

UMUC Business and Executive Programs Podcasts
Essential Competencies for the 21st Century Manager

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Ross: Greetings everyone, and welcome to this Podcast on the topic of Team Skills for the 21st Century Manager. I am Professor Jane Ross, an MBA program director and course manager for AMBA 606, Organizations and the External Environment, the course commonly known as Global Business. From my own experience as a global businessperson and academic, I can attest to the value of teams in getting work done. When you read about business leaders in the *Economist* or *Business Week*, for example or see successful business leaders on the world news, you may be inclined to think, "I want to be like that." But how do these successful managers get to where they are? What are their keys to success? Managers worldwide agree that a broad set of skills is needed. In the MBA program, we call these skills competencies, the things needed to do a job and do it well. Team skills are amongst these competencies. So, far in this series, you have been introduced to a number of the core UMUC competencies. More are yet to follow. Turning to teams, the definitions are simple. Even though the business of teamwork is very difficult, becoming effective team workers can be extremely challenging in the complex arena of global business today. In thinking about teams, here are some basic definitions: People working together with a shared purpose to get a job done, doing together what we cannot do alone. Teamwork is a broad term that reflects many kinds of human activities as people function together in various ways to get work done.

Teamwork happens almost everywhere, in organizations and other arrangements where cooperation is needed to lighten a load, add perspective, enhance productivity, and hopefully bring some enjoyment to the execution of tasks and procedures. From time immemorial, teams have been at work. Historically, in earlier American culture, the barn razing bee and the quilting bee are good examples of teams. Why did these team forms emerge? The heavy work of building a barn was much easier when many people were involved. Women, commonly isolated in rural settings, looked forward to getting together to recycle fabric to find warm bed coverings for the family. Coming together and combined effort, these are the hallmarks of teamwork. Many hands and minds make for lighter work and foster efficiencies in getting work done. Stepping ahead to the corporate culture of today, we find that people continue to work in many kinds of teams. Like the people of yesteryear, people come together and combine their efforts. You likely have experience in some of these team types yourself: face-to-face teams, dispersed teams, mixed teams, remote teams, global teams, and a host of other kinds of virtual teams. You will be pleased to know that your faculty members have extensive experience in virtual teams. They have built a leading MBA program working remotely from one another in a constant interplay of various team arrangements. Why do we place so much emphasis on teams and teamwork? Primarily, because industry and organization leaders affirm to us the imperative that MBA graduates must have excellent team skills. As one UMUC MBA graduate who now leads an important health agency recently exclaimed, "Teams are everything. Everything is done by teams in our organization. We could say teams are us." Similarly, the treasurer of a major U.S. corporation explained to me that even the role of treasurer has changed. It used to be that the treasurer sat in the office and managed the organization's money. Now the treasurer works with multi-purpose teams across the organization.

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Let's turn to the global challenge of teamwork for a moment. Global organizations having partners and employees around the world presents special challenges for teams. In order for today's companies to achieve their business goals teamwork is necessary in ways not even thought of a few short years ago. Global or distributed teams, which are often culturally diverse and function trans-nationally, have the potential to be more creative than single culture groups. Take, for example, the recruiting and hiring practices of the Grand Hyatt Hotels International. In an interview prepared for AMBA 606, Peter Fulton, manager of the Dubai Hyatt, explains the value of his organization for culturally diverse teams. "We deliberately advertise around the world. Our employees come from 80 countries. All work at Grand Hyatt Dubai is carried out in inter-nation teams." In your MBA work, you will find a number of virtual teams. If virtual teams are so important, we better define these as well. A virtual team is a group of people who work interdependently with a shared purpose across space, time, and organization boundaries using technology. In the UMUC MBA program, you will gain lots of team experience, learning how to transcend distance and differences in attempts to eliminate barriers that face-to-face groups often experience. As previously indicated, the purpose, strength, and benefits of teams lies in doing together what we cannot do alone. Working in teams requires a team rhythm and a group mind. What do I mean by rhythm? Let's take an analogy from dancing. My ballroom dancing teachers John and Cora used to say, "Do what we tell you and you will come up dancing." They meant that one cannot dance alone. One must be keenly attuned to what others are doing in order to tap the creative energies necessary for a beautiful and impressive dance set. Likewise, teamwork is about finding a group mind, putting skills, energies, talents and thinking together to create a seamless process amongst the members. The AMBA 606 Globetrotters team achieve this synergy extremely well in their work together and kindly put their experience into an article for the UMUC MBA Newsletter.

Working well together is a goal of teamwork. Let's look at some elements and examples. Let's talk for a moment about team formation. It is important to mine for the resources and skills within the group. Think broadly. Often teams tend to overlook valuable resources amongst their members. Team Globetrotters were candid about the challenges they faced as a team. Things such as competing demands of family, work, school, and other life activities made it difficult to balance everything. Completing team projects is not easy. This team's success in working extraordinarily well together did not come automatically. In the U.S. culture, where individualism is ensconced within the Constitution, a team mindset does not always come easily either. This is opposite to the Asian situation where values for the group are inherent and reflected in teamwork and the workplace. When I worked as a corporate advisor for globalization in South Korea, I often felt I was working where teamwork was invented. My position involved working in flexible ways on every team across the entire organization as well as on teams that transcended the company, two teams in other countries and companies. Team skills are a competitive advantage in Asian companies that Western business people need to understand. Although I had worked on many types of teams prior to my experience in corporate Asia and had taught teamwork, it was exciting and stretching to be involved in a vastly different approach to the ways in which individuals work together to accomplish tasks in teams.

But, let me not travel too far abroad and get back to teams in the UMUC MBA program. What works in student teams? Team Globetrotters' recommendations for effective teamwork include the following. Their list of qualities for effective teamwork is not elaborate, nor does their list differ significantly from factors cited by the corporate stars who talk, write, and educate about these matters. Here is what Team Globetrotters has to tell us. Team members need a sense of humor. Communications are important. We learned a lot about communications in the previous episode presented by Professor Hannah. Everyone must be involved and contribute to the discussion. Balance the workload to accommodate for travel, family, and other commitments.

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Plan, plan, and plan. Have a simple defined goal. A goal can cut through the fog and prevent the muddle. Work together as closely as possible. Review each other's work. Be open to suggestions. Be comfortable making and receiving suggestions for improvement. Support each other. Trust is necessary, but trust needs to be earned. Decision making is also an essential team activity, a topic that leads us directly into the next episode with Professor Les Livingstone. To recap, the definitions of teams and teamwork may be simple but working together is not. The opportunity to develop team skills is central to the UMUC MBA program. "Teams are us." I have enjoyed talking with you about ways in which team skills are vital for competent managers in the 21st Century. Thank you all for your participation and all the very best in your team learning.

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