

Spot-on Training Builds More Powerful Work Teams

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managers and employees
have collaborated

50%

more on projects than
in previous years.⁶



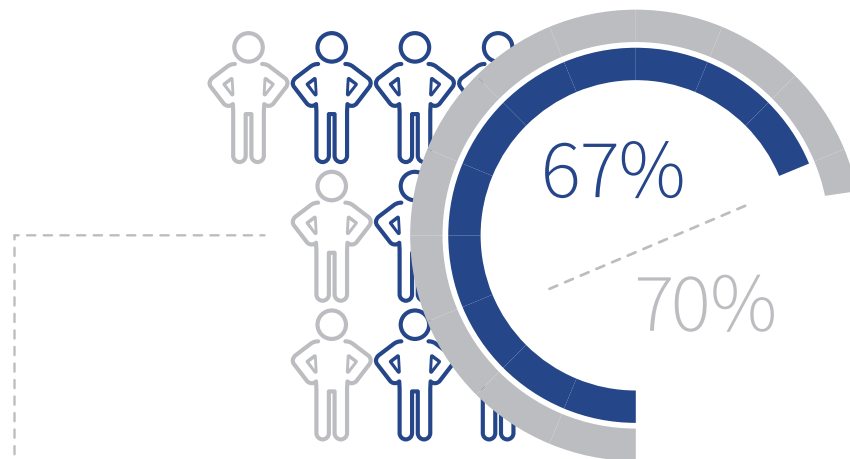
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

As businesses and government agencies strive to become more agile in an era of unpredictability and disruption, they're breaking free of top-down formal hierarchies and siloed organizations and moving to networks of collaborative, cross-functional work teams. In fact, a 2016 Deloitte survey found that 92 percent of companies believe that redesigning the organization is either very important or important, as they face and manage evolving priorities.¹

The team approach gives organizations an edge in many situations. Decentralized decision making and fluidity enables teams to react quickly to industry changes, strategically use employee expertise, get products to market faster and, as a side benefit, empower and engage employees by encouraging more ownership at all levels.

However, for all its many benefits, teamwork comes with its own set of challenges. Brilliant minds don't always think alike: 7 out of 10 workers who've been part of workplace teams admit that some were dysfunctional.²

The need for collaboration and cross-functional teams will continue, but they aren't the easy answer to all that ails organizations. **In order for teams to work, they need to be taught the fundamentals of teambuilding, conflict management and soliciting/giving feedback.³ It's also key that leaders know how to support and guide these teams and the individuals on them, including how to encourage self-leadership and how to help team members navigate the points where team and individual responsibilities intersect or conflict.**



While **67%** of employees believe that colleagues can help them do their jobs better²⁰, **70%** cite being part of a dysfunctional team².

Why teamwork is one of the leading workplace trends of the 21st century

Organizations of the past were structured for efficiency and perfectly positioned for the predictable commercial patterns of the time. Today's organizations face unpredictable markets, and they are under increasing pressure to be adaptive, innovative and customer-centric. They are also expected to get products to market quickly.

To gain this needed flexibility and customer focus, organizations are shifting toward the use of interconnected, dynamic teams.¹

A recent study found that 38 percent of all companies and 24 percent of large companies (>50,000 employees) have moved away from traditional, functional structures. The resulting small teams have the freedom to experiment while driving everyone to share what they learn across the entire organization.⁴ By combining strengths and skill sets, smaller teams can innovate faster, bring a wider array of ideas, see mistakes more quickly and find better solutions.⁵

Over the last two decades, managers and employees spent 50 percent more time in collaborative activities, which offers evidence of the shift.⁶

The reliability and efficiency afforded by the business structures of the past are no longer the most important competitive advantages. From hospital emergency rooms to NASA, start-ups to Google, and century-old organizations like Ford, examples of successful team innovation abound.

- Ford's F-150 team reinvented a top-selling vehicle, contributing to a billion-dollar quarterly increase in earnings
- Five entrepreneurial friends flipped the mattress business on its head when they launched Casper by focusing on removing customer pain points associated with shopping, delivery and sleep comfort⁷
- In 2015, tech giant Cisco moved to a team-based organizational model to improve speed and time to market, according to then-CEO, John Chambers. By competing against market transitions rather than other companies, Cisco's product transitions shifted from five to seven years down to one or two.⁸

“The organizations that will become household names of this century will be renowned for sustained, large-scale, efficient innovation. The key to that capability is neither company loyalty nor free-agent autonomy but, rather, a strong collaborative community.”

—Harvard Business Review⁹

Teamwork gives employee engagement and productivity a boost

The need for agility and innovation are not the only challenges organizations face; teamwork can also provide solutions on jobs where employee engagement and national productivity figures are low. Well-functioning, small teams help to empower employees, improve learning, provide comradery that helps cut deadline stress, and boost morale and engagement by decentralizing decision making and encouraging teams to pull together and take ownership.⁵

Companies are also realizing that no single individual can keep up with industry and technology developments. Teams enable knowledge sharing and learning, with each individual contributing unique strengths and information.

