

# What's the End Game?

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Every major corporation with a global presence relies on virtual teams to launch products quickly and gain a competitive edge. For any one launch, many teams are often involved. For example, a typical launch team may include marketing, sales, engineering, packaging, manufacturing, etc. Each of those groups may have their own teams working fast and furiously to complete their pieces. It is easy for the sub-teams to lose sight of how their work fits into the big picture since they may have different goals and objectives. When the end game is different for each functional team, collaboration suffers.

According to Lynda Gratton and Tamar Erickson's research on building collaborative teams, complex teams are less likely to share knowledge freely, to learn from one another, to help one another complete jobs, break up bottlenecks to meet deadlines or to share resources. They don't necessarily view their goals as compatible. In other words, they don't collaborate. To stay on the right path, team leaders need to create a clear and compelling direction for the team and make sure each functional group is connected to the broader vision. Individual goals should be linked to the team's overall goal and to each other.

Team leaders should be consistent in hosting monthly check-ins with the broader team and daily and weekly meetings with each functional team. At these sub-group meetings, let members know where you are in accomplishing the over-arching goals. To mitigate teams working in isolation, create goals that cross functional teams can achieve together.

It is important to assure your functional members that you want to hear their voice and that their opinions matter to all teams. Everyone should listen to learn and respect people's differing viewpoints. Team leaders should regularly communicate their progress to the broader teams so that everyone can see how the functional team's work contributes to the overall effort. This awareness helps to build trust that the job is being done well.

Be sure to recognize milestones, not just for functional teams, but for the project as a whole. Achieving certain goals goes a long way in keeping people focused on the big picture. Motivate by providing perks, such as food or fun after-hours activities. Pizza days or vouchers at the company store gives people something to achieve in the interval before the actual product launch. Also, create a strategy of giving rewards to individual employees who are engaged at a high level. Each person's contribution is critical.

Finally, team leaders should be enthusiastic and passionate around the message. They should show employees they care and are accessible, not buried in their office or cube completing tasks.

For sure, collaboration isn't easy when teams are large. However, a starting point is to make sure all are aligned to the overarching goals and that the goals are not forgotten by the sub-teams. Senior leaders must establish a culture that not only "says" it promotes collaboration, but actually lives and breathes it.

***Question:** If you are on a virtual team, what problems have you encountered? Do you function as an independent entity or as an interdependent team? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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