

# The Impact of Group Collaboration Habits on Team Task Outcomes in PBL Business Courses

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doi:10.56397/RAE.2025.01.03

## Abstract

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is a cornerstone of business education, particularly in the Canadian context, where multiculturalism and diversity play a significant role in shaping classroom dynamics. This paper explores how collaboration habits, such as effective communication, role allocation, conflict resolution, and cultural sensitivity, influence team task outcomes in PBL business courses. It highlights the challenges posed by language barriers, academic disparities, uneven commitment, and virtual collaboration while proposing solutions through structured interventions by educators and institutional support. Using data-driven analysis and theoretical frameworks, the study underscores the importance of fostering inclusivity, equipping students with collaboration skills, and leveraging digital tools to enhance teamwork in diverse settings. The findings provide actionable insights for educators and institutions to refine PBL strategies, ensuring students develop competencies essential for global business environments. This research contributes to understanding how deliberate efforts in collaboration management can transform learning experiences and prepare students for professional challenges.

**Keywords:** PBL, collaboration habits, business education, teamwork, conflict resolution

## 1. Introduction

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is a dynamic instructional strategy widely adopted in business education to prepare students for the complexities of real-world professional environments. By emphasizing collaborative learning, PBL immerses students in group-based problem-solving tasks that mimic workplace challenges. In Canada, where higher education thrives on diversity and multiculturalism, the practice of group collaboration in PBL settings gains unique significance. Canadian classrooms bring together students from varied cultural, linguistic, and academic backgrounds, offering both opportunities and challenges for collaborative work. The effectiveness of such team-based tasks heavily relies on the habits and dynamics established within these groups.

Collaboration habits such as clear communication, strategic role allocation, effective conflict resolution, and cultural sensitivity often determine whether a team succeeds in meeting its objectives. These habits are not only critical for academic success but also mirror the competencies required in modern business environments, where teamwork and cross-cultural collaboration are paramount. However, diverse groups often encounter unique obstacles, such as misaligned expectations, communication barriers, and varying approaches to teamwork. This essay delves into the nuanced impact of group collaboration habits on team task outcomes in PBL business courses in Canada, examining how these practices contribute to—or hinder—the achievement of learning objectives in a multicultural and inclusive academic context.

## 2. The Framework of PBL in Canadian Business Courses

PBL serves as a transformative approach to education, particularly in Canadian business courses, where students are prepared to tackle complex, real-world challenges. Rooted in experiential learning, PBL encourages students

to address open-ended problems by integrating theoretical knowledge with practical applications. This pedagogical model is particularly effective in business education, as it mirrors the multifaceted nature of professional environments and cultivates essential skills such as critical thinking, decision-making, and teamwork. In the Canadian context, PBL is uniquely shaped by the country's cultural and academic diversity. Classrooms often consist of students from a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds, reflecting the inclusive ethos of Canadian society. This diversity enriches the learning process by introducing varied perspectives and approaches to problem-solving. However, it also necessitates the development of effective collaboration habits to navigate potential challenges such as differing communication styles and varying levels of familiarity with PBL frameworks.

PBL tasks in Canadian business courses typically revolve around real-world business scenarios, such as market analysis, strategic planning, and financial problem-solving. These projects are designed to simulate workplace environments, encouraging students to take on distinct roles such as team leader, analyst, or strategist. By doing so, students gain a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of business functions and the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration. PBL emphasizes student autonomy and peer learning. Teams are expected to self-manage, fostering a sense of accountability and ownership over their learning process. Instructors, meanwhile, adopt the role of facilitators, guiding teams through reflective questioning and providing resources rather than direct solutions. This structure not only enhances academic engagement but also prepares students for the collaborative and adaptive demands of modern business practices. In Canada's multicultural education landscape, PBL serves as a vital bridge between academic theory and professional competency.

### 3. Key Collaboration Habits Influencing Team Outcomes

Effective collaboration habits are pivotal in ensuring the success of team-based tasks in PBL environments, particularly in the culturally diverse landscape of Canadian business courses. These habits foster efficiency, creativity, and cohesion among team members. Below, we delve deeper into the critical collaboration habits that significantly influence team outcomes.

