

There is no 'I' in team—or is there?

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

There is no I in Team—as the saying goes. But new research suggests it is important for individuals to feel personal ownership towards a team project in order to be more creative.

The study, led by Dr. Ieva Martinaityte of the University of East Anglia (UEA)'s Norwich Business School, suggests that this also drives each team member to invest more time and effort into the project.

At the same time though, managers should be aware that individual ownership minimizes collective effort. That is, teams with high levels of individual ownership are less collectively engaged, which in turn decreases team creativity.

Published today in the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, the study also involved Prof Kerrie Unsworth at the University of Leeds and Dr. Claudia Sacramento from Aston University.

The researchers investigated two types of psychological ownership—personal ('This is my project') and collective ('This is our project') and how these influence individual and team behaviour in a project that required creative output.

The results show for the first time that although collective psychological ownership has [positive effects](#) on engagement and subsequently on creativity, for both individuals and teams, personal psychological ownership drives individual engagement and creativity, but has the opposite effect on team outcomes.

Dr. Martinaityte, a lecturer in business and management, said: "Human nature to possess can be a powerful motivation to enhance employee engagement and creativity.

"Managers should invest time in making each team member feel like a project owner to maximize individual outputs, but equally focus on teams developing a feeling of collective ownership, 'our project' rather than 'my project', if they expect higher team dedication and more creative project outcomes. Without [team members](#) experiencing collective ownership, there is a risk that team performance will be lost.

"For employees it is about being aware of psychological ownership as a powerful driver to engage and perform in the team project. If they are

not willing to put effort into the project perhaps they should consider whether they feel they don't own the project."

Kerrie Unsworth, professor of organisational behaviour at Leeds University Business School, added: "It may sound trite, but a team is more than just a collection of individuals. When team members only think of themselves as individually owning the project without collective ownership, then creativity drops. There has to be an 'us' as well as an 'I' in a successful team."

The study analysed data from 39 teams and 186 individuals—including team members and project managers—working at international organisations based in the United States, United Kingdom, Lithuania, and China.

Examples of projects they worked on included developing mobile software, creating and implementing a building design and launching an event.

In an initial questionnaire team members reported their personal psychological ownership and collective psychological [ownership](#) towards the specific project. In a second questionnaire three weeks later they reported their levels of individual engagement in the project and their own creativity. At the same time, project managers rated the team's engagement in the [project](#). Finally, three weeks later managers reported team [creativity](#).

'Is the Project "Mine" or "Ours"? A Multilevel Investigation of the Effects of Individual and Collective Psychological Ownership', Ieva Martinaityte, Kerrie Unsworth, Claudia Sacramento, is published in the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* on Wednesday December 18.

More information: Ieva Martinaityte et al, Is the project 'mine' or 'ours'? A multilevel investigation of the effects of individual and collective psychological ownership, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/joop.12300](https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12300)

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