

10 Ways to Build Great Teams Using Personality Data



Introduciton

Great teams are made up of great people. It sounds obvious, but think about it: You could put a team together simply by saying you want your smartest employees — judged by SAT scores or college GPAs or where they got their degree — but that doesn't take into account the people behind those numbers. Research actually shows that the smartest teams aren't just made up by lumping the biggest IQs together.

So, when putting together a team for a new project, you'll want to consider the whole person: their strengths, weaknesses, preferred communication style — in a word, their personality.

A team should have a variety of personalities on it. Just like a great sports team, a great work team needs every member to play a different role, but all need to be aligned on common goals and challenges.

Here are 10 ways to build great teams using what you know of team members' personalities.

1 **Ask employees to take personality tests or self-assessments.**

This gives everyone information that they might not already know about themselves — and will help them learn how to interact with their colleagues. Traitify's Director of Psychology, Beverly Betz even suggests posting employees' results publicly. "I would want every member of the team to know the [types] of every other member of the team," she says. "This shows every team member's strengths."

"This isn't like an IQ test where there's a winner and a loser," Betz explains. "There are strengths in every one of these types, and it can only benefit you to know yourself, and to know what your vulnerabilities are."

2 **Deliberately create variety.**

"Newcomers to the team should be different in some critical way," according to researcher Margaret A. Neale, "be it in an area of expertise, level of education, manner of thinking, or some similar dimension."

In addition, a mixed group of personalities helps because teams have “life cycles.” In the beginning, a take-charge personality helps the group get aligned on goals. Later, employees with high EQ, or emotional intelligence, can help the group build consensus and learn how to best work with each other. Later still, can-do workers who are willing to roll up their sleeves will help the group stay on task and actually get their work done. Psychologist Bruce Tuckman calls these stages “Forming,” “Storming,” “Norming,” and “Performing.” (Tuckman later added a fifth stage, “Adjourning,” to recognize that not all teams need to exist indefinitely.) So making sure you have a mix of personality styles means that you’ve got someone who can handle all these stages.

3 Try unexpected pairings.

Sometimes similar personalities work really well together. “If you have two really creative people, they may bounce ideas off each other,” says Beverly Betz. “Or, they may move in different directions and distract each other.” It’s important to experiment, because sometimes people who seem like they wouldn’t be a good fit really are.

Betz says the Wright brothers are a good example of this. “They were really different people you didn’t think would work well together at all. One was really extroverted, the other was introverted. There was a lot of competition between them, but they worked really well together.”

4

Buddy up like with like.

When you have a newbie to the company or to a team, think about pairing that person up with a mentor with a matched personality for the short term. It may help that person learn the ropes faster if they have someone who’s “been there” before and understands where and how their personalities might mesh (or clash) with the existing teams.

That said, the research on whether similar personalities make for better mentor-mentee relationships over the long term is pretty murky, so after the newbie has finished her learning period, it might make sense to let her choose her own mentors.

5

Keep an eye out for dominant personalities and make sure they’re leading, not domineering.

According to Betz, “In the best teams, everyone has a chance to contribute.” This is backed up by decades of research in academia and in industry, including at Google, which has spent years studying team dynamics and has found that the most productive teams are ones where everyone gets to equally contribute to the work.

6

Trust — and interpersonal skills — are key.

Google's research also found that the best teams cultivate an environment where team members feel that they won't be ridiculed or shut down when they speak up. Betz agrees: In the best teams, "team members were respectful of each other and the group felt safe so that people could suggest ideas without fearing that they would be ridiculed."

According to author Mario Moussa, who is also a Wharton Executive Education Fellow, "over half the time, people are not sharing what they are thinking and feeling," and often it is because they don't feel like they have "psychological safety." But the more information you have, the better your team's decisions will be.



Steve Jobs & Steve Wozniak (Apple)

Business and marketing acumen (Jobs) combined with technical expertise (Wozniak) led to the creation of one of the world's most successful brands.

7

Raise awareness with employees.

At a retreat or teambuilding event, you could team up employees with similar communication styles, and have them prepare a presentation for employees with a different style. This helps employees learn how to work with varied personalities.

8

Understand that "problematic" personalities can change if they have to.

"There's a core part of personality that is stable over time. And that's why for example infants have a certain personality at birth," says Betz. "But I also think we can change personalities when we do something like therapy (or behavior modification). We can't absolutely get rid of certain traits but we can certainly modify them so they don't get in the way." Again, one trait you may want to talk to your employees about is domineering.

9

Avoid pigeonholing.

Personality is complex. Introverts aren't always shy, shrinking violets, and extroverts aren't necessarily social butterflies. Some of the best salespeople are introverts, which goes against what we have been taught to think about introverted people. Personality can be a tool, but it should not be used to permanently typecast someone.

10

Don't overlook how important personality is.

"I work with people on these issues every day," Betz says. "If you've got one really problematic person in a team, it affects the entire team adversely. Sometimes there's no way around it except to get rid of the person, or place that person in a different role."

In other words, a team's entire work product can be compromised by one problematic personality. A bad manager or team lead can affect everyone around them.

That said: If it's not one person, but a personality conflict between two people, you can manage that.

Betz again: "I would get the two of them talking, and I would say to a planner, 'What drives you crazy about the visionary?' I would start a dialogue. I think you can use personality data to understand yourself, but also to understand others."

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In Sum

Building a group of all-star employees has always been a key to success, and a tricky one at that. If you don't find people that mesh well together, you'll see turnover, and a team that begins to unravel.

Engaging with personality data is a powerful tool that can give you insights into your own working style and that of your employees, coworkers and team members. While it's not the be-all and end-all of creating a great team, it's an important ingredient that can make a good team even better.