

How to choose a team in a modern organization

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A team is a small group with complementary skills who hold themselves mutually accountable for a common purpose, goal, and approach. Teams unlike groups are not formed on a random basis but are carefully chosen by management. As businesses are slowly opening because of the lifting of some lockdown restrictions organizations need to set up various teams to help with the various organizational needs that need to be addressed with immediate effect.

Statistics that show the power of teamwork

- *About 75% of employers rate teamwork and collaboration as “very important” (Queens University of Charlotte).*
- *86% of employees and executives cite a lack of collaboration or ineffective communication for workplace failures (Salesforce, 2018).*
- *97% of employees and executives believe a lack of alignment within a team impacts the outcome of a task or project (McKinsey, 2016).*

A teamwork environment promotes an atmosphere that fosters friendship and loyalty. These close-knit relationships motivate employees in parallel and align them to work harder, cooperate, and be supportive of one another. Individuals possess diverse talents, weaknesses, communication skills, strengths, and habits. Thus when creating teams, organizations may choose from the following:

1. Problem-Solving Teams

A **problem-solving (or process-improvement) team** is typically made up of 5 to 12 employees from the same department who meet for a few hours each week to discuss ways of improving quality, efficiency, and the work environment. Such teams can also be planning teams, task forces, or committees that are organized to get tasks done. During meetings, members share ideas or offer suggestions on how to improve work processes and methods. Rarely, however, are these teams given the authority to unilaterally implement any of their suggested actions. Montreal-based Clairol Canada is an exception. When a Clairol employee identifies a problem, he or she has the authority to call together an ad hoc group to investigate, and then define and implement solutions. Clairol presents GOC (Group Operating Committee) Awards to teams for their efforts. Quality circles are another form of problem-solving teams.

1. Quality Circles

A **quality circle** is a workgroup of 8 to 10 employees and managers who share an area of responsibility. They meet regularly—typically once a week, on company time and company premises—to discuss their *quality problems*, investigate causes of the problems, recommend solutions, and take corrective actions.

They assume responsibility for solving quality problems and generate and evaluate their feedback. Management typically retains control over the final decision regarding the implementation of recommended solutions. Part of the quality circle concept includes teaching participating employees group communication skills, various quality strategies, and measurement and problem analysis techniques.

1. Self-Managed Work Teams

Problem-solving teams only make recommendations. Some organizations have gone further and created teams that not only solve problems but implement solutions and take responsibility for outcomes. **Self-managed work teams** are groups of employees (typically 10 to 15 in number) who perform highly related or interdependent jobs and take on many of the responsibilities of their former supervisors. Typically, these tasks are planning and scheduling work, assigning tasks to members, making operating decisions, taking action on problems, and working with suppliers and customers. Fully self-managed work teams even select their members and evaluate each other's performance. Supervisory positions take on decreased importance and are sometimes even eliminated. But research on the effectiveness of self-managed work teams has not been uniformly positive. Self-managed teams do not typically manage conflicts well. When disputes arise, members stop cooperating and power struggles ensue, which leads to lower group performance. Moreover, although individuals on these teams report higher levels of job satisfaction than other individuals, they also sometimes have higher absenteeism and turnover rates. One large-scale study of labor productivity in British establishments found that although using teams, in general, does improve labor productivity, no evidence supported the claim that self-managed teams performed better than traditional teams with less decision-making authority.

1. Cross-Functional Teams

This is a group of employees at about the same hierarchical level, but from different work areas, who come together to accomplish a task. A **task force** is a temporary cross-functional team. A **committee** is a group composed of members from different departments.

The Boeing Company used **cross-functional (or project) teams** when it developed its 777 jets. Such teams are made up of employees from about the same hierarchical level, but from different work areas, who come together to accomplish a task. For instance, if a business school wanted to design a new integrated curriculum in business for undergraduates, it might bring together a group of faculty members, each of whom represents one discipline (for example, finance, accounting, marketing, and organizational behavior) to work together to design the new program. Each individual would be expected to contribute knowledge of his or her field, and ways to package together with the knowledge in a more integrated fashion.

Many employees are asked to work in teams to accomplish their tasks. In a self-managed team, members make decisions about how to manage and schedule production, and also monitor the quality of their output. Skunkworks is also a form of cross-functional teams.

1. Skunkworks

Skunkworks are cross-functional teams that develop spontaneously to create new products or work on complex problems. Such teams are typically found in the high-tech sector and are generally sheltered from other organizational members. This gives the team the ability to work on new ideas in isolation, without being watched over by organization members, during creative stages. Skunkworks are thus able to ignore the structure and bureaucratic rules of the organization while they work. The first skunkworks team appeared in the 1940s, at Lockheed Aerospace Corporation. The team was to create a jet fighter as fast as possible and avoid bureaucratic delays. In just 43 days, the team of 23 engineers and a group of support personnel put together the first American fighter to fly at more than 800 kilometers an hour. Not all skunkworks projects are as successful. Many companies, including IBM and Xerox, have had mixed results in using them. Still, skunkworks does offer companies an alternative approach to teamwork when speed is an important factor.

1. Virtual Teams

Problem-solving, self-managed, and cross-functional teams do their work face to face. **Virtual teams** use computer technology to unite physically dispersed members and achieve a common goal. They collaborate online—using communication links such as wide-area networks, videoconferencing, or e-mail—whether they’re a room away or continents apart. Virtual teams are so pervasive, and technology has advanced so far, that it’s probably a bit of a misnomer to call them “virtual.” Nearly all teams today do at least some of their work remotely. Despite their ubiquity, virtual teams face special challenges. They may suffer because there are less social rapport and direct interaction among members. Evidence from 94 studies entailing more than 5,000 groups found that virtual teams are better at sharing unique information (information held by individual members but not the entire group), but they tend to share less information overall. As a result, low levels of virtuality in teams results in higher levels of information sharing, but high levels of virtuality hinder it. For virtual teams to be effective, management should ensure that (1) trust is established among members (one inflammatory remark in an e-mail can severely undermine team trust), (2) team progress is monitored closely (so the team doesn’t lose sight of its goals and no team member “disappears”), and (3) the efforts and products of the team are publicized throughout the organization (so the team does not become invisible). Virtual teams can do all the things that other teams do—share information, make decisions, and complete tasks. They can include members from the same organization or link an organization’s members with employees from other organizations (suppliers and joint partners, for example). They can convene for a few days to solve a problem or a few months to complete a project, or exist permanently. Often they can be more efficient at tasks as well, because of the ease of sharing information through email and voice mail. Virtual teams also make it possible for people who are indifferent geographical and time zones to work together. Virtual teams can suffer from the limited social contact of team members and the absence of para verbal and nonverbal cues in their communications. In face-to-face conversation, people use para verbal (tone of voice, inflection, voice volume) and nonverbal (eye movement, facial expression, hand gestures, and other body languages) cues to provide increased meaning. In virtual communications, team members are not able to duplicate the normal give and take of face-to-face discussion. As a result, virtual team members often have less social rapport and are more at risk of misunderstanding one another. An additional concern about virtual teams is whether members can build the same kind of trust that face-to-face teams build.

In conclusion, the use of teams greatly empowers employees but not all the time. Teamwork encourages the nurturing of “esprit de corps” or team spirit. Team spirit encourages sharing. By sharing, employees become more empowered by gaining knowledge from other group members. Some teams are given the authority to implement the decisions they come up with within the various teams. This empowers them as it gives them a sense of ownership for the final product.

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