



Teamwork: if the whole is greater than the sum of its parts

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One says teamwork. Or group work. He seeks for a definition, he tries to understand the differences, and he finds a new world.

Working together can be delightful. Or it can become a nightmare. One option occurring instead of the other (or that one turns into the other) depends on an amount of factors.

We call teamwork a process during which more people collaborate to reach a goal. We must say that it isn't true that all activities are better done together. Although making a teamwork is a modern tendency, it makes no sense to group people in order to sum the single work the ones would do anyway, and more comfortable, if they would be left by themselves.

Greater than the parts. The basic idea of the teamwork is that the whole would be greater than the sum of its parts. That is, that the final result made by the group would be more

relevant (in terms of amplitude, complexity, innovation, value) than the sum of the contributes produced alone by each participant.

By the way: not even all the phases of a teamwork must necessarily be carried out by a team.

For example, it should be that each member prepares or finds out information by herself, before meeting the team.

Individual preparation is *already* part of the teamwork, the motivation is simple: the presence of a single participant not prepared properly, or not aligned on the goals, can damage the whole team activity and prejudice the final result.

Individual/collective. And still: some people, usually the more extroverted, work better in a team. Others, more introverted (and often abler to offer original contributes) work better by their own, and they risk to be limited by the team. A beautiful article by Fast Company suggests maximizing the advantages of both modes, alternating collegial moments and individual moments.

Yet, even who works better by her own, hardly can obtain her more important results in a totally isolated environment, refuse permanently every comparison with the professional community, the social context, the market, the public, the critic... and without mentors and masters, without disciples, without shared quality criteria. So, actually, also the one who works alone is always rounded by personalities with which she *has* to dialogue.

Teamwork. There are works that structurally can be done only by a group of people. In these cases, we are speaking, more than of a group, of a *team*: a set of people each one has a precise role, founded on specific competencies and integrated with everyone else (think about a cinema *troupe*, a surgical *équipe*, the astronauts of a space station, a team of researchers. But also think of a football team. Or of a ship's crew. Or of an orchestra).

If the teams work permanently together, the groups don't: some of them get together in a recurrent way, others don't. They can be gathered to develop very different tasks: take decisions, solve a problem, develop a project, produce ideas, optimize a process, do orientation functions, consultancy, control, and verification.

Group work. In these cases, precisely because the single roles aren't always strictly defined by specific and exclusive competences, some other elements about working in a team become crucial: it's fundamental that the goal is well defined, concrete, clear and agreed, and always at the top of everyone's mind. Normally, a team knows very well what's its task, and it's trained to reach it. A group that loses its goal won't get anywhere.

And then. It's necessary that there's a good balance between the integration of all participants (on the basis of equity, recognition, respect, and share of rules and criteria) and the exploitation of differences (sensibility, points of view, experiences, formation, ethnicity, age, provenience, genre...). The groups formed from a high rate of diversity are more difficult to form and they can have a higher degree of conflicts, but they are, it's demonstrated by many types of research, also more productive and creative.

A matter of balance. Finally, every participant needs to be well disposed to work on two levels at the same time: she has to offer contributes that have value, develop a positive relationship with others. Within a group conflicts are physiological, and they can be fertile, but they need to be managed well.

Teresa Amabile, from Harvard Business School, occupies herself about a good rule of groups (in particular of creative groups) since more than twenty years. She has produced a big amount of interesting and many times quoted articles on this subject.

The responsibility of who leads. As an extreme synthesis, it's all about leading the team in a clear and balanced way: clear about the goals. Fair on balancing individual ideas and collective and collaborative creation. Freedom and constraints. Order and disorder. Originality and feasibility. Realism and utopia.

To obtain and preserve this balance is the task, and not an easy one, of who (as a recognized leader, coordinator or as a facilitator) has the responsibility of the group. It is a delicate and uncomfortable position: if things will go bad, the leader will be the first one to be blamed. If they will go well, the merit will be of everybody.