



## BUILDING EFFECTIVE UNITS - QUICK TIPS

*Five quick tips for creating and managing productive groups in the workplace.*

### *Know What Groups are Good For*

- Some projects or challenges are best tackled by an individual, some are best spread across a team.
  - ✦ For instance, individual performers may excel at focused research, long-term writing assignments, drafting plans for execution of complex decisions, and critical analysis of emerging hypotheses. Larger groups may excel at brainstorming, identifying new opportunities, executing complex work that must be completed simultaneously, and making decisions where input from multiple perspectives is mission critical.
- A team that is united by a shared sense of purpose can cooperate to work efficiently through major challenges towards a common goal; one that is disorganized or lacks a shared mission can be potentially less productive than a single person.
- An individual working autonomously will frequently lean towards presenting "safer" options and ideas to their bosses/ advisers/professors. Given the opportunity, groups tend to accept more risk and, as a result, often generate a larger pool of potentially more ambitious ideas than a single person.

### *Have Clearly Defined Roles*

- While it is not strictly necessary to have titles & labels for every single role that members of your unit assume, everyone should know who is responsible for what. This helps minimize misunderstandings and assumptions.
- Units can generate a lot of discussion and ideas, therefore it is important to have someone who can focus the group's creativity and, when necessary, bring the group back on point when it has followed a tangent for too long.
- Here are some important, archetypal roles that should be understood:
  - ✦ **Convener/Leader** (has the final say, keeps people on point)
  - ✦ **Communicator** (facilitates cooperation, exchange of information between and among team members)
  - ✦ **Challenger** (tries to bring alternative view points, plays "devil's advocate")
  - ✦ **Collaborator** (gets stuff done)

### *A Shared Sense of Mission Unites a Group*

- When a group of people are united in a well understood and shared purpose, everyone's productivity can increase as a result. When groups lack that shared identity - when the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing - productivity and morale plummet.
- When all the members of your team have bought in to the same mission, everyone becomes a part of a support network. People are more willing to help each other and a greater sense of trust and cooperation is fostered within the group. This is particularly beneficial when times of stress or crisis emerge - with everyone able to look to each other for guidance and support, fewer irrational or hasty decisions are made.
- The notion of "giving credit where credit is due" is important in any workplace, and teams of people that have all bought in to the same mission are more prone to share in each other's successes when the group's goals are reached.

### *Identifying Team Players Begins at Recruitment*

- If your unit tackles its challenges as a team, you want to make sure the people you bring on board are aligned with that style of working. There are a lot of questions that can be asked at the interview level that can reveal a lot about a person's mentality towards working in collaborations. Here are a few simple questions you can ask potential applicants:
  - ✦ "What role do you see yourself playing within a team?"





- ◆ "What have people told you in the past they value in you as a team player?"
- ◆ "How do you deal with conflict? How do you approach someone when you have an issue with them?"
- ◆ "How do you prefer to be approached if someone has an issue with you?"
- ◆ "Describe a situation when a team that you were part of encountered a major roadblock or setback... What did you do to overcome the resistance that you encountered?"

## *Communication is Crucial*

- Communication is central to making sure all members of a group understand both the over-arching goal of the unit, as well as the contributions expected of each team member.
- Regular group meetings allow everyone to reorient to the current status or level of progress of other members within the team, and move forward with a clear understanding of the big picture.
  - ◆ At the same time, meeting too often can hamper productivity and create an environment in which people feel they are being micromanaged. As always, striking a good balance is an important aspect of keeping lines of communication open and efficient.
- When smart and talented people come together, there are always going to be differences of opinion and conflicts that arise. Patient and level-headed communication is the best tool for resolving these kinds of situations, before they fester or boil over into something more serious.
- If your team has a reliable and well understood means of communicating - one which precludes assumption and leaves room for graceful self-correction - many conflicts can be diffused before they ever become an issue.

