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## Case study

### Team mechanisms - lessons from Broadway

WHAT makes a winning team? Is there an easy-to-follow recipe for a successful collaboration? The answer is “diversity”, say researchers who studied data on Broadway musicals and scientific journal publications, and found that collaborating with new people is a risk worth taking.

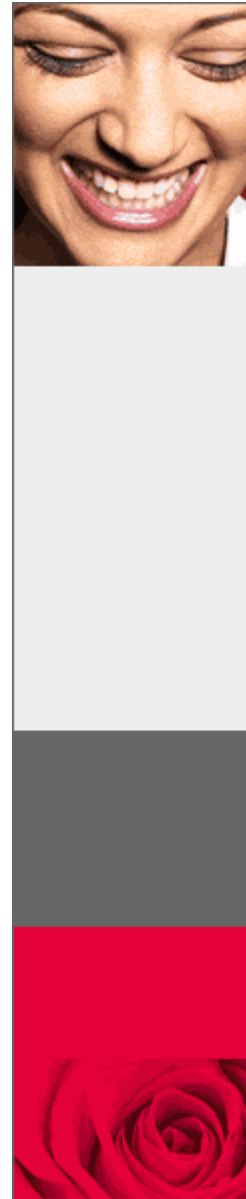
“We found that teams that achieved success — by producing musicals or publishing academic papers in good journals — were fundamentally assembled in the same way, by bringing in some experienced people who had not worked together before,” says Luís A. Nunes Amaral, Associate Professor of Chemical and Biological Engineering at Northwestern University. “You need someone new to get the creative juices going so you don’t get trapped in the same ideas over and over again.” In contrast, “the unsuccessful teams repeated the same collaborations over and over again”.

New faces are therefore essential but, if a team is not to become bogged down in miscommunication and conflict, an element of consistency is just as important.

“We discovered that assembling a successful team depends on choosing the right balance of diversity and cohesion — achieving the bliss point of intersection between the two,” says Brian Uzzi, Associate Professor of Management and Organisations at the Kellogg School of Management. Diversity being new collaborations and cohesion coming from settled working relationships in repeat collaborations.

The research also proved the adage that success breeds success. It found that unsuccessful teams worked in isolation from each other, whereas successful teams were interconnected with disparate groups of collaborators and “more likely to draw from a more diverse reservoir of knowledge”.

*This is a summary of Team Assembly Mechanisms Determine Collaboration Network Structure and Team Performance, by Roger Guimerà and Luís A. Nunes Amaral, Department of Chemical and Biological Engineering, Northwestern University; Brian Uzzi, Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University; Jarrett Spiro, Graduate School of Business, Stanford University, published in Science (April 29). <http://amaral.northwestern.edu>*



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