

Onboarding in Transdisciplinary Collaboration

Aligning students, teachers and partners in transdisciplinary teams

RELATING | Connectedness

What you will need:

- At least one team of students & project partners
- Group work
- 30 mins preparation
- 2 - 3 hrs execution
- Sticky notes, paper

Related Tools:

- Enabling Co-Creation
- Fostering Collaborative Creativity
- Exchanging Perspectives

Menu:

I. Overview
II. Learning Activity
III. Assessment
IV. Key Advice
V. References



"Exchanging expectations and seeking connections within a transdisciplinary project team is crucial for a successful collaboration. This tool provides a way to work on this meaningful alignment by creating a Collaborative Blueprint."

—Rosanne van Wieringen & Silke van Beekum

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I. Overview

In higher education, students increasingly work on projects with and for external organisations. This transdisciplinary collaboration between higher education institutes and external organisations requires new roles for students, project partners and teachers.

To form a genuinely transdisciplinary team and collaborate effectively, it is essential to establish meaningful connections and understand key aspects of working together. To that end, this tool clarifies expectations and develops a mutual understanding to get everybody on board.

Learning outcome

- The student is able to connect with their project team of students, teachers and external partners and align expectations to build and develop a transdisciplinary collaborative relationship

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II. Learning Activity

While creating a reflective space, each member of a transdisciplinary team will connect by exchanging expectations, hopes, intentions and mutual assumptions.



1. Informal Kick-off

30 mins

To foster a positive and productive collaboration between students and the project partner from the outset, host an informal get-together, where the transdisciplinary team can meet and get to know each other.

Tip: optionally, you can choose to do an activity from the list of icebreaker activities.



2. Orientation

30 mins

Initiate the onboarding process by guiding participants — students, project partners and yourself — towards a reflective orientation on the upcoming transdisciplinary collaboration. Begin by bringing all participants together and explaining the purpose of onboarding.

Then, instruct everyone to engage in a moment of personal reflection regarding their role and expectations for the project. Provide sticky notes and ask everyone to write down answers to the following questions:

- What do I bring to this collaboration?
- What do I get from this collaboration?
- What do I need in this collaboration?

Encourage openness and honesty in these reflections, as they will lay the groundwork for building a strong, cohesive team.

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3. Sharing Mutual Expectations

30 mins

Give the students and project partners two minutes to think about their expectations of the other participants in the transdisciplinary collaboration, taking their answers from Step 2 into account. How can what they need be translated into specific expectations for their team members?

The team appoints a note-taker who will write down keywords on a sticky note for each expressed expectation.

Now the exchange can take place. Each team member (student, project partner and the teacher) will get a turn. When it's their turn, the team member asks the other team members:

"What do you (as a teacher, student or project partner) expect from me?"

By listening carefully to others, ensure there is no repetition. The team member who asked the question should only ask clarifying questions without reacting. The exchange continues for as long as new expectations are being expressed. All sticky notes will be placed on the table.



4. Aligning Expectations

20 mins

Instruct the team to analyse the expectations on the sticky notes. As a starting point, the team clusters the sticky notes, using these guiding questions:

- Where do you see similarities?
- Where do you see differences?

First, focus on the similarities. How can you translate these expectations into concrete working agreements as a team? Write these working agreements down on a separate sheet of paper.

Now turn to the sticky notes that were placed in the 'differences' cluster. Discuss these sticky notes, using the following guiding questions:

- Which differences can be overcome?

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- Which differences seem difficult to align?

During the conversation, try to truly listen to each other. Identify the concerns underlying the expectations. What can you do to address or mitigate these concerns? What could be a working compromise? Remember to address all sticky notes. Towards the end of your conversations, try to write down concrete work agreements again.



5. Collaboration Blueprint

45 mins

Now, the teams will translate the collected expectations into a Collaboration Blueprint. The collaboration blueprint will function as a summary and symbol of the team's collaboration. The team discusses the following questions to complete the blueprint:

- Goal setting: what is the main goal of this collaboration?
- What are our criteria for success? When are we satisfied with the input? And when are we satisfied with the output?
- Why is our goal important? How are we showing commitment to this goal?

Lastly, the team comes up with a creative expression that symbolises their team's collaboration. This expression can take any form, such as a symbol, image, sentence or living statue.

Please note, as part of assessment *as* learning, students reflect using the reflective questions.

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III. Assessment

Students individually write a self-reflection of the onboarding. The reflection aims to evaluate the alignment process and anticipate the upcoming collaboration. By reflecting on guided questions, each actor becomes more aware of the upcoming collaboration and their role in the collaborative relationship.



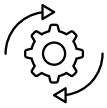
Purpose

Assessment *as* learning aims to strengthen the learning process and the development of metacognitive skills. It empowers students to direct their own learning and to become independent, critical self-assessors.



