

Characterizing Research Teams

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Research in health professions education (HPE) is often executed by teams—groups of individuals working together to solve a problem, reconceptualize an issue, or conduct a study. Teams frequently involve individuals from different disciplinary backgrounds or professions^{1,2} who work collaboratively to accomplish specific scholarly goals. Matching team composition to research goals is critical for ensuring the team has the skills and perspectives necessary to generate, integrate, and mobilize the desired knowledge. Drawing on literature,^{3,4} we describe the who, what, how, and when of 4 types of research teams.

	Unidisciplinary research teams	Multidisciplinary research teams	Interdisciplinary research teams	Transdisciplinary research teams
Who is on the team?	Members from the same discipline or profession	Members from different disciplines and/or professions		
Who leads the team?	Single lead researcher	Leads from disciplines work independently	Leads from disciplines work interdependently	Members are partners and interchangeable leaders
What is shared across team members?	Research approaches (e.g., methods and techniques)	Research topics (e.g., area of expertise or interest)	Research goals	
How is research done?	Members work together on common aspects of a problem using a shared disciplinary perspective	Members work separately on discrete aspects of a problem using distinct disciplinary perspectives	Members work together on common aspects of a problem using distinct disciplinary perspectives	Members work together to build a common conceptual understanding of a problem that transcends disciplinary perspectives
When are perspectives integrated?	They are shared, so not at all	At the end of the project	Throughout the research process	At the beginning of the project
When would you use this kind of team?	For deep analysis and theory development with a disciplinary focus	For developing and designing new interventions or innovations	For designing new multidimensional interventions or multidisciplinary theory development	For reconceptualizing the problem under study, designing new methodologies, and creating new co-constructed solutions
What are the drawbacks of this kind of team?	Hard to have an impact outside of home discipline	Challenges in merging findings across perspectives to generate solutions	Knowledge needed to share a basic understanding of multiple perspectives	Building a shared understanding requires a large time investment

A clear understanding of the goals and purpose of any type of research team is important to team success. Knowing what type of team you are working on will help: (a) develop a shared set of goals, (b) determine appropriate resourcing, (c) ensure fair measures of team and team member success, and (d) enhance team communication. The goal in building a research team is to assemble a group of individuals who will work together as a cohesive *team*.

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