

Who's the most important player in a (sports) team?

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As a football fan myself, I can say that I spend a lot of time thinking about a team instead of the team's sport itself, which may speak tons about sport's individuality. Probably the most important individual recognition in football is France's Ballon D'Or award, and every year it is awarded to the best player in that season ever since 1956. Interestingly, there is only one goalkeeper who has won it: the Russian Lev Yashin, in 1963 (Burt, 2022). Ever since the award's establishment, more than 50% of the times a striker wins it, and only around 10% of the times a defender has won it (Burt, 2022). However, does this resemble team importance? Is there more merit – and hence, more importance – to certain team roles?

Teams exist whenever there is an objective that is too large to be achieved by an individual. In recent years, organizations have grown to the point where “reductionist hierarchical management no longer works”, as Medium Daily Digest writes in an article about Ford's team management (Gordon, 2017). Decisions can no longer rely on one person, and therefore the power decentralizes. Let's revisit the concept of decentralization in Software, for example, by saying that it refers to a system divided in parts but *acts as one* (Van Steen et al., 2017). Therefore, if power is decentralized in a team, then power acts as one but it is constituted by different entities. The importance that the team has in thus the importance that all team members have.

It is crucial to understand that to give importance to a single role in a team means to isolate it. The fact that someone seems to make a team work is the product of synergy, and synergy is a characteristic of the team rather than a single individual. This can be induced from the 2002 case of the European Space Agency, where a rocket blew up apparently due to no logical explanation other than the integration of working parts manufactured in different countries (Gordon, 2017) (Lane, 2020). The pieces worked as intended by themselves, but when assembled, they exploded. Therefore, synergy comes when there is a union, and this shows that synergy exists in the union. Thus, union has a characteristic, true when in existence, and it is the product of synergy. The fact that a team functions as intended is due to its union and physical interaction, and therefore cannot be attributed to one role over the others. The fact that one person functions well in a team, is more than “a rational decision; it is a mutual choice”, as Bolman and Deal wrote in their article *What Makes a Team Work?* (Bolman et al., 1992). Let's go back to the Ballon D'Or, would Benzema (Burt, 2022) have won it without a single teammate's input?

This is a strong debate because the fact that we attribute importance to one role inside a team does not necessarily mean that the person in that role would function without the team. Maybe it is just a matter of portion: can 50% of the

team's synergy rely on one person and the other 50% be spread across the other 15 team members? According to Google's Project Aristotle (Google Research, 2016) (Duhigg et al., 2016), to make such a statement means to misunderstand people's roles. If synergy is 50% due to a single person, then it is probably because their role is to work on synergy, much like leaders or project managers. This consequently means that the other 15 individuals have another set of 15 tasks where they are 50% of the reason that task works, and therefore, the team functions. Google's research on "the perfect team" showed that 20% of the team's effectiveness relies on the fact that all members have a balanced workload in terms of share of work, and they are aware of their roles in the team (Google Research, 2016) (Duhigg et al., 2016).

The famous case of Data General's new 32-bit computer in the 1970s done in record time and with record technology at the time marked a singular milestone not only for computer science but for team management (Bolman et al., 1992). The team, completely forgotten by the company, treated as without any respect nor recognition, worked against all odds and became history. The team members themselves explained that they were paid no good money, they did not have any management principles, nor clear structure (Bolman et al., 1992). But they had one thing: power.

This included power struggles, where one individual may hack another's computer for fun, another may speak about the leader badly to the company's boss, and so on, as they explained in the article by Bolman and Deal (Bolman et al., 1992). These power struggles created bonds, a shared culture, rather than a clear structure. Control was everywhere. This comes back to our main point: synergy was the characteristic of a team, existing only when the team is united. Each member of the Data General's team made an equal contribution to power. This may seem from one perspective a control deficit, a disorder in structure, but that equal contribution makes it impossible is what forms synergy, and synergy is a feature of a team's union, not an individual. Synergy makes it impossible for a team member to be considered as more important than the rest.

We can conclude from this essay that although it may seem that one person can hold the team together, it is due to the equal contribution of the rest of the team members. Although it may be unnoticed, each member has a balanced share of what makes a team work – even in those members that ignore their duties, for there is action in omission – and this is called the decentralization of power. The decentralization of power seems to be what glues people in teams, often called synergy. If synergy is characteristic of a team, then it cannot be attributed to one person, and therefore there cannot be one role that is more important than the others inside any functional team.

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