are different preferences to how those responsibilities are assigned. Both preferences have their strengths and drawbacks, and there is no "right" approach.

On one side of the spectrum are people with a more Organized approach to teamwork. These kinds of people want to know who is responsible for what when it comes to shared tasks and projects. Sometimes this can be established through a conversation or sometimes this can be established by using an accountability tool (RACI, project charter, etc.). When perceived from the opposite side of the spectrum, these people can be seen as rigid or unwilling to help outside of their specific responsibilities.

On the other side of the Responsibilities spectrum is the Organic approach to teamwork. These kinds of people believe that responsibilities are more fluid and can evolve as the project / tasks evolve. They prefer teammates to work closely together and have overlapping responsibilities. Even if it is not clear who does what, everything still gets done. When perceived from the opposite side of the spectrum, these people can be seen as avoiding accountability or too involved in everyone else's work.

It is important to recognize that both approaches to setting responsibilities have their strengths and weaknesses. The different approaches are not necessarily the problem, but big issues can arise when you are working with someone with a completely different approach. That is why we recommend everyone be clear on what approach to time they prefer. Answer the four questions below, and based on your answers, you should be able to identify your preference for either Organized Teamwork or Organic Teamwork.

<b>1) Using tools like RACI charts or project charters is essential for keeping team tasks and responsibilities organized.</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>2) It's important for each team member to stick to their designated tasks to maintain order within the team.</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>3) Team members should naturally find their tasks within the project, allowing for a more dynamic and cohesive workflow.</b>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>4) Overlapping responsibilities among team members enhance collaboration and collective ownership of a project.</b>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Based on your answers, you should be able to identify your preference for determining responsibilities.</b>	<b>High Preference for Organized Teamwork</b>	<b>Slight Preference for Organized Teamwork</b>	<b>Mixed Preference</b>	<b>Slight Preference for Organic Teamwork</b>	<b>High Preference for Organic Teamwork</b>

### **Collaborating With People With Different Styles of Setting Responsibilities**

It goes without saying that if both you and the other person have an Organic approach to teamwork, then collaborating will be easier. Similarly if you both have a more Organized approach, it won't bother you the same way if deadlines are missed. But what do you do if you prefer a more Organic approach while the other person prefers a more Organized approach? Or what about the reverse? Don't worry... effectively working with people with different approaches to assigning responsibilities is possible. All it takes is a willingness to try and adapt your style to meet their preferences.

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What you should do if you prefer a more Organized approach and the other person prefers a more Organic approach:

- **Facilitate Open Discussions on Expectations:** Clearly communicate your expectations for task completion and deadlines, and encourage your colleague to share their vision on task flexibility and autonomy. This mutual understanding can help blend both approaches effectively.
- **Adopt a Flexible Framework for Responsibilities:** Implement a flexible framework that outlines core responsibilities but allows for adaptability in how tasks are executed. This approach acknowledges the structure you prefer while accommodating the fluidity favored by your Organic-leaning colleague.
- **Utilize Collaborative Project Management Tools:** Leverage project management tools that support both structured task assignments and the ability to adjust roles as projects progress. Tools like Trello or Asana can provide the balance needed for both approaches to thrive.
- **Establish Regular Check-ins for Adjustments and Feedback:** Schedule frequent meetings to review project progress and discuss any necessary adjustments to responsibilities. This ongoing dialogue ensures both Organized and Organic preferences are addressed, fostering a collaborative environment.

What you should do if you prefer an Organic approach and the other person prefers a more Organized approach:

- **Clarify Your Flexibility Limits:** Share with your colleague the areas where you're flexible and where you need more structure. This clarity can help find a middle ground that respects both your Organic nature and their need for organization.
- **Propose Structured Checkpoints Within a Flexible Framework:** While maintaining the fluidity of your working style, suggest regular checkpoints or milestones. This compromise ensures progress is trackable and aligns with their preference for organization and predictability.
- **Adopt Tools for Shared Visibility:** Use project management tools that both of you can access for updates and changes. Even if your approach is more fluid, these tools can provide the structure and visibility the Organized colleague values.
- **Communicate Proactively About Changes and Rationale:** When adjustments to plans or responsibilities are needed, communicate these changes proactively to your Organized colleague, including the rationale behind them. This openness respects their preference for structure and minimizes surprises.

### Don't Choose One Style... Leverage Both Organized and Organic Teamwork

In our journey to understand how we work together, it's become clear that having different ways of managing responsibilities—from Organized to more Organic—can actually be a good thing. It's not about forcing everyone to work the same way but about using our unique strengths to make the team stronger. For example, those who like to have everything planned out bring order and meet deadlines, making sure we know who's doing what and by when. Meanwhile, those who are more adaptable are great at coming up with new ideas and adjusting when things don't go as planned, keep the team flexible.

To make the most of these differences, it might help to mix both styles. Start with a clear plan that sets out goals and who's responsible for what, just like laying out the pieces of a puzzle on a table. This helps everyone understand the big picture. Then, allow room for the team to come together, share ideas, and figure out how to fit those pieces together in the best way. This combination can help teams be both organized and creative, making sure things get done while also coming up with innovative solutions.

Seeing each way of working as a valuable asset, not a problem to be solved, can lead to better teamwork, more creativity, and greater success. By respecting and using our diverse approaches to work, we can achieve a balance that brings out the best in everyone and pushes the whole team forward. This isn't just about making things easier; it's about making our collective efforts more effective and enjoyable, turning the challenge of diversity into our greatest strength.



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*Cary Bailey-Findley has spent the past decade building the Human Capital within three Fortune 500 companies and was awarded the ranking of #1 development organization in the world by the Association of Talent Development. He is currently the Talent Manager for SimCorp the world's leading provider of integrated investment management solutions for investment and asset managers. He holds a Master's degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology and a Master's degree in Business Administration.*

*You can follow his blog at [www.cavemaninasuit.com](http://www.cavemaninasuit.com) or download leadership and team development tools at (<https://highperformanceculture.org/>)*