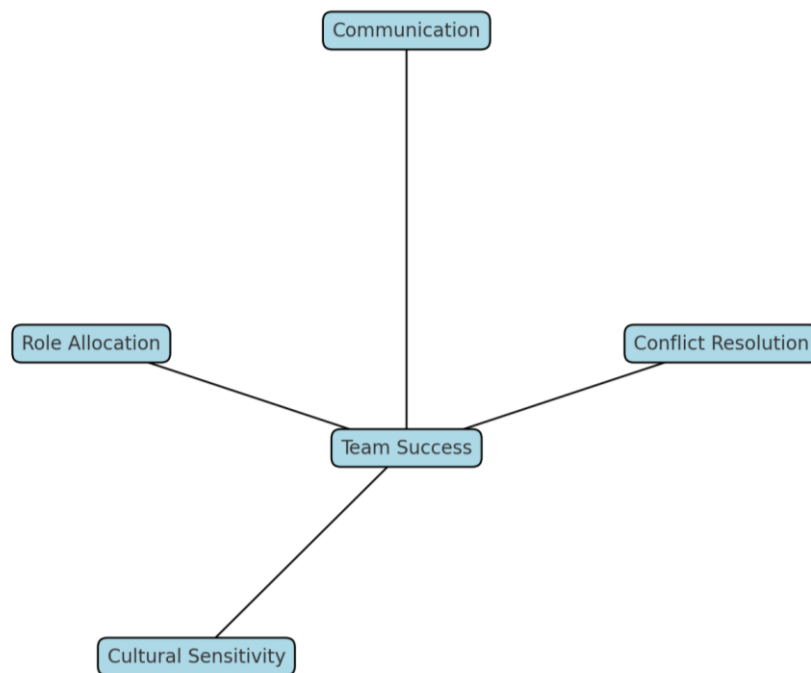


Figure 1. Relationship Between Collaboration Habits and Team Success

Table 1. Comparison of Good and Poor Collaboration Habits

Aspect	Good Collaboration Habits	Poor Collaboration Habits
Communication	Clear, open, and structured communication. Regular meetings and active listening.	Unclear or irregular communication; lack of active listening.
Role Allocation	Roles assigned based on individual strengths; tasks clearly defined.	Undefined roles leading to confusion or overlap in tasks.

Conflict Resolution	Disagreements resolved constructively through dialogue and consensus.	Conflicts ignored or escalated, resulting in team disintegration.
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### *3.1 Effective Communication*

Communication is the foundation of successful teamwork, facilitating the exchange of ideas, alignment of goals, and resolution of issues. In PBL settings, open and structured communication ensures that all team members have a shared understanding of the task and their roles. Canadian classrooms emphasize inclusivity and respect for diverse perspectives, requiring teams to adopt robust communication norms to navigate linguistic and cultural variations. Key practices in effective communication include holding regular meetings, setting clear agendas, and documenting discussions. Active listening plays a critical role, ensuring that every member's viewpoint is acknowledged and valued. In multicultural teams, leveraging tools such as collaborative platforms (e.g., Slack, Microsoft Teams) can help bridge communication gaps by allowing asynchronous and multi-modal interactions. Miscommunication or lack of engagement often results in misunderstandings or duplication of efforts, which can derail project timelines.

### *3.2 Role Allocation and Accountability*

Role allocation tailored to individual strengths and expertise is essential for efficient teamwork. Assigning specific roles such as leader, researcher, data analyst, and presenter helps streamline the division of labor and reduces redundancy. In Canadian business courses, where tasks are often multifaceted, this practice mirrors organizational structures in professional settings. Accountability mechanisms further reinforce effective role allocation. Teams that establish clear expectations, deadlines, and monitoring systems perform better than those with ambiguous task distribution. Peer evaluations and self-assessments, common in PBL frameworks, help ensure that all members actively contribute to the project. When roles are poorly defined, conflicts over responsibilities can arise, impeding progress and weakening team morale.

