

# TEAM DYNAMICS

with Melissa Thomas-Hunt  
Associate Professor, University of Virginia Darden School of Business

DISCUSSION GUIDE

## KEY POINTS

Successful teams harness the expertise of all members.

Teams are formed to solve a problem, make a critical decision, or fix a situation. A successful team brings together a diverse set of people with experiences and expertise to uncover new solutions. The more effective the team is in using unique perspectives, the more successful the team.

Team performance is negatively impacted when a team makes false assumptions about what's important.

Two roadblocks get in the way of effective team performance.

1. **Common Knowledge Effect** is when teams spend more time discussing the common knowledge known by all members, as opposed to the unique knowledge individual team members bring to finding solutions.
2. **Over-Weighting Status** is when teams give more weight to the perspective of higher status team members and pay less attention to ideas offered by lower status team members.

Airtime matters.

The research is clear that the amount of time spent talking in a meeting amounts to “getting credit” for contributing to the team’s outcome. Those who talk the most, get the most credit. Don’t talk just to talk — talk strategically. Silence prevents the team from benefitting from your knowledge. By speaking up and using airtime wisely, you increase the odds that your team will hear your contributions.

## Supporting eachother makes teams more effective.

Supporting and advocating for the voices of lower status members of the team will increase your standing.

In a team setting, women's expertise is more heavily scrutinized, especially in stereotypically male-dominated domains. However, when another member of the group asks a woman expert to contribute her perspective, she is seen as more influential and competent. This is a double win, as the person who solicits her expertise is also viewed more favorably.

## Three strategies for getting more out of your teams.

1. **Share your expertise.** Good team outcomes rely on leveraging the expertise of all team members, including your own. If your knowledge is not being heard in meetings, find a trusted teammate and commit to supporting each other:

- Jumping into the conversation early.
- Repeating what you said if it goes unheard.
- Giving evidence supporting your points.

→ Remember, airtime translates into perceived influence. Get credit for your ideas so your contributions can be leveraged and heard.

2. **Enlist early support.** Early support, especially with new ideas, can help get your expertise heard in team meetings. With this same trusted teammate, find a few more members of your team and share your ideas ahead of a formal meeting. Let them know how you formulated this point so they can support you once everyone is together.
3. **Engage others.** As a team leader, draw out your quieter team members, especially those who may have unique knowledge. Ensure all members get their share of airtime and prevent valuable ideas from being discounted. You can help fill in the gaps when team members forget to bring their expertise to the team discussion.

→ At any level – member or leader – you can solicit input from others. This validates their expertise and elevates your status in the meeting.

## Great leaders create team environments where all voices are heard.

The most effective teams create a culture where individuals feel their ideas are heard. Expect every team member to contribute ideas and expertise to decisions.

## Personal Inventory

*First 5 minutes: Fill out this inventory.*

Think of a team you are on.

What unique knowledge and skills do you bring to the team and to the projects your team delivers?

In team meetings or discussions, what does your unique knowledge contribute to the outcome? What happens when your expertise is not heard? What about the expertise of other members?

→ Share with your Circle. 2 minutes each. 20 minutes total. Share one.

1. What is your expertise? What is missing when your knowledge is not heard?
  2. What prevents the expertise from being included?
  3. Share an example from the past month that shows these team dynamics in practice. Have you been in a meeting where you or another team member wasn't able to effectively share an important point of view?

## Practicing Skills

This has two parts, so make sure you stick to the time allotted so everyone gets a turn.

*First 6 minutes:*

Break into pairs. Share with your partner an experience on a team. Pick an example of when some relevant ideas were not being heard or utilized.

Craft a solution for the relevant ideas to be heard and utilized.

- Share your expertise.
  - 0 How can you wisely use airtime?
  - 0 What evidence can you give to support your ideas?
- Enlist early support.
  - 0 Is there someone you can speak to before a meeting?
  - 0 How could this person support you in a meeting?
- Engage others.
  - 0 How can you draw out quiet members?
  - 0 How can you equalize the airtime given to good ideas?

Practice sharing your expertise in a meeting in a new way or practice soliciting information from another team member.

*After 6 minutes:* Switch and let your partner share.

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### ➔ Share with your Circle. *1 minute each. 10 minutes total.*

1. What was the scenario you shared?
2. What are new solutions you may try after hearing this research?

This concludes the meeting.

## One Action

In the next week, commit to one new action that will have your ideas heard or that will have the ideas of others on your team heard. This might be on your team at work or on a committee in which you volunteer.

**Share with your Circle your One Action in your next meeting.**

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## Bringing It Home

Ahead of your next meeting, come up with some ideas for bringing every team member's voice and contribution to the conversation.

How can you more effectively reinforce your expertise in the meeting? Even if you are a lower status member of the team, what are a few ways you could contribute in a bigger way?

What are a few things you can do to advocate for other members of your team? How can you play a role in helping other team members being heard?

What other things prevent your team from achieving results? What solutions could you propose to your team leader?