

# How to Foster Effective Teamwork

**Dividing employees into teams can be great for your business--as long as you provide the proper direction.**

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By David G. Javitch

**Q:** I have a big task to undertake, and I'm not sure if I should do it myself or put a team together to do it for me. What's your advice?

**A:** Today, most managers use a team approach to solve problems, generate ideas and complete tasks. But before building a team, the manager needs to resolve these key questions: Can I complete the task myself? Do I have the time and resources to complete this task? Can some other person or group be even more effective than I can?

If the answers favor getting others involved, it's time to consider the advantages and disadvantages of teams. On the upside, teams combine various employee skills, ideas, knowledge bases and perspectives. Teams usually increase individual productivity and workplace satisfaction. Simply being on a team can be a key source of employee motivation, status and pride for having been selected to participate. Team output is generally higher in quality and quantity than individual performance.

However, all is not necessarily rosy--there are some disadvantages to using teams as well. For example, teams may take longer to achieve a goal than an individual would, and teams grow through predictable stages that are time-consuming, such as member selection, organization, socialization and creation of final products or ideas. Key resources (time, money, people and equipment) are restricted to the team and not available to others. Some of the team members may lack interest, necessary skills or abilities, or motivation. They may have been appointed or self-appointed to the team for political reasons or merely to enjoy themselves while others do the work. This "social loafing" can be a source of tension among productive team members. Finally, people dynamics can complicate the team process, replete with conflicts, group pressure to reach a fast or unanimous conclusion, and taking risky stances.

The good news is, with effective direction and facilitation from the right team leader, team-building can be a very productive and cost-effective process. To help ensure success, the team needs to consider six crucial success factors: clear identification and ownership of the team goal; clear definition and acceptance of each person's role and responsibilities; clear delineation of team processes, such as decision-making, conflict resolution, communication and participation; clear opportunities to build trust between participants; and finally, clear acceptance of each other's strengths and limitations in a manner that encourages positive working relationships.

The key word here is clear. When goals, roles, processes, trust and relationships are clear, then success almost always follows.