### *3.3 Conflict Resolution Mechanisms*

Conflict is a natural byproduct of collaboration, especially in diverse teams with varying perspectives and working styles. The ability to address disagreements constructively can significantly affect a team's success. In Canadian business education, which often includes students from different cultural and professional backgrounds, the development of conflict resolution strategies is vital. Effective conflict resolution mechanisms include fostering open dialogue, adopting neutral facilitation, and focusing on shared goals. Encouraging members to voice concerns early prevents escalation and fosters a culture of trust. In cases where consensus cannot be reached, implementing majority voting or seeking input from instructors as mediators can help. Teams that proactively address conflict maintain cohesion and focus, while unresolved disputes can lead to fragmentation and disengagement.

### *3.4 Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusion*

Cultural sensitivity is particularly important in Canada's multicultural educational environment. Students bring diverse communication styles, decision-making approaches, and work ethics to the table. While these differences can lead to misunderstandings, they also present opportunities for richer problem-solving and innovation when approached inclusively. Practices that foster cultural sensitivity include setting ground rules for respectful interaction, being open to alternative viewpoints, and celebrating diversity within the group. Teams that actively incorporate diverse perspectives often develop more creative and holistic solutions. For instance, differing cultural approaches to risk, consensus, or hierarchy can offer unique insights that benefit the group's problem-solving strategies. Failure to embrace cultural diversity, however, can lead to exclusion and disengagement, ultimately affecting performance.

### *3.5 Time Management and Goal Setting*

While often overlooked, effective time management is integral to successful collaboration. Teams that set clear milestones, allocate time for regular check-ins, and account for potential delays are better equipped to meet deadlines. Goal-setting further enhances focus by providing a shared vision and measurable benchmarks for success. PBL teams that fail to establish these habits often struggle with last-minute pressure and incomplete work.

Collaboration habits such as effective communication, role allocation, conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity, and time management are the cornerstones of successful teamwork in PBL business courses. These habits not only enhance academic outcomes but also prepare students for the complexities of professional collaboration in the diverse and globalized business world. By cultivating these practices, Canadian business programs provide students with the tools to navigate both academic and professional challenges with competence and confidence.

## **4. Challenges in Establishing Collaborative Habits**

While the benefits of strong collaborative habits in PBL environments are well-documented, establishing these habits is not without its challenges. In Canadian business courses, where group work often involves diverse and multicultural teams, barriers such as language differences, academic variability, and differing levels of commitment can impede effective collaboration. Additionally, the shift toward virtual or hybrid learning environments in the post-pandemic era has introduced new complexities that require innovative solutions.

#### *4.1 Language and Communication Barriers*

Language differences present one of the most immediate and tangible challenges in diverse PBL teams. Canada's multicultural education system often includes students for whom English or French is not a first language. This can lead to difficulties in articulating ideas, understanding technical jargon, or following complex discussions. Such barriers may result in misinterpretations, delays, or uneven participation within the group. Even within teams where all members are fluent in the working language, variations in communication styles—such as direct versus indirect expression—can create friction. Students from cultures with high-context communication styles may find it challenging to express themselves in environments dominated by low-context, direct communication norms. Addressing these barriers requires proactive strategies, including setting clear communication protocols, encouraging active listening, and leveraging digital tools for asynchronous communication to accommodate varying levels of language proficiency.

#### *4.2 Academic and Skill-Level Disparities*

PBL teams often comprise individuals with differing academic backgrounds, experiences, and skill levels. In Canadian business courses, where students from diverse disciplines collaborate, variations in technical knowledge or familiarity with PBL methods can create an uneven playing field. For instance, students with prior experience in case studies or business simulations may dominate discussions, while those less familiar with such tasks may feel sidelined. These disparities can lead to uneven workload distribution, with more experienced students shouldering a larger share of responsibilities. This dynamic not only breeds resentment but also undermines the learning potential for less experienced members. Facilitating equitable participation requires structured role assignment, skill-sharing sessions, and mentorship within teams to bridge knowledge gaps.

