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HBR's 10 Must Reads On Teams (with Featured Article "The Discipline Of Teams," By Jon R. Katzenbach And Douglas K. Smith)



Synopsis

Most teams underperform. Yours can beat the odds. If you read nothing else on building better teams, read these 10 articles. We've combed through hundreds of articles in the Harvard Business Review archive and selected the most important ones to help you assemble and steer teams that get results. Leading experts such as Jon Katzenbach, Teresa Amabile, and Tamara Erickson provide the insights and advice you need to:

- Boost team performance through mutual accountability
- Motivate large, diverse groups to tackle complex projects
- Increase your team's emotional intelligence
- Prevent decision deadlock
- Extract results from a bunch of touchy superstars
- Fight constructively with top-management colleagues

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Avoiding Dictator Syndrome: The Paradox of Circular Logic in Teams In HBR's 10 Must Reads On Teams (2013), I have found Frisch's (2008) article, When Teams Can't

Decide, to be my favorite and most applicable to my current career season. In my career, I've considered one of three core discipline leads, whose work impacts the other in a circular fashion. When having team meetings to discuss creating new features, each lead, representing the expertise of their team's function, weighs in on the conversation. This often presents the issue of what Frisch has identified as "circular logic" (Strategic, 2012). Circular logic, also known as the "voting paradox", was first discovered by an eighteenth century French mathematician and social theorist, the Marquis de Condorcet, in which different subsets of the group can generate conflicting majorities for all possible alternatives (Frisch, 2008, loc. 2144). The article focuses on how teams can circumvent the "dictator-by-default syndrome", which is cornering their superior to make an either/or decision, and navigate the complexities of circular logic (Frisch, 2008). The purpose of this paper is to review Frisch's (2008) article. "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function" (Fitzgerald, 1945). In math, the transitive principle is stated as follows: if $A > B$ and $B > C$, then $A > C$. However, the Marquis de Condorcet proved this principle is only true as an individual or in pairs (Strategic, 2012). The transitive principle never became a law because it does not work for groups in which there are three or more decisions, each offering multiple options (Strategic, 2012). What is perceived as irrational within the context of individuals and pairs is normal for groups and thus, no voting mechanism can overcome Condorcet's paradox in a group (Strategic, 2012). In applying this to my career, team members often approach a superior to help overcome decision-making logic because team members are more biased towards their functional areas. This produces a stalemate of sorts by not having the ability to rank preferences to decisions and enabling circular logic. Because information is presented to the superior as an either/or problem, it places them in a lose-lose situation. If A is selected, B and C lose, thus not favoring their superior's decision. Is it possible the information can be nuanced and presented as a both/and? Spanier (n.d.) noted, "Instead of being oppressed by the tyranny of the OR, highly visionary companies liberate themselves with the genius of the AND, the ability to embrace both extremes of a number of dimensions at the same time. Instead of choosing between A OR B, they figure out a way to have both A AND B. In order to circumvent 'dictator-by-default syndrome', and cater more towards having both A AND B, Frisch (2008) provided four suggestions: 1) specify the desired outcome, 2) test fences and walls, 3) surface preferences early, and 4) assign devil's advocates (loc. 2168-2193). By focusing on the overall goal, the superior is able to narrow down the amount of options to what clearly achieves the goal (Frisch,

2008, loc. 2168). Frisch (2008) stated, "Without clear desired outcomes, team members choose options based on unspoken, differing assumptions. This sets the stage for the dictator-by-default syndrome" (loc. 2168). With clear direction on the goal, team members can now test their options against company policy to see if their ideas are stopped, a wall, or presented a passable barrier, a fence (Frisch, 2008, loc. 2193). Once passed, the options must be filtered based on the customer or stakeholder's preferences (Frisch, 2008, loc. 2193).

"Using weighted preferences is another way to narrow the decision-making field and help prevent the dictator-by-default syndrome" (Frisch, 2008, loc. 2259). The remaining options can be deliberated over until a final solution emerges. Frisch (2008) stated, "By breaking the false binary of a business case into several explicit and implicit alternatives and assigning a devil's advocate to critique each option, you can depersonalize the discussion, making thorough and dispassionate counterarguments an expected part of strategic deliberations" (loc. 2280). In conclusion, Frisch's (2008) article, *When Teams Can't Decide*, focuses on how to work within the complexities of circular logic in decision-making and circumventing the dictator-by-default syndrome.

Frisch's (2008) concepts to narrowing options for decision-making focuses on achieving the overall goal by not cornering a superior to an either/or decision, but enabling a both/and decision. The remaining options are then deliberated over until a final decision emerges.

