

Encouraging motivation to benefit others can lead to more effective teams

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Credit: George Hodan/Public Domain

When team members are motivated toward promoting the benefits of others, they are higher-performing and stay in their teams for a longer period, according to a new study.

Jasmine Hu, assistant professor of management at the University of Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business, and her colleague Robert

Liden of the University of Illinois at Chicago conducted a field study with 67 work [teams](#) from six companies in both U.S. and China and a lab study with 124 student teams at Notre Dame.

"Findings from both the field study and lab research showed that the greater motivation to benefit others, the higher the levels of cooperation and viability and the higher the subsequent team performance," Hu said. "These types of teams were also less likely to have members voluntarily leave their teams. Furthermore, we discovered that these positive effects of team motivation to benefit others were stronger the more the tasks required close interaction and higher interdependence among its members."

Hu believes that the results have a number of implications for managers of teams.

"In line with our results, management attention should be directed toward enhancing motivation to benefit others, as teamwork is a coordinated action and showing concern for others may bring about smoother interactions and more effective cooperation within the team," Hu said. "Organizations should capitalize on our finding that when team members are motivated toward promoting the benefits of others, they produce higher performance, more organizational citizenship behavior, and stay in their teams for a longer period."

Hu believes the research shows that both the behavior and emotions of team members plays a role in team effectiveness.

"Specifically, in order to build effective team outcomes, management should guide team members motivated to benefit others to coordinate their tasks, facilitate smooth task allocation, reduce dysfunctional conflicts and build strong interpersonal ties," she said.

The findings show that effective outcomes are dependent on the extent to which teammates need to work together. The more closely teams worked together, the more effective they were, especially when motivated to benefit each other.

"The highest level of team effectiveness was achieved when team motivation to benefit other and the interdependence of tasks among [team members](#) were both high," Hu said.

Hu suggests that managers look at the types of teams they have to best understand how to make them more effective. If a manager has a team that is already motivated toward the benefit of others, Hu recommends establishing a higher level of interaction and coordination among members. For teams that have a high level of interdependence but low motivation, Hu proposes that managers improve interaction, introduce highly motivated members and lead by example to get the most out of the team.

The study appears in the *Academy of Management Journal*.

More information: J. Hu et al. Making a Difference in the Teamwork: Linking Team Prosocial Motivation to Team Processes and Effectiveness, *Academy of Management Journal* (2014). [DOI: 10.5465/amj.2012.1142](#)

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