

## Team Composition

The success or failure of a team is strongly related to the quality of its membership. Collins's (2001) popular book, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't*, stresses the importance of finding the best people possible. Metaphorically speaking, he suggests that "getting the right people on the bus" is even more important than deciding where the bus is going, because high-caliber individuals will be able to figure out where the bus needs to go and determine the best route for getting there. Research on sports teams suggests that "the best individuals make the best team" (Gill, 1984, p. 325). This correlation between individual talent and team performance is strongest in sports such as baseball (.94) and football (.91). However, it is entirely possible for a group of highly skilled players to be a poorly performing team. For example, though a soccer team of eleven all-star goalies may boast an extraordinary amount of individual talent, their performance as a team may suffer because their one-dimensional level of expertise does not encompass all of the skills required to play a well-rounded game of soccer. Thus, not only do teams need to have talented members, those members need to have skills that complement one another.

Ideally, each member will possess task-related knowledge and skills along with interpersonal skills that enable them to work with others. The relative amount of each type of skill that a given member should possess will depend on the complexity of the task and the level of interdependence required to achieve the desired outcome. More specifically, task-related knowledge and skills are especially important on tasks that are complex and that require highly specialized knowledge and skills to achieve results. On the other hand, members of reciprocally interdependent teams will need stronger interpersonal skills than do members of groups that use sequential or pooled methods. Regardless, group work will always call upon some mixture of both sets of skills; thus, it is important to be aware of each when building a team.

While task-related competence is important to consider in choosing potential members, ideal members also possess strong interpersonal skills. Members who are considered "team players" are enthusiastic, optimistic, collegial, cooperative, and flexible (Rousseau, Aubé, & Savoie, 2006). Furthermore, they are self-motivated and conscientious, and have strong communication skills. Communication skills such as active listening and assertiveness are used both to support and to challenge other team members. Yet individuals who have strong interpersonal skills are self-aware enough to know that they are not being overly assertive, derogatory, or offensive. In addition, they are able to accept negative feedback from others and respond in a nondefensive manner. Of course, those with strong interpersonal skills also know how to give critical feedback in a way that is motivated by a desire to help others, not tear them down. Spirited banter through which members challenge one another's assumptions is often the hallmark of high-performing teams; it is described in detail in Chapter 6, on communication.

Stevens and Campion (1999) have developed the Teamwork-KSA Test to measure team knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). After reviewing the research, they determined five specific areas associated with effective participation in groups:

***Interpersonal Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities***

*Conflict resolution:* Recognizing types and sources of conflict; encouraging desirable conflict but discouraging undesirable conflict; and employing integrative (win-win) negotiation strategies rather than distributive (win-lose) strategies.

*Collaborative problem-solving:* Identifying situations requiring participative group problem-solving and using the proper degree of participation; recognizing obstacles to collaborative group problem-solving and implementing appropriate corrective actions.

*Communication:* Understanding effective communication networks using decentralized networks where possible; recognizing open and supportive communication methods; maximizing the consistency between nonverbal and verbal messages; recognizing and interpreting the nonverbal messages of others; and engaging in and understanding the importance of small talk and ritual greetings.

***Self-Management Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities***

*Goal-setting and performance management:* Establishing specific, challenging, and accepted team goals, and monitoring, evaluating, and providing feedback on both overall team performance and individual team member performance.

*Planning and task coordination:* Coordinating and synchronizing activities, information, and tasks among team members, as well as aiding the team in establishing individual task and role assignments that ensure the proper balance of workload among members.

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Sources: Miller (2001, p. 748); Stevens and Campion (1994, p. 505).

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The Teamwork-KSA Test is just one of many assessment tools available commercially for assessing current and potential members, and its results are often used for member selection or staff development.

### Team Size

After team designers clarify the team's task, predict the level of interdependence that will be required for success, and identify potential members, they must decide how many members to enlist. In smaller groups of three or four, members may have to take on multiple roles and responsibilities. But in groups of more than eight or ten members, coordination can become cumbersome. The complexity and breadth of the task to be completed will help to inform the minimum number of members required to complete the task. In other words, the number of specializations or fields that the task will call upon, added to the human capital that will be required in order to carry out the job, will yield an estimate as to the number of individuals that should be called to the team. Noted team expert J. Richard Hackman (2002) emphasizes the importance of team size and specifically warns against the common error of placing too many members on a team.

What are the risks associated with oversized teams? Coordination losses increase as the number of people involved on any given task increases and relational bonds weaken (Mueller, 2012). As group size grows, individual members may also become passive due to a diffusion of responsibility, a lack of accountability, and ultimately a reduction in commitment

**Table 2.1**

Task Roles	Function
Information seeker	Asks for facts, opinions, and ideas from the group, and for clarification and elaboration about existing concepts
Information giver	Contributes facts, opinions, and novel ideas to the group
Discussion facilitator	Facilitates the discussion by engaging the group
Task manager	Keeps the group on task and focuses on practical details
Skeptic	Challenges ideas and evaluates potential solutions
Recorder	Takes notes and records the decisions of the group

**Table 2.2**

Relationship Roles	Function
Encourager	Validates, affirms, and supports others
Harmonizer	Mediates conflict among group members
Process observer	Observes and periodically comments on the groups progress
Advocate	Helps quieter members to speak up and be heard in the group

**Table 2.3**

Individual Roles	Function
Resister	Opposes the group by being negative and passive-aggressive
Dominator	Dominates discussions and intimidates others
Avoider	Tries to do as little work as possible
Attention seeker	Calls attention to self to meet personal needs

given the opportunity to participate in more productive roles. However, groups often make it challenging, even for members playing negative roles, to change roles. Once initial impressions have been formed, it can be difficult to change them.

Interestingly, a given role can change the typical behavior of the role carrier. Commonly held beliefs about how a particular role should be carried out can determine an individual's