

ORGANIZATIONS USE COMMITTEES, TASK FORCES, AND CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAMS.

Among the formal teams and groups in organizations, a **committee** brings together people outside their daily job assignments to work in a small team for a specific purpose.¹⁰ A designated head or chairperson typically leads the committee and is held accountable for the task agenda. Organizations, for example, often have committees dealing with issues like diversity, quality, and compensation.¹¹

Project teams or **task forces** put people together to work on common problems, but on a temporary rather than a continuing basis. Project teams, for example, might be formed to develop a new product or service, redesign workflows, or provide specialized consulting for a client.¹² A task force might be formed to address employee retention problems or come up with ideas for improving work schedules.¹³

The **cross-functional team** brings together members from different functional units.¹⁴ They are supposed to work together on specific problems or tasks, sharing information and exploring new ideas. They are expected to help knock down the “functional chimneys” or “walls” that otherwise separate departments and people in the organization. Some organizations also use **employee involvement teams**. These groups of workers meet on a regular basis with the goal of using their expertise and experience for continuous improvement. The **quality circle**, for example, is a team that meets regularly to discuss and plan specific ways to improve work quality.¹⁵

VIRTUAL TEAMS USE TECHNOLOGY TO BRIDGE DISTANCES.

SCENE: U.S.-based IT manager needs to meet with team members in Brazil, the Philippines, and Poland. Rather than pay for everyone to fly to a common location, he checks world time zones, sends an e-mail to schedule, and then joins other team members online at the scheduled time using AppleFaceTime or Skype.

The constant emergence of new technologies is making virtual collaboration both easier and more common. At home it may be Twitter, LinkedIn, or Instagram; at the office it's likely to be a wide variety of online meeting resources. Members of **virtual teams**, also called **distributed teams**, work together and solve problems through computer-mediated rather than face-to-face interactions.¹⁶ They operate like other teams with respect to what gets done. It's the way things get done in virtual teams that is different.

As you probably realize already from working in college study teams, virtual teamwork has many advantages. It allows teamwork by people who may be located at great distances from one another, offering cost and time efficiencies. It makes it easy to widely share lots of information, keep records of team activities, and maintain databases. And, virtual teamwork can help reduce interpersonal problems that might otherwise occur when team members are dealing face-to-face with controversial issues.¹⁷

Are there any downsides to virtual teams? Yes, for sure, and often they're the same as in other groups.¹⁸ Social loafing can still occur, goals may be unclear, meeting requests may be too frequent. Members of virtual teams can also have difficulties establishing good working relationships. The lack of face-to-face interaction limits the role of emotions and nonverbal cues in the communication and may depersonalize member relations.¹⁹ “Human beings are social animals for whom building relationships matters a great deal,” says one scholar. “Strip away the social side of teamwork and, very

A **committee** is designated to work on a special task on a continuing basis.

A **project team** or **task force** is convened for a specific purpose and disbands after completing its task.

A **cross-functional team** operates with members who come from different functional units of an organization.

An **employee involvement team** meets on a regular basis to help achieve continuous improvement.

A **quality circle** is a team of employees who meet periodically to discuss ways of improving work quality.

Members of a **virtual team** or **distributed team** work together and solve problems through computer-based interactions.

TIPS TO REMEMBER

Steps to Successful Virtual Teams

- Select team members with positive attitudes and capable of self-starting.
- Select members high in initiative and with proven records of hard work.
- Begin with social messaging that allows members to exchange information about one another to personalize the process.
- Assign clear goals and roles so that members can focus while working alone and also know what others are doing.
- Gather regular feedback from members about how they think the team is doing and how it might do better.
- Provide regular feedback to team members about team accomplishments.
- Make sure the team has the best virtual meeting technology.