



## Becoming a Team Player in Professional Groups and Teams

The workplace and economy are changing. Responding to fierce global competition, businesses are being forced to operate ever more efficiently. One significant recent change is the emphasis on teamwork. You might find yourself a part of a work team, project team, customer support team, supplier team, design team, planning team, functional team, cross-functional team, or some other group. All of these teams are being formed to accomplish specific goals, and your career success will depend on your ability to function well in a team-driven professional environment.

Teams can be effective in solving problems and in developing new products. Take, for example, the creation of Red Baron's "Stuffed Pizza Slices." Featuring a one-of-a-kind triangular, vented design, the product delivers taste, convenience, and style. But coming up with an innovative new hit required a cross-functional team with representatives from product development, packaging, purchasing, and operations. The entire team worked to shape an idea into a hit product using existing machinery.<sup>17</sup>

German auto manufacturer BMW likes to "throw together" designers, engineers, and marketing experts to work intensively on a team project. Ten team members, for example, working in an old bank building in London, collaborated on the redesign of

the Rolls-Royce Phantom. The result was a best-selling superluxury automobile that remained true to the Rolls heritage. The new model had twenty-first-century lines with BMW's technological muscle under the hood.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps you can now imagine why forming teams is important.

ICAP Spring 2011 EXAM, BCBS PAPER Question

Q.2(A). What are the distinctive characteristics of a "High Performance Team"? ( 2 marks)

(B) List Five steps which, in your opinion, should the business leader of a progressive organisation take in order to create and develop a High Performance Team. ( 5 marks)

**Organizations are forming teams for better decisions, faster response, increased productivity, greater buy-in, less resistance to change, improved morale, and reduced risks.**

**Virtual teams are groups of people who work interdependently with a shared purpose across space, time, and organization boundaries using technology.**

**Professional team members follow team rules, analyze tasks, define problems, share information, listen actively to others, and try to involve quiet members.**

## The Importance of Conventional and Virtual Teams in the Workplace

Businesses are constantly looking for ways to do jobs better at less cost. They are forming teams for the following reasons:

- **Better decisions.** Decisions are generally more accurate and effective because group and team members contribute different expertise and perspectives.
- **Faster response.** When action is necessary to respond to competition or to solve a problem, small groups and teams can act rapidly.
- **Increased productivity.** Because they are often closer to the action and to the customer, team members can see opportunities for improving efficiency.
- **Greater buy-in.** Decisions arrived at jointly are usually better received because members are committed to the solution and are more willing to support it.
- **Less resistance to change.** People who have input into decisions are less hostile, aggressive, and resistant to change.
- **Improved employee morale.** Personal satisfaction and job morale increase when teams are successful.
- **Reduced risks.** Responsibility for a decision is diffused, thus carrying less risk for any individual.

To connect with distant team members across borders and time zones, many organizations are creating *virtual teams*. These are groups of people who work interdependently with a shared purpose across space, time, and organization boundaries using technology.<sup>19</sup> The author of this textbook, for example, works in her office in Santa Barbara, California. Her developmental editor is located in Kentucky, the production editor is in Minnesota, and the publisher is in Ohio. Important parts of the marketing team are in Singapore and Canada. Although they work in different time zones and rarely see each other, team members use e-mail and teleconferencing to exchange ideas, make decisions, and stay connected.

Virtual teams may be local or global. At Best Buy's corporate headquarters in Richfield, Minnesota, certain employees are allowed to work anywhere and any-time—as long as they successfully complete their assignments on time. They can decide how, when, and where they work.<sup>20</sup> Although few other organizations are engaging in such a radical restructuring of work, many workers today complete their tasks from remote locations, thus creating local virtual teams. Hyundai Motors exemplifies virtual teaming at the global level. For its vehicles, Hyundai completes engineering in Korea, research in Tokyo and Germany, styling in California, engine calibration and testing in Michigan, and heat testing in the California desert.<sup>21</sup> Members of its virtual teams coordinate their work and complete their tasks across time and geographic zones. Work is increasingly viewed as what you do rather than a place you go.

In some organizations, remote coworkers may be permanent employees of the same company or may be specialists called together for temporary projects. Regardless of the assignment, virtual teams can benefit from shared views and skills.

## Positive and Negative Team Behavior

Team members who are committed to achieving the group's purpose contribute by displaying positive behavior. How can you be a professional team member? The most effective groups have members who are willing to establish rules and abide by those rules. Effective team members are able to analyze tasks and define problems so that they can work toward solutions. They offer information and try out their ideas on the group to stimulate discussion. They show interest in others' ideas by listening actively. Helpful team members also seek to involve silent members.

