



## READING GUIDE

# HBR's 10 Must Reads on Teams

HBR's 10 Must Reads Series

Most teams underperform, but yours can beat the odds. *HBR's 10 Must Reads on Teams* gathers definitive ideas from the pages of *Harvard Business Review* on boosting team performance through mutual accountability; motivating large, diverse groups to tackle complex projects; increasing your team's emotional intelligence; preventing decision deadlock; getting great results from touchy superstars; and handling conflict constructively.

**Here are some key lessons and takeaways to get you started and guide your reading.**

### What you need to know about teams in 66 words:

Communication patterns are the strongest predictor of a team's success. Leaders can't make a team deliver great results, but they can increase the likelihood. Not all working groups are actual "teams." To engage your teammates, help them see their own progress. Group emotional intelligence norms build the foundation for true collaboration. When teams can't come to decisions, it's often a process problem, not a people problem.

### Three communication patterns affect team performance

- **Energy** is the number and nature of exchanges among team members. Normal conversation involves many of these exchanges, and in a team setting more than one exchange may be going on at a time.
- **Engagement** is the average of energy among team members. Teams that have clusters of high-energy communication and other members that don't participate, don't perform as well.
- **Exploration** involves communication that members engage in outside their team. Higher-performing teams seek more outside connections.
- When teams map their own communication behavior over time and then make adjustments that move it closer to the ideal, they can dramatically improve their performance.

## Leaders must set the right conditions for team success

- Contrary to conventional wisdom, teaming can be detrimental to tackling some challenging tasks. But leaders can set the right conditions to encourage success.
- **Designate a “deviant.”** Appoint a naysayer who will challenge the team's desire for too much homogeneity (which stifles creativity).
- **Avoid double digits.** Build teams of no more than nine people. Too many more and the number of links between members becomes unmanageable.
- **Keep the team together.** Established teams work more effectively than those whose composition changes constantly.

## A team's essential discipline comprises five characteristics

- **A meaningful common purpose that the team has helped shape.** A team must “own” its own purpose.
- **Specific performance goals that flow from the common purpose.** Compelling goals inspire and challenge a team.
- **A mix of complementary skills.** Successful teams develop skills when the challenge requires it.
- **A strong commitment to how the work gets done.** On a real team, all members, the leader included, contribute in concrete ways.
- **Mutual accountability.** Members must forge their accountability to each other, not just to the leader.

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## EXPLORE TEAMS ON HBR.ORG

**Article:** “[Reinventing Your Leadership Team](#)” by Paul Leinwand, Mahadeva Matt Mani, and Blair Sheppard

**Video:** “[Give Your Team More Negative Feedback](#)” with Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman

**Audio:** “[How to Fix ‘Team Creep’](#)” *HBR IdeaCast* with Mark Mortensen

**Article:** “[5 New Rules for Leading a Hybrid Team](#)” by Laszlo Bock

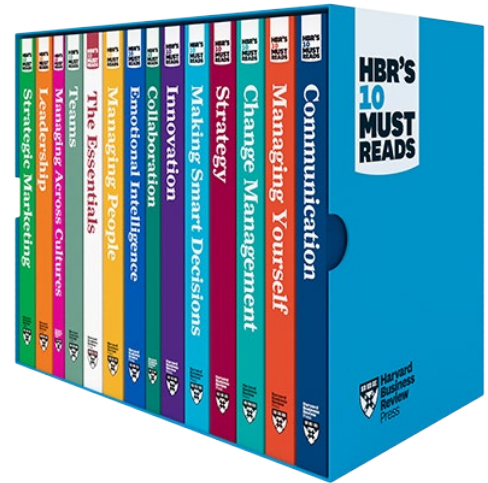
**Audio:** “[Bridging the Gap Between Me and My Team](#)” *Coaching Real Leaders* podcast with Muriel Wilkins

**Article:** “[Keeping a Diverse Team United in Polarized Times](#)” by Richard Farnell, Kelly McManus, Sean Imbs, William Branch, Erick Buckner, and Isaac Taylor

**Video:** “[Building the Team Journey](#)” with Pat Wadors

## HBR's 10 Must Reads Ultimate Boxed Set

The most important ideas on management all in one place. We've combed through hundreds of *Harvard Business Review* articles on topics such as emotional intelligence, communication, change, leadership, strategy, managing people, and managing yourself and selected the most important ones to help you maximize your own and your organization's performance. This 14-volume set offers essential reading selected from the pages of *Harvard Business Review* on topics critical to the success of every manager.



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