Roles

Self assessment



Characteristics

Self-regulated learning



Materials

Reflective questions

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Assessment

Reflective questions

Reflect by answering the following questions in up to 100 words each:

1. In the process of aligning expectations, what went well?

2. What was difficult in the process of aligning expectations? Why?

3. What role did you play in aligning expectations?

4. Do you foresee any bottlenecks in the upcoming collaboration? If so, what and where?

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5. How are you planning to deal with possible differences in the upcoming collaboration?

6. What role will fit you in the team for the upcoming collaboration?

7. What did you learn about yourself in relation to the team in this onboarding session?

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IV. Key Advice

Suggestions for **icebreaker activities** (Step 1) and the **Collaboration Blueprint** (Step 5) can be downloaded below.

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Key Advice

Icebreaker activities

- **Throw a ball.** Ask all participants to form a circle and ensure that they are standing at an appropriate distance from each other. Hand a small ball to one of the participants and instruct them to throw the ball to another person in the circle. The person who catches the ball then introduces themselves by sharing their name and explaining their reason for attending the meeting, as well as what they hope to achieve from it. After this, the person throws the ball to another participant who does the same. This process is repeated until everyone in the circle has had the opportunity to introduce themselves and the ball has been passed around the entire group, allowing everyone to learn each other's names.

- **Alliteration game**. Each participant is asked to come up with an alliterative epithet to add to their own name. To start, one person says their name along with their alliterative epithet, and the next person repeats the previous name and epithet and then adds their own name and epithet. This process continues with each member of the group, with each person repeating the previous names and epithets before adding their own. By the end of the exercise, the last person will have to remember a long list of names with their corresponding alliterative epithets.

- Instruct participants to **bring an item or object** to the meeting that they feel represents who they are. During the introduction round, each participant will have the opportunity to explain why they chose their particular object and how it reflects their identity or personality. This exercise serves as an icebreaker activity and help to foster connections and understanding among group members.

- **Draw an animal** together in a group. No talking or non-verbal signaling/signs are allowed. The activity takes 9 minutes. There is one marker and a paper. When you pick-up the marker you can put one straight line on the paper, after your turn you put the marker down on the table. A group member picks-up the marker to put one straight line on the paper. So only straight lines are allowed. You do this as a group until the 9 minutes are done. After the 9 minutes, you are invited to share and analyse how the process went.

- **Association exercise.** All participants sit in a circle. Choose one player at random to start the game by saying a single word out loud. The next player in clockwise order must quickly respond with a word that has some connection or association to the previous word. This process continues with each player building on the previous word, forming a chain of related words. This exercise encourages participants to think creatively and quickly while also developing their ability to make connections and associations between words. It can be used as an icebreaker activity or as a warm-up exercise before a brainstorming session.

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Key Advice

Example activities

- **Think, pair, share:** a group work exercise that encourages participants to actively engage with the material and each other. By taking the time to think about their own response, discuss with a partner, and share their ideas with the larger group, participants can gain new insights and perspectives on the topic being discussed. The exercise can be especially helpful for promoting discussion and active learning in larger groups.

- **Mind mapping**: a collaborative exercise that involves visually organizing information around a central idea or theme. It can be used as a tool to encourage multiple perspectives and ideas, and can help to clarify and organise complex topics. Mind mapping also allows for the use of colour and imagery to make the final product more engaging and memorable.

- **World Café**: a collaborative exercise that involves posing a question or topic for discussion and rotating participants through small groups at cafe-style tables to share their ideas and build upon those of others. Through several rounds of discussion and reflection, participants can develop new insights and strategies and promote collective learning.

- **Open space technology**: a collaborative exercise that involves setting an agenda of topics or issues for discussion, self-organising into open space groups around those topics, collaborating and sharing ideas within those groups, documenting insights and ideas, and sharing those insights and identifying action steps at the end of the exercise. The goal of the exercise is to promote group discussions and problem-solving around a specific topic or issue and develop new insights and strategies that can lead to meaningful action.

- **Talking stick**: a group work exercise that promotes respectful communication and active listening. Participants pass a "talking stick" and take turns speaking while others practice active listening. The exercise encourages productive discussions, effective communication and collaboration among participants.

- **Rich picture**: a group work exercise that helps to capture the complexity of a problem or situation in a visual way. By drawing a rich picture and exploring the various elements of the picture with the group, participants can gain a deeper understanding of the problem or situation and identify potential solutions. The exercise can be especially helpful for addressing complex problems that are difficult to fully grasp through verbal or written communication alone.

- **Fishbowl**: a group work exercise that involves a small group of participants having an open discussion while other participants observe and take notes. The exercise encourages open discussion and active listening and allows participants to gain new insights and perspectives on the topic at hand. After a set amount of time, participants rotate and switch roles, which allows for more individuals to take part in the discussion and observe. The exercise is useful for addressing complex issues or sensitive topics.

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Collaboration Blueprint

Main goal	Creative Expression
Criteria for success	
Commitment	

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V. References

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