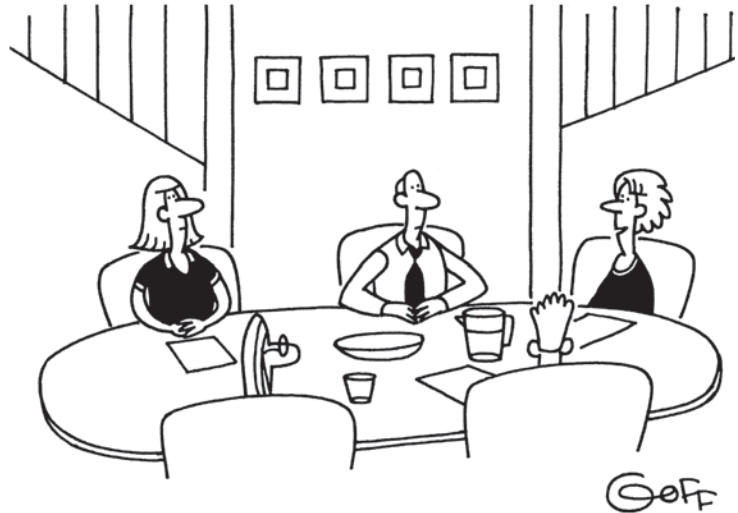
They help to resolve differences, and they encourage a warm, supportive climate by praising and agreeing with others. When they sense that agreement is near, they review significant points and move the group toward its goal by synthesizing points of understanding.

Not all groups, however, have members who contribute positively. Negative behavior is shown by those who constantly put down the ideas and suggestions of others. They insult, criticize, and aggress against others. They waste the group's time with unnecessary recounting of personal achievements or irrelevant topics. The team joker distracts the group with excessive joke telling, inappropriate comments, and disruptive antics. Also disturbing are team members who withdraw and refuse to be drawn out. They have nothing to say, either for or against ideas being considered. To be a productive and welcome member of a group, be prepared to perform the positive tasks described in Figure 11.3. Avoid the negative behaviors.

**Negative team behavior includes insulting, criticizing, aggressing against others, wasting time, and refusing to participate.**

### Characteristics of Successful Professional Teams

The use of teams has been called the solution to many ills in the current workplace.<sup>22</sup> Someone even observed that as an acronym TEAM means "Together, Everyone Achieves More."<sup>23</sup> Yet, many teams do not work well together. In fact, some teams can actually increase frustration, lower productivity, and create employee dissatisfaction. Experts who have studied team workings and decisions have discovered that effective teams share some or all of the following characteristics.



"Isn't this what teamwork is all about? You doing all my work for me?"

**Small Size, Diverse Makeup.** Teams may range from 2 to 25 members, although 4 or 5 is optimum for many projects. Larger groups have trouble interacting constructively, much less agreeing on actions.<sup>24</sup> For the most creative decisions, teams generally have male and female members who differ in age, ethnicity, social background, training, and experience. Members should bring complementary skills to a team. Fred Adair, a partner at executive search firm Heidrick & Struggles, had this to say about diverse teams when asked about his recent study of nearly 700 top business leaders: "Yes, diverse teams are generally better. There is a more balanced consideration of different perspectives, and I'm using the word 'diversity' in the broadest sense—diversity of personality, of opinion, of decision-making style."<sup>25</sup> The key business advantage of diversity is the ability to view a project and its context from multiple perspectives. Many of us tend to think that everyone in the world

**Small, diverse teams often produce more creative solutions with broader applications than homogeneous teams do.**

**FIGURE 11.3** Positive and Negative Team Behaviors

Positive Team Behaviors	Negative Team Behaviors
Setting rules and abiding by them	Blocking the ideas and suggestions of others
Analyzing tasks and defining problems	Insulting and criticizing others
Contributing information and ideas	Wasting the group's time
Showing interest by listening actively	Making inappropriate jokes and comments
Encouraging members to participate	Failing to stay on task
Synthesizing points of agreement	Withdrawing, failing to participate

is like us because we know only our own experience.<sup>26</sup> Teams with members from a variety of ethnicities and cultures can look at projects beyond the limited view of one culture. Many organizations are finding that diverse teams can produce innovative solutions with broader applications than homogeneous teams can.

**Agreement on Purpose.** An effective team begins with a purpose. For example, when Magic Johnson Theatres was developing its first theater, it hired a team whose sole purpose was to help the company move rapidly through the arduous state permit application process. Even the task of obtaining a license for the site's popcorn machine was surprisingly difficult.<sup>27</sup> Xerox scientists who invented personal computing developed their team purpose after the chairman of Xerox called for an "architecture of information." A team at Sealed Air Corporation developed its purpose when management instructed it to cut waste and reduce downtime.<sup>28</sup> Working from a general purpose to specific goals typically requires a huge investment of time and effort. Meaningful discussions, however, motivate team members to "buy into" the project.