With all these potential gains, the growing popularity of teams is understandable.

Why does teamwork have a bad rap with workers?

With all these potential advantages, why aren't employees clamoring for more team-based projects? Why did 85 percent of U.S. employees in a University of Phoenix study say that working on teams in the office is difficult? And why did 41 percent of participants in a 5 Dynamics study report feeling friction when collaborating with colleagues¹⁰, driving nearly a third to consider looking for new jobs because of a negative team environment?¹¹

Working with different personalities is challenging. People aren't always naturally predisposed to work well together. Individual interests and demeanors can sabotage team spirit. Competitive instincts, fear of conflict, hidden agendas, the wrong expertise and poor or unusual communication styles can all interfere. Even an overly ambitious team member can struggle to "manage the tension between getting ahead and getting along."¹²

Teamwork training is imperative:

86% of employees and executives agreed that poor collaboration causes workplace failures.¹⁴



How do you know if your work teams aren't functioning well?

- ✘ Team members express frustration in motivating others to follow through
- ✘ There's open conflict or detrimental competition in meetings or work spaces
- ✘ One or two individuals are calling the shots, so there's little or no disagreement
- ✘ Decision making is ineffective, with decisions being revisited or made at the last minute
- ✘ Little effort is made to implement decisions once they're made
- ✘ Meetings are inefficient and lack a clear purpose
- ✘ Slackers are hiding out and getting away with doing little to nothing
- ✘ One or several team members are excluded by a team bully or clique¹³

Help individuals get comfortable working in teams

Teamwork and chemistry rarely happen by accident. If your goal is team performance that is greater than the sum of the performance of a team's individual members, it takes planning and training. Eighty-six percent of employees and executives agreed that poor collaboration causes workplace failures. That's not because the idea of teamwork is flawed. It's merely a wake-up call to executives who ignore the need for chemistry and teamwork training.¹⁴

Collective intelligence and team success are directly tied to team members' social sensitivity and

communication¹⁵—both of which are learned skills. Training in teamwork fundamentals helps employees know what to expect, so they understand (among other things) that a little conflict and disagreement might be normal when a team is formed.

Where do you start with teamwork training? Here are some ideas to consider:

1. Socially sensitive teams notice, understand and respect the feelings of team members. High emotional intelligence helps ensure both self-awareness and the ability to read the people around you. It is critical to motivation, productivity and a team's ability to collaborate and be successful.¹⁶
2. Strong communication is also central to a group of people working well together. The full benefit of a diverse group is only realized if each member contributes. If one or two team members are shooting down ideas, bullying others, or disrupting discussion or cohesion, this benefit is lost. By the same token, if one or two people are overly sensitive to negative feedback or disagreement, rifts can easily form. Instead, when team members know how to speak up respectfully, disagree and deal with adversity, the team can be more productive and creative and won't be caught up in conflict.¹⁷
3. Additionally, it's helpful when team members understand what the normal process of becoming a team looks like. "Forming, storming, norming and performing" aren't new concepts, but individuals who have never been introduced to them can become frustrated if they are unaware that conflicts and misunderstandings are expected as individuals figure out how to work best with each other.¹⁸

Companies that promote collaborative working are

5 times as likely

to be high performing¹⁹

×5



“When team members know how to speak up respectfully, disagree and deal with adversity, the team can be more productive and creative and won’t be caught up in conflict.”

—Kentaro Toyama, Ph.D.¹⁷

Get better results as leaders adeptly manage work teams

Managing teams calls for a new approach of building effective self-leadership in the team rather than creating dependence on central leaders.³

While poor group performance often comes down to problems with individuals, it’s not uncommon for managers to make serious mistakes in designing, supporting and leading teams. “Too often, they gather some people together (often, more than are needed in an attempt to represent all stakeholders), toss it a task and hope for the best. That’s not good enough.”³

Without preparation, team dysfunction can easily keep organizations from realizing those gains—and this oversight is happening. More than 60 percent of people who find working on teams difficult feel that part of the problem is they have not received enough teamwork training.⁹

Cross-functional teams offer some significant advantages in an evolving business world. Realize the powerful benefits of teamwork by properly preparing and training your teams.

About the Author



Brenda Smyth is a content creator for the Thought Leadership department at SkillPath. Drawing from 20-plus years of business and management experience, she flavors her blog posts, eNewsletters and articles with real people and experiences. She combats relaxation by always having at least one side gig and, as a business writer, is drawn to behavior science topics. Her writings have appeared on *Forbes.com* and *Entrepreneur.com*. In 2018, she co-authored *Top Career Tips*, a SkillPath publication.

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To learn more about this topic or other workplace challenges, download additional free resources at **es.skillpath.com/resources**.

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