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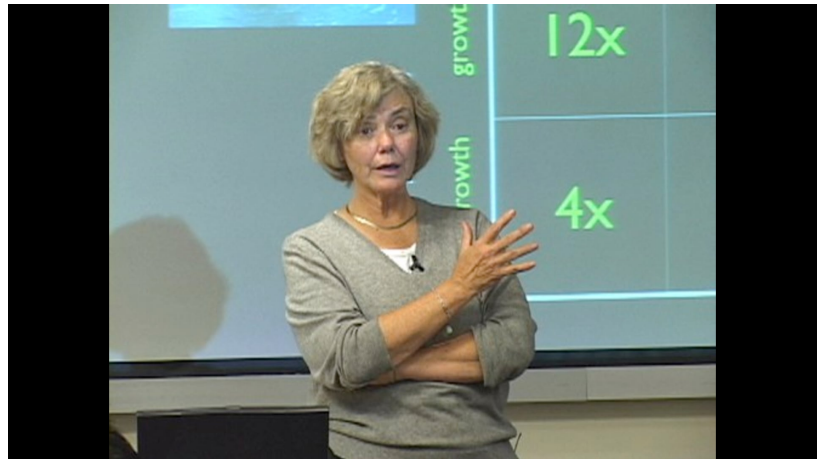
Kathy Eisenhardt, co-director of Stanford Technology Ventures Program and professor in Management Science and Engineering, discusses the size and composition of successful teams. She recommends a team of 3-5 cross-functional people with diverse age group and experience.

Transcript

What makes for a great team? We actually know some really specific stuff, three to five people might sound a little bit too mechanical but in fact if you only have two people, you typically have way too much to do and you don't have enough diversity of opinion.. If you get more, if you get like 6, 7, or 8 people you really don't have a team anymore and you've spend all your time trying to coordinate these people because you can't manage it.. On the other hand, a number between 3, 4 and 5 is typically right.. The second thing that we found that you really need in a great team is that it's genuinely cross-functional.. So you really do want somebody from engineering, from marketing, from finance, manufacturing if you're in that kind of a business, but not engineer is still in the job.. What does that mean? That means is you don't have a marketing person if it's really just a double E calling him or herself a marketer.. That's not a marketing person.. That's just a person calling himself something.. What you really want is people who genuinely can do those functions because there are different issues that each of those functions brings, different expertise, and so you really want this cross-functional team not just people pretending they're cross-functional.. So what are some of the worst teams we've seen? Two engineers, a terrible team typically..

You want to have some variety and you want to have more people.. Third thing that you often want to have is people who work together before.. Because one of the things that happens in new companies is that you will find yourself in a lot of stressful situations.. And if you start to realize you're in a stressful situation that the other people you're working with are really jerks and you don't like them, it's kind of too late.. And so, the agree-too which you've had some prior experience with the people you're working with is very important to really have a top team.. And then finally, one of the things that people don't realize but I think is really true is that you need, that the best teams typically have people of variety of ages, so not just 20-year olds but 30s, 40s, and 50s.. And it's not so much because 50-year olds are like father figures or mother figures and 20-year olds they're really exciting and innovative because actually 50-year olds can be innovative too.. But it's more that they have different life experiences.. And so, you're seeing different aspects of the problem.. And the overall idea of what you're trying to do in a team like this, you're trying to have a big enough team so there's bandwidth to get the job done..

You're also trying to institutionalize some conflicts of different kinds of functions with different age groups who typically will see things in different ways but you're still trying to get along which is why the prior experience really helps.. So one of the things we've seen is that this kind of a team is usually the kind of a team that works best...