#### *4.3 Varying Levels of Commitment*

Another common challenge in establishing effective collaborative habits is the unequal commitment of team members. Students may differ in their levels of motivation, availability, or prioritization of the task at hand. In Canadian PBL settings, where students often juggle part-time jobs, family responsibilities, and other academic demands, these variations are particularly pronounced. Uneven commitment levels can result in missed deadlines, incomplete tasks, and frustration among more dedicated team members. To address this issue, teams can establish ground rules, formalize accountability mechanisms, and incorporate peer evaluations to ensure that contributions are recognized and rewarded fairly.

#### *4.4 The Complexities of Virtual Collaboration*

The shift toward virtual or hybrid learning environments has added a new layer of complexity to group collaboration. While digital tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Workspace have enabled remote teamwork, they also come with challenges. Technical issues, varying access to reliable internet, and the lack of face-to-face interaction can hinder communication and team cohesion. Virtual environments often exacerbate existing issues such as unequal participation or miscommunication. Students who are less comfortable with technology or online collaboration may struggle to engage fully, while others may feel disconnected from the group dynamic. Overcoming these challenges requires intentional efforts to build virtual rapport, schedule regular check-ins, and use collaborative tools effectively.

#### *4.5 Cultural and Interpersonal Differences*

Cultural diversity, while an asset in Canadian classrooms, can also introduce challenges in team dynamics. Differences in work ethics, decision-making processes, and attitudes toward hierarchy or authority can lead to misunderstandings or conflicts. For example, some students may prefer a consensus-driven approach, while others prioritize efficiency and decisive action. Interpersonal differences, such as varying personality types or communication preferences, further complicate the process of building collaborative habits. Introverted team members may feel overshadowed by more assertive peers, leading to imbalanced participation. To address these issues, teams must foster an inclusive environment where all members feel valued and respected.

In conclusion, establishing effective collaborative habits in PBL business courses is fraught with challenges, particularly in Canada's diverse and increasingly digital academic landscape. Addressing these barriers requires a combination of proactive strategies, including structured team-building activities, cultural sensitivity training, and the use of technology to bridge gaps. By tackling these challenges head-on, educators and students can ensure that collaborative learning remains a powerful and equitable tool for personal and professional growth.

## 5. Implications for Educators and Institutions

Educators and institutions play a pivotal role in shaping collaboration skills and promoting team success in Canadian business courses. In the context of PBL, where teamwork is central to achieving educational objectives, their contributions are indispensable. To enhance student learning outcomes and prepare them for professional challenges, educators and institutions must adopt comprehensive strategies to foster collaborative environments.

