

Teams work better with a little help from your friends

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Credit: Vilem Skarolek/public domain

Here's something both you and your boss can agree on: Workplace teams are better when they include your friends.

Researchers analyzed the results of 26 different studies (called a meta-analysis) and found that teams composed of friends performed better on some tasks than groups of acquaintances or strangers.

Teams with friends were particularly effective when the groups were larger and when their focus was on maximizing output.

"Working with friends is not just something that makes us feel good - it can actually produce better results," said Robert Lount, co-author of the study and associate professor of management and human resources at The Ohio State University's Fisher College of Business.

The study was led by Seunghoo Chung, a [doctoral student](#) in management and human resources at Ohio State. The results appear online in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* and will be published in a future print edition.

The researchers analyzed studies about teams that used participants with established [friendships](#) and that included teams with non-friends or acquaintances as a comparison group. All the studies also clearly measured task performance.

In the end, the 26 studies they analyzed included 1,016 groups with 3,467 participants.

Overall, results showed friendship groups had a clear performance advantage, whether the tasks required brawn or brains. The advantage was found in all age groups.

The larger the teams studied, the bigger the positive effect of friendship groups, the study found.

"Friends can coordinate tasks more effectively," Chung said. "They know each other's strengths and weaknesses and can figure out how to break up the work in the most efficient way."

Findings showed that friendship groups did better in tasks where the goal

was to produce the most output, but did not have an advantage when the goal was to find the optimal solution to a problem.

When the goal is maximizing output, the biggest issue is often keeping people motivated, and that's where friends are helpful, Chung said.

"When you're working with friends, you tend to be in a better mood and can work through the adversity and strain that sometimes comes from having to produce a lot in a short time," Chung said.

But when the goal is coming up with the best answer to a problem, there may be an upside to working with strangers, Lount said.

People who are not friends may be more likely to constructively disagree, to talk about the pros and cons of a proposed solution, and be less likely to just go along with the crowd.

Overall, Lount said the results suggest that managers should consider (non-mandatory) social events and team-building exercises that encourage friendships.

"When employees are having fun together, it may have long-term benefits for productivity," he said.

"As a manager, you must balance allowing friends the opportunity to socialize, but also making sure that they don't spend too much time at the water cooler."

The bottom line is that managers should look for ways to build teams around groups of friends, Chung said.

"It is a good way to enhance performance," he said.

Provided by The Ohio State University

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