**Agreement on Procedures.** The best teams develop procedures to guide them. They set up intermediate goals with deadlines. They assign roles and tasks, requiring all members to contribute equivalent amounts of real work. They decide how they will reach decisions using one of the strategies discussed earlier. Procedures are continually evaluated to ensure movement toward the attainment of the team's goals.

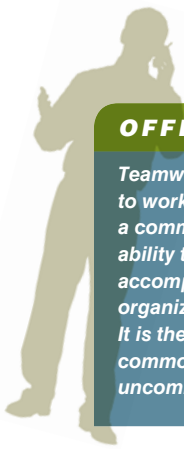
**Ability to Confront Conflict.** Poorly functioning teams avoid conflict, preferring sulking, gossiping, or backstabbing. A better plan is to acknowledge conflict and address the root of the problem openly. Although it may feel emotionally risky, direct confrontation saves time and enhances team commitment in the long run. To be constructive, however, confrontation must be task oriented, not person oriented. An open airing of differences, in which all team members have a chance to speak their minds, should center on the strengths and weaknesses of the different positions and ideas—not on personalities. After hearing all sides, team members must negotiate a fair settlement, no matter how long it takes. Good decisions are based on consensus: most members must agree.

**Use of Good Communication Techniques.** The best teams exchange information and contribute ideas freely in an informal environment. Team members speak clearly and concisely, avoiding generalities. They encourage feedback. Listeners become actively involved, read body language, and ask clarifying questions before responding. Tactful, constructive disagreement is encouraged. Although a team's task is taken seriously, successful teams are able to inject humor into their interactions.

**Ability to Collaborate Rather Than Compete.** Effective team members are genuinely interested in achieving team goals instead of receiving individual recognition. They contribute ideas and feedback unselfishly. They monitor team progress, including what is going right, what is going wrong, and what to do about it. They celebrate individual and team accomplishments.

**Shared Leadership.** Effective teams often have no formal leader. Instead, leadership rotates to those with the appropriate expertise as the team evolves and moves from one phase to another. Many teams operate under a democratic approach. This approach can achieve buy-in to team decisions, boost morale, and create fewer hurt feelings and less resentment. But in times of crisis, a strong team member may need to step up as leader.

**Acceptance of Ethical Responsibilities.** Teams as a whole have ethical responsibilities to their members, to their larger organizations, and to society. Members have a number of specific responsibilities to each other, as shown in Figure 11.4. As a whole, teams have a responsibility to represent the organization's view



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*Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.*

**Effective teams exchange information freely and collaborate rather than compete.**

## FIGURE 11.4 Ethical Responsibilities of Group Members and Leaders

When people form a group or a team to achieve a purpose, they agree to give up some of their individual sovereignty for the good of the group. They become interdependent and assume responsibilities to one another and to the group. Here are important ethical responsibilities for members to follow:

- **Determine to do your best.** When you commit to the group process, you are obligated to offer your skills freely. Don't hold back, perhaps fearing that you will be repeatedly targeted because you have skills to offer. If the group project is worth doing, it is worth your best effort.
- **Decide to behave with the group's good in mind.** You may find it necessary to set aside your personal goals in favor of the group's goals. Decide to keep an open mind and to listen to evidence and arguments objectively. Strive to evaluate information carefully, even though it may contradict your own views or thwart your personal agendas.
- **Make a commitment to fair play.** Group problem solving is a cooperative, not a competitive, event. Decide that you cannot grind your private ax at the expense of the group project.
- **Expect to give and receive a fair hearing.** When you speak, others should give you a fair hearing. You have a right to expect them to listen carefully, provide you with candid feedback, strive to understand what you say, and treat your ideas seriously. Listeners do not have to agree with you, of course. However, all speakers have a right to a fair hearing.
- **Be willing to take on a participant/analyst role.** As a group member, it is your responsibility to pay attention, evaluate what is happening, analyze what you learn, and help make decisions.
- **As a leader, be ready to model appropriate team behavior.** It is a leader's responsibility to coach team members in skills and teamwork, to acknowledge achievement and effort, to share knowledge, and to periodically remind members of the team's missions and goals.

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and respect its privileged information. They should not discuss with outsiders any sensitive issues without permission. In addition, teams have a broader obligation to avoid advocating actions that would endanger members of society at large.

The skills that make you a valuable and ethical team player will serve you well when you run or participate in professional meetings.