



Cross-functional teams
Working with allies, enemies & other strangers
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Creating a cross-functional team is more than throwing people together, give them a challenge to meet or a problem to solve and expect them to thrive.

Qualities of a real team are :

- ❑ A universal goal with the members accountable for reaching it.
- ❑ Interdependency: each member depends on the other when the team wants to be successful.
- ❑ Unified spirit and effort.

Cross-functional teams have as special characteristic that they are composed of people with different functions from different levels within (and eventually outside) the organization.

Companies are using cross-functional teams to :

- ❑ Increase speed.
- ❑ Master complexity.
- ❑ Focus on the customer.
- ❑ Enhance creativity.
- ❑ Intense learning.
- ❑ Have one single point of contact.

The big challenge is getting people with variety of backgrounds, priorities and interests to work together. The leader usually has less authority than the organization's functional leaders. He needs a firm command of process skills :

- ❑ Asking questions
- ❑ Paraphrasing and listening skills
- ❑ Leading discussions

- ❑ Creating a safe and comfortable environment
- ❑ Involving all members
- ❑ Ensuring respect for each other
- ❑ Motivating

There are 4 basic models for cross-functional team leadership :

1. Co-leadership: a split between technical and process leadership.
2. Facilitator leadership: they help leaders prepare for meetings, offer advice on HR and coach individual members.
3. Project manager: the leader has the general-management skills, the members the technical and scientific skills.
4. Rotating leadership: OK for long term projects with several key phases.

When you want to lead with authority in whatever model you have to set clear goals, to be flexible, to be able to resolve conflicts and to be a scavenger.

Empowering a team comes from within the team, not from outside sources. An inspiring goal moves team members forward because they act with confidence in the future. They become team-centered and not self-centered.

Empowered teams :

- ❑ Have the responsibility and the authority to achieve their goals.



- ❑ Control tasks and processes
- ❑ Can make decisions

Working together with key-stakeholders (= those who will be affected by the team's work) commits them to be a part of the solution.

The empowerment can be different in a coordinating team (task force or committee), a semi-empowered team (self-directed or project team) and empowered teams.

In every team conflicts will arise originating in the past or the assumptions on rank.

Teams must adopt very specific operational goals and create and maintain positive relationships with functional departments and senior management. The team and the functional department must be flexible and support each other.

But goals alone are not the glue.

You can use following questions to evaluate your team :

1. Does my team have a clear purpose or commitment? Is it linked with the broader organizational mission?
2. Did you involve all members through discussion in the team's mission development?
3. Did you translate the team's mission into SMART performance objectives.
4. Does every team member understands his role in reaching the objectives?
5. Do you have an action plan for achieving objectives?

Techniques to avoid or solve conflicts :

- ❑ Providing training in conflict resolution (

listening skills, questioning skills, consensus-building skills).

- ❑ Help senior management and department managers understand the characteristics of a cross-functional team.
- ❑ Get expert help from HR professionals.
- ❑ Set standards for communication and trust.
- ❑ Put people working on a team in the same place.

As already briefly mentioned, building bridges to your key stakeholders will increase the effectivity of your team. Most teams have the same important stakeholders: department managers, customers and clients and senior management.

Following can help you building these bridges :

- ❑ Identify your key-stakeholders.
- ❑ Look for what you can do for key-stakeholders, like common objectives.
- ❑ Communicate formally and informally.
- ❑ Select boundary managers

Appraisal has – as everywhere – a major impact on the functioning and success of the team.

Reach out to your team members for input on team members.

Team members can be divided in 4 categories :

1. Contributors: shares information, helps using resources in the best way, pushes, accepts responsibilities and serves as mentor.
2. Collaborator: helps setting long-term goals, reminds to review goals



and objectives, works hard to achieve goals, open for new ideas and shares credit with other members.

3. Communicator: helps resolving problems, listens, shows enthusiasm, encourages and gives feedback.
4. Challenger: frank opinions, disputes conventional wisdom, pushes towards high ethical goals, reports honestly and supports legitimate team consensus.

Some final tips :

- ❑ 6 to 10 is the ideal size of a team.
- ❑ Avoid the Meeting Monster

If you want to ensure failure, follow Parker's 10 Ways :

1. Ignore ideas and recommendations from the team.
2. Don't give resources to solve problems.
3. Think about problems as failures.
4. Ask for lots of reviews and signatures.
5. Prevent the team from getting information on the business.
6. Assign a 'control person'
7. Don't involve the team in reorganizations or changes in policy.
8. Eliminate training.
9. Criticize a lot.
10. ' You know the best'