

Team Excellence Via “Task-Bubbles”

Anca Metiu,
Professor of Management
at ESSEC Business School
and Director of the ESSEC
PhD programme, together
with Prof. Nancy P.
Rothbard of the Wharton
School, research how
teams reach success
through a micro-approach
via task bubbles, artefacts
and shared emotions.

From the research paper
*Task Bubbles, Artefacts, Shared
Emotion, and Mutual Focus
of Attention: A Comparative
Study of the Microprocesses of
Group Engagement.*



An alliance with a purpose

THE 3 Ps IN A CoBS POD



PERCEIVE

with a set of key takeaways



PROJECT

with food for thought: on yourself, your organisation and the wider context



PERFORM

by putting it all into practice using action tips





● PERCEIVE

with a set of key takeaways

- Research and practice identifies the factors for teams meeting with success as: the necessary knowledge and skills to do its job, performance strategies that may include incentives or KPIs, and individual effort and motivation.
- The standard approach to team management includes inspiring people to work harder through a shared vision, effectively coordinating them, providing them specific goals, managing conflict and lastly, monitoring the team's progress.
- But although the ingredients and strategies might be in place, teams still fail to reach successful project outcomes.
- Team performance has tended to be studied on a macro level, whereas many key determinants exist at a micro level.
- When managers plan how to successfully carry out a project, they make two assumptions: that the team members are mutually focused on the task at hand and that the team will remain unchanged from the beginning to the end of the project.
- But not every team member is totally committed to results. Most teams see members leaving the team, allocated to other more urgent projects, or transferred – as is the case when projects rely in part on external providers – to other clients during the project.
- When everyone's attention in the team is focused it leads to problem-solving in everyday team interactions.
- Team members' development of high levels of mutual focus of attention are characterised by three factors: task bubbles, use of task-related artefacts, and shared emotion.
- Successful human interaction is characterized by shared emotion, shared focus of attention, bodily presence and proximity, and the building of certain barriers to others outside the group who could potentially weaken this attention and emotion. When these factors exist, collective effervescence is triggered that in turn enhances individual emotional energy.
- The way tasks and problem-solving are undertaken is key. The forming of informal "task bubbles" – with two or three co-workers working in close proximity and able to exchange emotions, is very effective. Formal problem-solving meetings with participants chosen based on their status are much more ineffective.
- The semi-permeability of the task bubble enhances – or at least helps sustain – mutual focus of attention.
- Working approach: frequent sub-groups working intensely together at the whiteboard are much more effective than less frequent project meetings involving the whole team.
- Full-time employees working on a project are more effective than mixed teams using full-time employees and external consultants.
- Permanent staff tend to view external contractors as outsiders and not to be fully trusted. Because of this perceived alienation and their own stake in sharing their consultant skills with permanent staff, contractors themselves felt reluctant to approach full-timers.
- The degree of belief in a project also has visible impact on effectiveness: seeing a project as exciting, challenging and meaningful can be triggered by managers providing a sense of vision and meaning, even at micro-behavioural level.
- Task-related artefacts – objects specific to their task in hand, regardless of working in physical proximity or remotely via Videocon (ex: whiteboards, computer screens, marker pens, code on a screen) – help keep the focus and build common understanding, as well as create a physical synchronicity of movement, as opposed to the outside world, typical for people who build trust.
- Sharing positive emotions in short bursts in an atmosphere of hard work enables others to feed off of them – carried by individuals to other encounters through a process of emotional contagion.



Read the full article:
<https://councilcommunity.org/2017/12/12/team-excellence-and-bubbles-of-intimacy/>



● **PERFORM**

by putting it all into practice

CHECKLIST

- 1. As a project manager, create a vision to share with your team members and determine key objectives and milestones for them. Your vision should include why it is important for your team, the organisation, and the wider system of things. Your vision should include a "picture" of what things look like after the project has successfully been completed. Your vision should include an element of "stretch" to incite team members to surpass themselves.
- 2. Although there is some room for managerial task design, given that sub-groups form naturally as team members work on their tasks, encourage motivated employees to form sub-groups and "bubbles".
- 3. Factor in incentives (performance goals, KPIs, reward for effort and motivation).
- 4. If external providers are called upon, ensure that some form of awareness initiative is undertaken (ex: team bonding, coffee and chat, ice-breaking event, etc.).
- 5. If possible, avoid building sub-groups that mix full-time employees with external consultants. Set both populations specific and respective tasks to undertake.
- 6. Take emotional intelligence into consideration and ensure that trust is encouraged by working proximity, dedicated tasks, artefacts/tools the team members can use. Encourage the expression of emotions and celebrate any "victories" that the sub-teams may achieve on the way to project completion.
- 7. Ensure that frequent task-related project meetings are held and avoid too many formal project meetings with the entire team or selected few.



Getting involved

Business and Society

*A singular presence
with a global mission*

REACH US

The Council on Business & Society website:
www.council-business-society.org

The Council Community blog:
www.councilcommunity.org

 [the-council-on-business-&-society](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-council-on-business-&-society)

 [@The_CoBS](https://twitter.com/The_CoBS)

 <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialCoBS/>

 <https://www.instagram.com/official.cobs/>