

Building a Cross-functional Team

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Most projects require a wide variety of skills to complete the work involved, so if you're managing a project of any type, it's likely that you'll have to work with a group of people from different backgrounds. They may be drawn from different parts of your organization; they may come from a number of separate organizations-wherever they're from, when they come together, they're known as a "cross-functional team."

It's the project manager's job to bring cross-functional team members together and form them into an effective group which operates as one to achieve the overall goals of the project. Unsurprisingly, this can sometimes be tricky. However, there are a number of rules which, if followed, can make team building much easier and more likely to succeed. This actionlist lays out the basics.

What You Need To Know

I'm new to project management and I have to build and lead a cross-functional team. Where do I start to find the right people?

Begin by identifying and engaging a team of people with the right skills and enthusiasm for the project. This list, obviously, will vary enormously, depending on the size of your project and what it entails. Say, for example, you are organizing an office move: you're likely to need floor planners, packers, removal men, electricians to do the wiring, IT people to sort out the computers, and so on.

Your team will probably need to come from all parts of your company, so that you get people with the right skills and also that you get input and involvement from all parts of the business. You may well find that your senior stakeholder (the senior manager who has agreed to the project idea, for example) can help you to find and recruit the right people.

Is it important to get the right mix of personalities, as well as skills, in a project team?

Absolutely. The mix of personalities among a team's members can have a huge effect on whether the team functions properly or not.

Meredith Belbin, the business writer and academic, identified around a dozen common team roles as part of his research in the 1970s.

Role and characteristic	Function
Leader -aims to get the best out of everyone	Forms the team; sets objectives; monitors performance; provides structure.
Challenger -rocks the boat	Adopts unconventional approaches; challenges the accepted order; comes up with ideas.
Expert -provides specialist advice	Provides a professional viewpoint, often from an external source (for example IT, accounting).
Ambassador -makes friends easily	Develops external relationships; understands external environment; sells the team.
Judge -down to earth, logical, careful	Listens; evaluates; ponders before deciding; avoids arguments; seeks truth and the best way.
Innovator -provides source of vision, ingenuity, and creativity	Uses imagination; motivates others; evaluates and builds on ideas; deals with complex issues.
Diplomat -steers team to successful outcome	Influential; builds alliances in and out of the team; good negotiator; aids agreement; often becomes leader in difficult times.
Conformer -helpful, reliable, co-operative	Fills gaps; jack of all trades; seldom challenges authority.
Outputter -chases progress	Self-motivated; focuses on tasks and results; imposes timescales; checks progress; intolerant of other people.
Supporter/mediator -focuses on team relationships	Builds morale; resolves conflict; gives advice; supports and encourages.
Quality controller -ensures tasks done well	Checks output; preoccupied with high standards; focuses on quality.
Reviewer -monitors performance	Observes; reviews performance; promotes feedback; looks for pitfalls.

Ideally, you need a good mix of these types of people in your team (bearing in mind that people can fulfill more than one role at a time), as you're likely to have problems if you have too many of one type. Imagine a team full of judges, or challengers, for instance!

However, don't worry too much if your team does contain quite a few of the same type of people-there are ways around it. For example, you could split your team into smaller "working parties," each of which is responsible for particular tasks that together contribute to the overall goals.

What To Do

Learn About the Stages of Team Formation

Teams go through a number of stages after they are first brought together, and these stages can be responsible for different kinds of problems or issues that arise.

Say, for example, your team is going through a sticky patch and you're having to deal with conflict and arguments. If, rather than wondering what on earth is going wrong, you recognize that this may simply be a result of the stage your team has reached, it will help you judge objectively what-if anything-needs to be done about it.

The four stages are:

- **Forming.** Excitement is high; everything is new and fun; no-one knows what they're doing yet.
- **Storming.** Roles are assigned; personalities begin to show; uncertainty of others and their abilities can lead to conflict, which can smolder unless tackled promptly; people don't yet feel safe to be open and honest.
- **Norming.** Confidence starts to improve; relationships strengthen; differences of opinion are respected; solutions begin to develop; goals become manageable, and everyone starts to work together to achieve them.
- **Performing.** The team becomes fluid, with people taking it in turns to lead; delegation occurs so team members grow and flourish; goals and targets are reached regularly and effectively.

Help the "Norming" Process Along

In any team, it is important to get the "vectors" aligned. A vector is a force that pulls in a certain direction and every project team member will have their own, created by their individual beliefs, thoughts, and desires. Within a team, it can be disastrous if everyone's vectors are all straining in different directions-and even one "anti-vector" or team member forcing the current a separate way will have an adverse effect.

In your role as a project manager, it's your responsibility to get every team member pulling in the same direction to achieve the project goals-a process known as "vectorship." Although this sounds obvious, it's extraordinary how many projects fail because individuals who are being negative are allowed to go unchallenged!

The best way to get these vectors aligned is to create a working climate in which mistakes and failures are viewed as learning experiences, not occasions for blame, and where every member feels included "in the loop." There are a number of elements which contribute to this type of an atmosphere:

- **A free flow of information.** Make sure that every member receives/has easy access to any information they need to do their job.

- **Open communication.** Don't keep secrets, or allow team members to feel that some people are privy to information that others aren't.
- **Frequent feedback.** People need to know how well they're doing-and if and where improvements can be made.
- **Regular one-to-one interaction.** Talk to your team members as people, and use the time to make sure they're happy and on side.
- **A listening culture.** Make sure that people feel free to say what they think without fear or anger, and that they will be heard, even when they're voicing minority or unpopular views.

