

A Resource for College and High School Teachers.

# Making Team Projects Work

## Improving Team Creativity

When I assign team projects in class and say that it will require some creativity, one of the **least** favorite phrases I hear is: *“But I’m not creative.”*

My coauthor, Lauren Vicker, knows this, and also knows that this is cause for me to get on my soapbox. Here’s why... Because they’re wrong (and I’m not usually so black and white about things like this!).

All too often, members of student teams (and this definitely applies to many members of work teams, too!) confuse *creativity* at a work task with *artistic ability*. But, these are different. Creativity is a skill that can be developed and improved. If, for example, I want to improve my abilities at a sport, I have to spend time practicing that sport. Similarly, if I want to succeed at a new task at work, I have to spend time practicing that task. Improving creativity requires this same level of devoted time and practice as a sport or work task.

Individual creativity serves as a foundation to team creativity. But, how do you improve team creativity? This requires additional procedures that can help a team to structure its team process so that all members have that dedicated time and practice when working together as a team. To improve your team creativity, here are some easy to use team tools that we recommend:



1. Facilitated Brainstorming. First and foremost, traditional brainstorming just does not work well and, in fact, may reduce a team’s creative outputs. If you want your team to perform better, find a facilitator who can help to draw out the team during brainstorming. A skilled facilitator has questions and group process ideas to help a team succeed. (For more information about brainstorming, see our blog post from October 20, 2020)
2. Use Team Creativity Software. Similarly, there are many excellent software programs that can help a team succeed with creativity (too many to list here). They each help people individually create ideas, and then also help the team to successfully combine those ideas. Like a good facilitator, these tools can overcome the problems associated with traditional brainstorming.
3. Brainwriting. Starting a team out with individual brainstorming can help the team to succeed. One way to do this is through a process of brainwriting, which combines **an** individual idea

generation period followed by a team exchange that allows the entire team to build on those initial individual ideas.

4. Set a High Bar. Setting goals high can improve brainstorming processes, while setting the bar low can diminish it. But, here's the trick: The goal has to be high enough to push the team way out of its comfort zone while at the same time not being too high where the team feels overwhelmed by it.
5. Diversify the Team. If you can, diversify your team. Include members with different knowledge bases, different skill sets, and different backgrounds as part of the idea generation group. More importantly, *actively listen* to those with the different ideas. These unique and diverse ideas are what can help a team to succeed.



Solving a team problem requires, in part, creativity (see Lauren's post from two weeks ago about the general problem-solving process). Creativity involves time devoted to thinking and processing, and these interventions can help with that time.

Try some of these when you're trying to figure out a problem.

Next week we'll discuss tools that will help a team reach consensus. And, if there is a topic you'd like to see in this series, let us know at [MakingTeamProjectsWork@gmail.com](mailto:MakingTeamProjectsWork@gmail.com).

Tim Franz is a Psychology Professor at St. John Fisher College. He is co-author with Lauren Vicker of *Making Team Projects Work: A Resource for High School and College Educators* and co-author with Seth Silver of the forthcoming book *Meaningful Partnership at Work: How The Workplace Covenant Ensures Mutual Accountability and Success between Leaders and Teams*. For more resources, check out our website at <https://teambuildingprocess.com/>

Watch for our ***Student Handbook*** coming late this summer or early this fall!

*Images from Ameen Fahmy on Unsplash and StockSnap from Pixabay.*