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I found the article, *Eight Ways to Build Collaborative Teams* (Gratton & Erickson, 2007), to be my favorite out of HBR's 10 Must Reads (2013). Building a team that knows how to work together is a tremendous benefit in today's growing business culture. The article proposes that "the qualities required for success are the same qualities that undermine success" (Gratton & Erickson, 2007, p. 56). These qualities for building collaborative teams are being large, virtual participation, diversity and the high educational levels. This article suggests using the eight ways to build collaboration in teams with complex and major initiatives. They refer to the large actions that companies need to make to stay competitive or change to create

value. Gratton and Erickson began by researching fifty-five large teams that seems to demonstrate high levels of collaboration in order to find similarities in their practices (2007). What they found were four categories in which all the businesses seems to "overcome substantially the difficulties that were posed by size, long-distance communication, diversity and specialization" (Gratton & Erickson, 2007, p. 58). The four categories were executive support, HR practices, strength of the team leader and the structure of the team. The rest of this review breaks down each of the four categories in which the authors came up with their eight ways to build collaborative teams.

Executive Support "At the most basic level, a team's success or failure at collaborating reflects the philosophy of the top executives in the organization" (Gratton & Erickson, 2007, p. 59). Top leaders have to (1) invest in signature relationship practices. Gratton and Erickson found that "in every case the company's top executives had invested significantly in building and maintaining social relationship throughout the organization (2007, p. 60). But it is not enough just to invest in this for employees, executives need to (2) model collaborative behavior. People should see the top leaders working hand in hand with others. "A senior team's collaborative nature trickles down throughout the organization" (Gratton & Erickson, 2007, p. 63). Another area executive support is needed is by (3) create a gift culture. This gift culture is made up of leaders investing time, energy and resources in mentoring and coaching. It should be evident in both themselves personally and throughout the entire organization. The huge benefit of this practice is that it allows people within the organization to build the networks they need to do the work they have been tasked with across the company (2007).

HR Practices Surprisingly, Gratton and Erickson's research showed, reward systems didn't have a noticeable effect on collaborative behavior in the companies they interviewed. More so, it was the human resources significant investment to (4) ensuring the requisite skills and (5) supporting a sense of community that made a significant impact for collaborative teams (2007). When HR departments intentionally made sure teams had specific relational skills necessary for working with others it displayed in team performance. HR should invest in teaching employees "appreciating others, being able to engage in purposeful conversation, productively and creatively resolving conflicts and program management" (Gratton and Erickson, 2007, p. 66). Their studies also showed "While a communal spirit can develop spontaneously, we discovered that HR can also play a critical role in cultivating it, by sponsoring group events and activities" (Gratton and Erickson, 2007, p. 68). By investing in relational skills and providing informal opportunities for employees to gather together, a leader can encourage better cooperation and collaboration.

Strength of the Team Leader It is very important for the collaboration of a team to

have the correct leader. Gratton and Erickson speak to the importance of flexibility as a quality of managers (2007). This means that organizations need to (6) assign leaders who are both task- and relationship-oriented. They make the goal clear, engaged in debates about commitments, and clarified the responsibilities of individual team members. However at a certain point in the development of the project they switched to a relationship orientation (Gratton and Erickson, 2007, p. 70). Leaders that can change their style during a project are more likely to lead a successful collaborative team.

Team Formation and Structure

The complex nature of team-member can stifle the goals a team is working toward, especially when they do not know each other. Gratton and Erickson found that when 20% to 40% of the team members were already well connected to one another, the team had strong collaboration right from the start (2007, p. 71). This shows it is important to (7) build on heritage relationships in order to build team collaboration. These heritage relationships have already invested time and effort in building trust with each other. The one pitfall that can move a team away from collaboration with this practice is if not skillfully managed, too many of them can actually disrupt collaboration. When a significant number of people with the team know one another, they tend to form strong subgroups (Gratton and Erickson, 2007, p. 72). This can cause a divisive nature within the team that will work against accomplishing collaboration. A way that teams can limit certain friction within the group setting is for there to be an (8) understanding of role clarity and task ambiguity. Gratton and Erickson state, Collaboration improves when the roles of individual team members are clearly defined and well understood (2007, p. 72). When people know, specifically, what they are supposed to be doing and how their role impacts the whole, leaders limit the need for sharing when it isn't needed. It also empowers those who are highly skilled to work independently on their portion. Given this practice, teams can be successful if they are composed of specialists who had deep expertise in their given function, and each person had a clearly defined role (Gratton and Erickson, 2007, p. 73). If team can practice the eight ways above they will succeed in working together on complex tasks or projects. Gratton and Erickson summarize this article by saying, Strengthening your organization capacity for collaboration requires a combination of long-term investments in building relationships and trust, in developing a culture in which senior leaders are role models of cooperation and smarter near-term decisions about the ways team are formed, roles are defined, and challenges and takes are articulated (2007, p. 74). Once a company can articulate these practices it will overcome the four traits that are crucial to successful teams but can also undermine them; size, virtual, diversity and expertise. The authors conclude this article well when they state

“Companies can assemble the breadth of expertise needed to solve complex business problems without inducing the destructive behaviors that can accompany it” (Gratton and Erickson, 2007, p. 74).

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