



# QUICK TIPS FOR CROSS-BOUNDARY WORK FOR EFFECTIVE TEAMING



Team Science Coffee Break Speaker: Anna Mayo, PhD

<https://carey.jhu.edu/faculty/faculty-directory/anna-mayo-phd-1>

Increasingly, we work in teams to address research questions across the translational spectrum. These teams can leverage diverse sets of expertise and viewpoints to generate novel and impactful work. However, teams can be challenging to manage. One common challenge for research teams is working across boundaries. Boundaries can be differences among team members in their backgrounds, expertise, status, or demography, among many others. This document provides a quick reference on strategies for managing team boundaries. View Dr. Mayo's videos for more detail.<sup>1</sup>

## Leverage "Team Starts" with Good Team Design and a Compelling Direction

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Effective teams have certain conditions in place.<sup>2</sup> Two of the most critical conditions are good team design and a compelling direction. Team starts, whether assembling a team from scratch or intentionally pausing an existing team for reflection, are an important time to consider these issues and set your team up for success. Decisions about team design and direction can even be codified within a team charter at the outset of its work to ensure these issues are explicitly discussed and communicated. If you answer "no" to any of the following questions, you should engage your team in discussions about why, and modify your team's direction or the way in which it is communicated to team members as appropriate.

DOES THE TEAM HAVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE?	Having the requisite skills available is key to success and it can require changes in membership over time. Additionally, look for individuals with greater social perceptiveness, which has been shown to facilitate more collective intelligence.
IS THE TEAM A REAL TEAM?	Effective teams also have enough (but not too many) members to achieve their goals. Membership can have a tendency to creep up, but larger membership increases the complexity of managing the team and can foster "social loafing" and inefficiency. Make sure there are enough people to complete the work while avoiding team creep.
DOES THE TEAM HAVE A COMPELLING DIRECTION?	Real teams have members who interact in meaningful ways. They are more than a collection of individuals. Members of real teams rely on one another to achieve their shared goals. The team's work and its meeting schedule should allow for a balance of individual work and collaborative interactions.

1) <https://ictr.johnshopkins.edu/community-engagement/team-science/team-science-trainings/cross-boundary-work-for-effective-teaming>  
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## Transcend Boundaries within the Team using Inclusive Leadership and a Focus on the Team's Identity and Orientation

Even a well-designed team can experience challenges managing internal boundaries across its membership. The bigger and more diverse the team becomes, the more complex the challenge. These boundaries can be managed by an inclusive leadership approach.

ARE THERE STATUS HIERARCHIES IN THE TEAM?	If so, emphasize the team goals and identity to minimize the negative impact of hierarchy on team functioning.
ARE THERE OTHER FORMS OF DEMOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY?	If so, highlight cross-cutting ties of team members or intrapersonal diversity to avoid rifts or fault-lines developing.
CAN YOU FRAME THE PROBLEM AS JOINT PROBLEM SOLVING?	Team members will work across boundaries if they view the end goals as meaningful and understand that solutions require contributions from everyone involved.

## Actively Manage the Team's External Focus

A team's internal functioning is important for its success, but for the team's work to have maximum impact, the team's external environment needs to be managed as well.<sup>3</sup> The team's external environment includes the larger organization, community, and scientific fields involved in the team's research. Managing fluid membership and planning for the team's external activities are critical parts of this work.

HOW IS THE TEAM MANAGING ANY FLUIDITY IN ITS MEMBERSHIP?	It's common to have members come and go for different reasons. If your team has fluid membership, these new, temporary, or peripheral team members need to be oriented and integrated into the full team.
DOES THE TEAM HAVE A PLAN FOR MANAGING EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES?	<p>Managing up, scouting, and coordinating external work should be explicitly planned for, including defining roles and responsibilities for who should do these tasks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage up. Advocate for the team's work to leadership. Lobby for resources. Link the group's work to strategic initiatives and priorities in the organization.</li> <li>• Scout. Make sure the team is up to date with its information, methods, and technologies. Look for new opportunities.</li> <li>• Coordinate. Manage interdependencies with other units, for example negotiating on deadlines or the use of resources.</li> </ul>

2) Hackman JR, Hackman RJ. Leading teams: Setting the stage for great performances: Harvard Business Press; 2002.

3) Ancona D, Ancona DG, Bresman H. X-teams: How to build teams that lead, innovate, and succeed: Harvard Business Press; 2007.