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Cross-Functional Teams: 4 Experts Share The Good, Bad & Ugly

on 29 January 2019

Tags: Cross functional team



A cross-functional team is essentially a group of people who have different skills but are working toward shared objectives. Most workers have been part of a cross-functional team at some point, even if only for a short time. For others, it may even be a regular occurrence.

Examples Of Cross-Functional Teams In Business

1. Warship Construction Team.

If you've never built a warship, know that it takes several years and extreme precision at every stage of the project. Countless components must be designed, produced, tested, and fitted onto the ship—and they all must work in tandem with one another. "If even one component is inaccurate in its design or power-consumption level, other components can fail as well," shares Andrew de Bray, managing director at [Factum](#).

De Bray consulted for a manufacturer of the ship's radar system and had to collaborate with the manufacturers of other components and the ship itself. "As a [project management resource](#), I also had to work with designers, installers, stockyard handlers, naval architects, and the end client. We held regular meetings, shared documents and input through collaborative tools, and even created co-design teams. Everyone had knowledge and skills that were critical in building this complex vessel. It was a massive undertaking that allowed no room for error," he recalls.

Cross-functional team pros and cons: Working together with so many different people for a long period of time can **inspire**. De Bray notes, "Our constant interactions across functions and companies helped everyone involved consider and understand different perspectives, and how those perspectives impacted the project. We were able to achieve the precision we needed, and find efficiencies along the way."

The same collaborative context can also present friction. "When there's a lot of people involved, it can be a hassle to get input from everyone and ensure we're all on the same page. There were even times where some people wanted their way regardless of how it impacted others, which put a strain on project progress and the relationships we'd built."

2. Product-Focused Selling Team.

Selling is sometimes a collaborative effort. While many organisations employ a salesperson or sales team, some B2B sales are complex and require significant help from other functions. Such was the case for Colin Pollard, principal consultant at [Colin Pollard Consultancy](#), who employed a product-focused team to sell decision-support solutions to commercial aviation companies.

He was responsible for sales throughout Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, but several elements added difficulty to his role. "These types of solutions were complex, the clients were large, and there were no regulatory requirements for adopting such solutions (despite their great value). I had to develop and promote detailed business cases in an environment where the most desired outcome for our target prospects was doing nothing."

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the prospect did not emit buying signals until the product manager joined in and provided input. From what I gathered, this communicated to the prospect we took their business seriously and were prepared to support them.”

Cross-functional team pros and cons: “Putting together that cross-functional team enabled me to **project a more substantial presence with prospects**. In addition, the other team members felt invested in the outcomes, and they took personal pride when we won a new account,” notes Pollard.

Pollard recalls that because this was an ad-hoc team with no formal status, there were limitations. “Everything depended on my personal relationships with the individuals I asked to help. There was no manager involved to force them [into action]. Also, if they had competing concerns from their regular duties, I was on my own.”

3. Multiperspective Marketing Team.

Cross-functional teams enable you to take an integrated approach to whatever goal you’re trying to reach. (Tweet this!) Sagi Gidali, CPO and co-founder of [SaferVPN](#), finds that this is especially valuable in marketing.

“We regularly use agile cross-functional teams from the marketing, design, and analytics departments to collaborate on marketing goals and customer retention plans for our business. This may include asking *everyone* to do competitor and customer research before making a plan to increase customer retention, since each department will take a different approach. As well, we ask each team member to bring their expertise to the table to create a seasonal marketing campaign.”

Cross-functional team pros and cons: One of the benefits of cross-functional teams like these is that **each member can easily understand other members’ roles**. “Since these are closely related departments, most people have crossover skills and knowledge that enable them to easily understand how other members impact the work.”

“However, this also can lead to friction in team dynamics. For example, a person from design may have marketing experience and think a different approach is warranted for a campaign,” cautions Gidali.

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4. Web Design & Content Team.

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“I helped this web design startup that was able to quickly grow thanks in large part to their use of agile cross-functional teams. Given how small they were, collaborating across functions wasn’t exactly difficult, but they did it particularly well. They combined members from content, design, and web development in a way that fostered great team spirit and enabled them to deliver client projects faster than the industry average.”

Cross-functional team pros and cons: Productivity and ideation are two benefits Hart calls out. “If you get cross-functional teams right, you can experience some pretty **exceptional returns in productivity**. Thanks to their unique perspectives and collective experience, these teams can often develop ideas faster than in a traditional setup.”

One of the disadvantages of cross-functional teams, however, is competing priorities. “When you create a team of people from different departments or functions, they are bound to have their priorities stemming from a manager or their own perspective. For example, people are likely to prioritise a task they’re familiar with over one that takes them out of their comfort zone.”

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