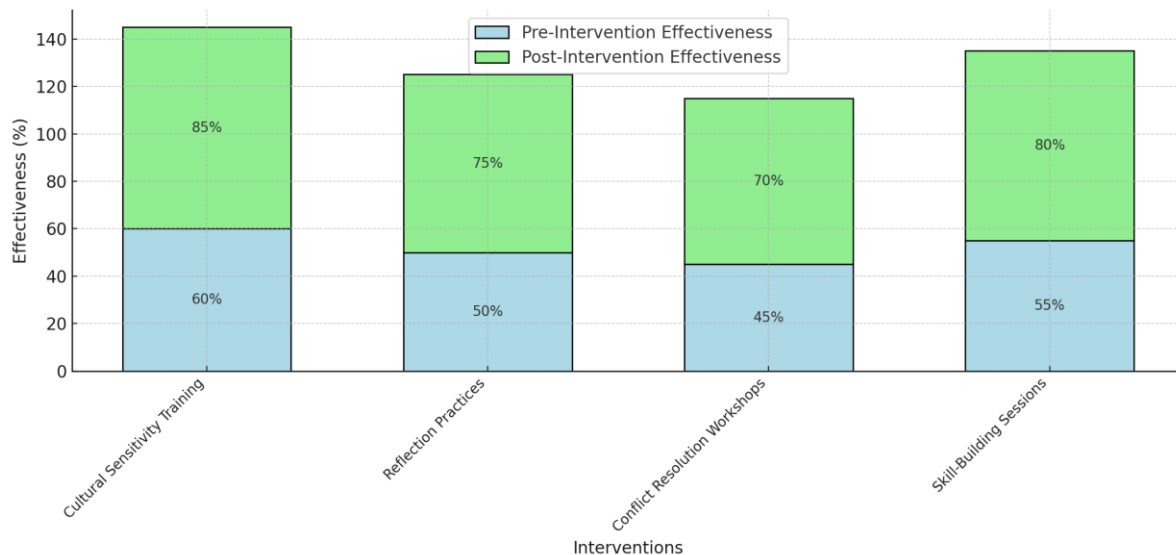


Figure 2. Effectiveness of Educational Interventions in Improving Collaboration Skills

Educators, first and foremost, are responsible for equipping students with essential collaboration skills. This goes beyond simply teaching them how to divide tasks; it involves helping them understand the importance of teamwork and addressing the challenges that arise in collaborative settings. Structured interventions such as workshops on team-building, intercultural communication, and conflict resolution provide students with practical tools to excel in group dynamics. Reflective practices, including self-assessments and peer evaluations, further encourage students to critically evaluate their contributions and recognize the value of their teammates' efforts. This iterative process of reflection and improvement enables students to develop a deeper understanding of effective collaboration. Institutions, on the other hand, must provide an environment conducive to teamwork. Physical spaces designed for collaboration—such as rooms equipped with brainstorming tools and interactive technologies—can facilitate group discussions and creative problem-solving. Additionally, leveraging digital platforms like Slack, Microsoft Teams, and collaborative project management tools ensures seamless virtual teamwork, especially in hybrid learning contexts. Institutional support in the form of accessible resources and technological infrastructure is critical to enabling effective collaboration in a modern educational landscape.

Canada's multicultural context further necessitates a focus on inclusivity. Institutions must actively promote cultural sensitivity through initiatives such as diversity workshops, inclusive classroom policies, and mentorship programs. These efforts help students navigate cultural differences and leverage diversity as a strength rather than a barrier. Organizing intercultural events and collaborative activities can foster stronger connections among students from varied backgrounds, building trust and rapport essential for teamwork. Educators and institutions are instrumental in establishing and nurturing effective collaborative practices in PBL business courses. By teaching essential skills, creating supportive environments, and fostering inclusivity, they not only enhance academic outcomes but also equip students with the competencies needed to thrive in diverse and dynamic professional settings. This dual focus on academic success and real-world preparedness underscores the transformative potential of collaborative learning in Canada's business education landscape.

## 6. Conclusion

Group collaboration habits are a cornerstone of success in PBL business courses, particularly within the diverse and inclusive educational landscape of Canada. The ability to communicate effectively, allocate roles strategically, resolve conflicts constructively, and embrace cultural sensitivity forms the foundation of strong team performance. These habits not only ensure the successful completion of academic tasks but also serve as critical skills for navigating the complexities of today's globalized workforce. The multicultural nature of

Canadian classrooms, while presenting unique challenges such as communication barriers and cultural differences, also offers opportunities for innovative problem-solving and enriched learning experiences. Teams that foster inclusivity and leverage diverse perspectives can produce more creative and comprehensive solutions, mirroring the demands of real-world business environments. However, achieving this requires deliberate effort from both students and educators, underscoring the need for structured interventions, skill-building workshops, and supportive institutional frameworks. Educators and institutions must work collaboratively to address challenges such as uneven participation, virtual collaboration barriers, and cultural misunderstandings. By doing so, they can ensure that PBL not only remains a transformative educational approach but also prepares students to excel as collaborative, adaptable, and culturally aware professionals. Ultimately, cultivating these habits empowers students to thrive in their academic pursuits and future careers, contributing meaningfully to the dynamic and interconnected global economy.

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