

Studies show that nice guys finish first in business world

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When it comes to leading a team tasked with developing new products and bringing them to market, new research from North Carolina State University shows that being nice and playing well with others gives you a very real competitive advantage. One new study shows that project managers can get much better performance from their team when they treat team members with honesty, kindness and respect. A second study shows that product development teams can reap significant quality and cost benefits from socializing with people who work for their suppliers.

The first study, co-authored by NC State's Dr. Jon Bohlmann, focused on cross-functional [product development](#) teams, which bring together engineers, researchers and business personnel. The diverse backgrounds of the team members means there is a focus on finance and marketing, as well as design and functionality, from the beginning of the product-development process. But that diversity also makes effective communication essential, in order to ensure that team members are collaborating rather than working at cross-purposes.

The Bohlmann study finds that "interactional fairness perception" affects "cross-functional communication." In other words, Bohlmann explains, "If you think you are being treated well, you are going to work well with others on your team."

Bohlmann, an associate professor of marketing at NC State, says that the study evaluated whether team members felt they were being well treated by their project leader. This evaluation included questions as to whether

team members felt their leader was honest, kind and considered the viewpoints of team members. Bohlmann says the results of the study show that if a team's leader was perceived as "basically being a nice guy," then "team members showed a significant increase in commitment to the team's success and to the project they were working on." This increase in commitment is important, Bohlmann explains, because it leads to enhanced performance in meeting team goals.

If the Bohlmann study tells us that nice guys finish first, a study co-authored by NC State's Dr. Rob Handfield finds that playing well with others can give a company an edge when it comes to product development. Specifically, the Handfield study shows that significant cost and quality benefits can result from informal socializing between employees of a product-development company and those companies that supply the product developers with material and labor.

Handfield explains that informal socializing, "like going out to dinner after a meeting," can lead to considering new ideas that take advantage of the different perspectives and experience that suppliers can provide - and ultimately provide product developers with meaningful input. For example, Handfield says, "Suppliers may point out that components which are already being produced in bulk would serve as well as the custom-made, and expensive, parts being envisioned by product designers. Why reinvent the wheel? We already have one that works fine." Handfield is the Bank of America University Distinguished Professor of Supply Chain Management at NC State.

Source: North Carolina State University

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