

**LEARNER CASE · 30 TO 40
MINUTES****MULTIPLE TEAM MEMBERSHIP | LEARNER CASE**

Four teams, two very different weeks

Why the number of teams is only the start of a good diagnosis.

THE DECISION

Eva must approve the roster for the next eight weeks. Should she limit team memberships, give employees full calendar control, or redesign how the work is divided?

At 6:45 on Monday morning, Eva Martens was looking at two names on her screen. Both employees belonged to four teams. The staffing dashboard marked both of them amber.

One employee seemed comfortable with the arrangement. The other had just told Eva, “I spend most of the day leaving one job half-finished so that I can join another.”

Eva manages operations at Haven Foods, a fictional regional distribution centre that supplies schools, restaurants, and care homes. Its 180 employees receive goods, prepare orders, check food safety, and load delivery vehicles. Most employees have a regular shift team. Experienced employees are often asked to join additional groups concerned with training, safety, customer problems, stock accuracy, or temporary improvement work.

The arrangement usually helps Haven Foods. People who know the operation well can share their experience beyond their regular shift. The same arrangement can also make the working week difficult to follow. A person may have four team names beside their name, but those four memberships reveal little about what the person actually does from one hour to the next.

HR has suggested a simple rule: nobody should belong to more than three teams. The operations director prefers another response. He thinks employees should be allowed to organise their own calendars. Eva is unconvinced by either answer. She starts by comparing Ruben and Aisha.

Ruben's four teams

Ruben has worked at Haven Foods for eight years. His main responsibility is the Outbound team, which prepares orders for the afternoon loading window. He also belongs to the Safety group, the Onboarding team, and a temporary Route Change project.

Everybody refers to Outbound as Ruben's home team. He has worked with most of its members for several years. The Safety group includes two former Outbound colleagues. He knows the trainer with whom he handles onboarding, and the Route Change project is led by a supervisor he has worked with before.

Day	Team allocation
Monday	Outbound, 8 hours
Tuesday	Outbound, 8 hours
Wednesday	Outbound, 6 hours; Safety, 2 hours
Thursday	Outbound, 8 hours
Friday	Onboarding, 4 hours; Route Change, 4 hours

Ruben spends 30 of his 40 hours with Outbound. His other memberships involve smaller and clearly scheduled contributions. He changes team context twice during the week.

RUBEN'S VIEW

"Four teams sounds busier than it feels. Most days I am with Outbound, and everybody knows where to find me. Friday is for the extra work. If somebody from Route Change sends me a message on Tuesday, it usually waits until Friday."

Aisha's four teams

Aisha has worked at Haven Foods for six years. She knows the returns process better than almost anyone, so four different team leaders have asked for her help. She now belongs to Returns, the Scanner Pilot, Inventory Accuracy, and Customer Recovery.

Each team expects Aisha to remain involved throughout the week. Returns wants her available when damaged orders arrive. The Scanner Pilot asks for quick feedback whenever staff test a new device. Inventory Accuracy needs someone to investigate discrepancies near the end of each shift. Customer Recovery assigns cases as soon as complaints come in.

Nobody has agreed which team should come first.

Day	Team allocation
Monday	Returns, 4 hours; Scanner Pilot, 2 hours; Inventory Accuracy, 2 hours
Tuesday	Customer Recovery, 4 hours; Returns, 2 hours; Scanner Pilot, 2 hours
Wednesday	Inventory Accuracy, 4 hours; Customer Recovery, 2 hours; Returns, 2 hours
Thursday	Scanner Pilot, 4 hours; Inventory Accuracy, 2 hours; Customer Recovery, 2 hours
Friday	Returns, 2 hours; Scanner Pilot, 2 hours; Inventory Accuracy, 2 hours; Customer Recovery, 2 hours

Aisha spends ten hours with each team. Her roster contains eleven changes from one team context to another. The formal blocks also hide interruptions. Team leaders regularly call or message her when she is working for somebody else.

Aisha knows most members of Returns, but the other groups draw people from different shifts. Several Scanner Pilot members joined Haven Foods recently. Membership of Customer Recovery rotates, and Aisha often needs to work out who owns a case before she can act.

AISHA'S VIEW

"I still like the work. The scanner project is interesting, and I asked to join it because I want to become a supervisor. I do not want the solution to be taking me off everything that might help me develop. I am tired of changing gears. At the end of most days, I cannot tell what I finished."

Four reasonable requests

The Returns supervisor wants Aisha present every morning. Returns become harder to process when questions wait until the following day.

The Scanner Pilot leader wants Aisha for two fixed sessions each week, but also expects her to answer short questions between sessions. He says that most questions take only ten minutes.

Inventory Accuracy needs Aisha's experience but does not need her every day. Another experienced employee could handle part of the work after a proper handover.

Customer Recovery values Aisha's judgment. Its coordinator is willing to group cases into a fixed weekly block, except when a major customer problem requires an immediate response.

Each request sounds reasonable when considered separately. Together, they divide Aisha's week into small pieces.

The decision

A	Introduce a three-team rule. Remove Aisha from one team and apply the same maximum throughout Haven Foods.
B	Give Aisha complete control over her calendar. Keep all four memberships and let her decide when to work for each team.
C	Keep the memberships but redesign their shape. Name one home team, group the other work into larger blocks, reduce interruptions, and clarify each contribution.
D	Keep the roster unchanged. Offer Aisha time-management or resilience training so that she can handle the existing arrangement better.

Eva can combine parts of these options, but she must explain what problem each action is meant to solve. She also needs a fallback if the four team leaders refuse to change their expectations.

A simple way to map the situation

How many teams?

Count the teams to which the employee formally belongs.

How often does the employee switch?

Mark each move from one team's work, people, tools, and expectations to another team context.

Is there a clear core team?

Ask whether one membership receives sustained attention while the other memberships involve smaller, bounded contributions.

How familiar are the coworkers?

Ask whether the employee has worked with the people in these teams before. Familiarity can make expectations and coordination easier, but it does not remove the time lost through constant switching.

Your task

Prepare a 30-day plan for Eva.

1. Compare Ruben's and Aisha's team arrangements. Why does the shared number "four" hide more than it reveals?
2. Identify the most pressing problem in Aisha's current roster.
3. Decide whether Aisha should leave one team. Explain what information you would need before making that decision.
4. Redesign Aisha's week. Show which team becomes her core team and how the remaining work will be grouped.
5. Decide how Eva should respond to team leaders who still expect immediate answers outside their agreed blocks.
6. Write the first three sentences Eva should use in her conversation with Aisha.
7. Select two or three things Eva should monitor during the following month. Explain what would count as improvement.
8. Would the same solution be suitable for Ruben? Why or why not?

Research behind the case

RESEARCH BASIS

This fictional case is informed by research showing that the number of teams beside a person's name does not fully describe multiple team membership. How people divide their time, how often they change team context, whether they have a clear core team, and whether they know their teammates can matter. The underlying study followed 1,345 employees involved in 4,329 project teams in one large research organisation. Haven Foods and its employees are fictional. The study was observational, so it can guide diagnosis and work design but cannot prove that a particular roster causes exhaustion or resignation.

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