

You might hear an effective team described as one that has “the right players in the right seats on the same bus, headed in the same direction.”²⁷ The open-systems model in Figure 13.2 shows this thinking. A team’s effectiveness is influenced by *inputs*—getting the right players and putting them in the right seats, and by *process*—making sure everyone knows they’re on the same bus and headed in the same direction. A team with either input or process deficiencies, or both, is going to underperform. But when the inputs and processes are both right for the tasks at hand, the full benefits of team synergy are likely to be achieved.

TEAMS NEED THE RIGHT MEMBERS TO BE EFFECTIVE.

The foundations for team effectiveness are set when a team is formed. The better the inputs, the more likely are good teamwork and performance success.²⁸ And when it comes to inputs for team success, the starting point is the selection of members.

Member Talents

Ability counts in team membership. You want talent available to accomplish the tasks at hand. In an ideal world, team members, talents, and interests fit well with the job to be done. If you were in charge of a new team, wouldn’t you want to start this way?

The talents needed to accomplish relatively simple tasks are easy to identify. It’s harder to identify those needed for more complex tasks. And because complex tasks require more information exchange and intense interaction among team members, they put more pressure on teamwork.

Think complexity the next time you fly. And check out the ground crews. You should notice similarities between them and teams handling pit stops for NASCAR racers. In fact, members of some ramp crews have been through “Pit Crew U,” run by Pit Instruction & Training in Mooresville, North Carolina. Real racing crews at this facility have trained ramp workers to work under pressure while meeting the goals of timeliness, safety, and job preparedness. The goal is better teamwork to reduce aircraft delays and poor service.²⁹

“Must Have” Team Contributions

- Using talents
- Encouraging and motivating others
- Listening to different points of view
- Sharing information and ideas
- Resolving conflict
- Building consensus
- Fulfilling commitments
- Avoiding disruptive behavior

Member Diversity

Team diversity also counts in team membership. It represents the mix of skills, experiences, backgrounds, and personalities among team members. The presence or absence of diversity can affect both relationships among members and team performance. And when diversity is present, just how well it is managed can make the difference between a team that struggles between failure or modest success and one that achieves something truly great.

It is easier to manage relationships among members of **homogeneous teams**—those whose members share similar characteristics. But this sense of harmony can come at a price. Researchers warn about risks when team members are too similar in background, training, and experience. Such teams may underperform, especially on complex or creative tasks, even though the members may feel very comfortable with one another.³⁰

It is harder to manage relationships among members of more **heterogeneous teams**—those whose members are quite dissimilar to one another.³¹ But, the potential complications of membership diversity also come with special performance opportunities. When heterogeneous teams are well managed, the variety of ideas, perspectives, and experiences within them can be helpful for problem solving. Highly creative teams, for example, are often ones that mix experienced people with those who haven’t worked together before.³² The experienced members have the connections, whereas the newcomers add fresh thinking.

What are your experiences with diversity in team membership? Do you get along better in teams whose members are pretty much all alike? Have you encountered problems on teams whose members are quite different from one another?

Team diversity is the mix of skills, experiences, backgrounds, and personalities of team members.

Input Foundations for Team Effectiveness

- *Membership composition*—talent and skills, diversity of experiences, backgrounds, personalities
- *Nature of task*—clear and defined versus open-ended and complex
- *Organizational setting*—information, resources, technology, space
- *Team size*—smaller versus larger, odd/even count

Homogeneous teams have members with similar personal characteristics.

Heterogeneous teams have members with diverse personal characteristics.