Learn What Motivates People

Motivation is essential for people and teams to work effectively and harmoniously. Studies into what motivates people at work have revealed that motivators and demotivators are not necessarily the same thing. In other words, the things that make people feel motivated and enthusiastic are not always the same things that, if unsatisfactory, make them feel discontented and apathetic.

The table below identifies the top ten motivators for project team members, and the top ten demotivators (R. J. Yourzak, "Motivation in the Project Environment" (1985)):

Motivators	Score	Demotivators	Score
Recognition	1	Relations with project manager	1
Achievement	2	Team peer relations	2
Responsibility	3	Salary	3
Team peer relations	4	Project manager's leadership	4
Salary	5	Security	5
Relations with project manager	6	Work conditions	6
Project manager's leadership	7	Organization's policy	7
Work itself	8	Team subordinate relations	8
Advancement	9	Personal time	9
Personal growth	10	Title/status	10

These lists prove the point: some things, if they're good, are hardly noticed-but they cause high levels of dissatisfaction if they're bad.

Go through your list of team members and consider what you think motivates each of them, or small groups of them, if this is more appropriate. Then consider whether any of the demotivators listed

are present in your project or organization. Is there anything you can do to boost the positives and minimize the effect of the negatives?

Delegate

Delegation is another vital tool for managing your team. It's not something that everyone finds easy to start with, but it does get easier with practice and will help your project to run smoothly. Here are the basic rules:

- Select the most appropriate person for the task. Depending on what the job is, you might not have to always delegate downward, toward your team; you can also delegate upward (to your manager) or sideways (to a peer).
- Communicate clearly to whoever will be helping you, so that he or she is clear about what they should be coming back to you with, and when.
- Break down tasks into manageable chunks, probably with deadlines at each stage where the other person can report back and let you know that things are moving in the right direction.
- Keep proper records so you know what tasks you are delegating and to whom.

And here's a quick summary of how much supervision is needed, depending on a person's experience and motivation:

Level of experience	Degree of supervision required
1. New or inexperienced person, low confidence	Tell the person what to do; show them how to do it; put a plan together, showing each checkpoint when they have to report back to you; review the task and give feedback.
2. Slightly more experience/confidence	Tell the person what your desired outcome is, and plan the steps together. Less frequent checkpoints than (1).
3. More experienced, though needs some guidance and help	Tell the person what your desired outcome is and allow them to plan it, and establish when checkpoints are necessary.
4. Experienced, committed person	Explain the required outcome, timescales, and checkpoints (if any), and leave them to get on with it. But don't abdicate all responsibility for a task; you are the project leader, and are ultimately responsible for everything!

The secret of good delegation (and supervision) is to put yourself into your team members' shoes. Imagine that you are a really capable professional who knows and enjoys what he's doing, but has a project manager constantly peering over his shoulder and commenting on how he does his job! Conversely, think what it would be like for new recruits, who are still very unsure of themselves and their role, to be managed by a "hands-off" boss who simply leaves them to sink or swim. How would you react under those circumstances?

Resolve Conflict

Projects can be breeding grounds for conflict because they are temporary situations and circumstances within them tend to change continually. Unresolved conflict can be very destructive, so it needs to be tackled immediately. Here's how:

1. Recognize conflict

Conflict can be either overt (clearly visible and stemming from an easily identifiable cause), or covert (bubbling under the surface, from a less obvious or apparently unrelated cause).

2. Monitor the climate

Look out for early warning signals so that you can deal with the conflict quickly, before it gets out of hand. Early action saves time and stress later.

3. Research the situation

Spend time finding out the true root cause of the conflict, who is involved, and what the potential effects are. Putting yourself in other people's shoes will enable you to understand and empathize better.

4. Plan your approach

Encourage everyone involved to be open and understanding in the way they interact with others. It might be a good idea to ask people to write down their thoughts and feelings, so that they can express themselves logically and constructively.

5. Tackle the issue

- Give everyone a chance to express their point of view.
- Avoid fight or flight: fighting back will only make the situation worse, while running away from the situation will show that you don't feel up to resolving the situation, and it may lead to a loss of respect.
- Remember to be assertive. Becoming aggressive will get you nowhere, but neither will passivity.
- Acknowledge the views and rights of all parties.
- Encourage those involved to come up with their own solution-if they've created the solution, they are more likely to buy into it.
- Suggest a constructive way forward.

What To Avoid

You Don't Involve Your Team Early Enough in Decision Making

Making too many rules and trying to impose your own plans and methods on your team without getting their input is just asking for trouble. You've brought these people together for their skills-so involve them from the start. Not only will they provide information and ideas, but also they will feel as if they "own" the plans, all of which boosts their level of commitment to them.

This doesn't mean that your projects should be planned by committee; rather that you, as manager, plan the project based on all the available experience and creative ideas. Perhaps you could attempt the first level(s) of planning to help you to explain the project to the team and then ask for comments. Then, using these, the final breakdown of tasks could be looked at again by the people who'll actually be carrying them out.

You Micromanage

Don't go there! You'll explode with the effort of trying to oversee every detail yourself, and your team will quickly lose motivation. Delegate the work and supervise it appropriately, but keep your eye mainly on the overall direction of the project-the "big picture."

Where To Learn More

Web Sites:

Belbin Associates: <http://www.belbin.com>

Experience Based Learning, Team Building Workshops: <http://www.ebl.org/index.html>

Gallup Management Journal: <http://gmj.gallup.com>

Office of Personnel Management:

<http://www.opm.gov/perform/teams.asp#Staff%20Recommendations>