



BRIEF

# Tiger Teams

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## Introduction

A **Tiger Team** is a small group of people tasked with solving or investigating an organizational problem or opportunity within a specified period of time. By bringing together team members with different skills, capabilities, and perspectives, Tiger Teams help your organization get smart stuff done.

Tiger Teams excel at tackling efforts that can't be adequately resolved within a week or two (otherwise, that should really be a [To-Do](#)) and aren't critically urgent (that's P0 territory – more on that later).

[Rocks](#) that require cross-functional collaboration and weekly or biweekly meetings are often best handled by putting together a dedicated Tiger Team.



Tiger Teams can be composed of people from within the same department or several departments, but they should remain small and agile – preferably in the single digits or “no bigger than what two pizzas can feed,” as the rule goes.

In the hierarchy of organizational structures, Tiger Teams are similar to pods – both are self-sufficient, cross-functional teams – but with one major difference: Tiger Teams are temporary teams doing time-bound work, while pods are almost always permanent, cross-departmental teams with ongoing responsibilities.

To better highlight the differences between pods and Tiger Teams, let’s look at how they’re implemented at Ninety:

We assemble **Pods** composed of engineers, a product manager, a product marketing manager, a designer, and an Agile coach to own the look, feel, and performance of each one of our tools. This is ongoing, cross-functional work related to each team member's roles, accountabilities, and responsibilities.

By contrast, we might assemble a **Tiger Team** to overhaul the brand look and feel of an offering by a certain date — a project that is critical to business success, has a specific objective, requires cross-functional collaboration, and has an agreed-upon endpoint.

## Context

The expression “Tiger Team” was first used in the 1960s, emerging from the military and engineering best practices that helped put the first person on the moon. Over the years, this concept was enhanced by the various management philosophies that influenced the growth of high-performance teams (like Total Quality Management, Six Sigma, and Lean). Due to their time-bound nature, the modern Tiger Team aligns with modern business philosophies and methods such as Agile and the discipline of 90-day planning cycles and Rocks.

At Ninety, if we need a team of experts to meet regularly, usually weekly or biweekly, to collaborate on a problem or opportunity during a time frame of three weeks to 90 days, we form a Tiger Team. Projects that stretch beyond 90 days but require specialized teams may be broken up into parts. On our platform, we include descriptors like “Part One” in the Rock title, indicating a multi-quarter effort.

### **Tiger Teams vs. P0 — What's the Difference?**

While some may advocate for creating a Tiger Team for a critical issue that needs to be resolved immediately, such as a service outage, at Ninety, we don't spend valuable time creating a Tiger Team in that situation. Instead, we call a P0 (pronounced “p-zero”) and swiftly get the appropriate hands on deck to put the fire out as quickly as humanly

possible. Some POs go late into the night, but they rarely last more than a couple of hours.

Used in conjunction with a RACI matrix to cement agreements and Milestones to keep the Rock on track, a Tiger Team can effectively tackle high-impact Rocks like:

- Refining or documenting a Core Process that involves multiple stakeholders
- Launching a new product or service
- Addressing an unexpected (but not urgent) drop-off in customer demand for your cornerstone product
- Exploring a new idea or product feature

Tiger Teams don't function like a scaled-down version of your organization. Instead, they're built to quickly transcend common organizational constraints, remove silos, and provide multiple points of view. As a small team of cross-functional experts, a Tiger Team doesn't need input from a lot of stakeholders to make decisions. Their superpower is moving swiftly to achieve a needed outcome.

## Five Key Questions Every Tiger Team Must Address

**1. Do we need it now, or can it wait until next quarter?** At Ninety, we're huge believers in marching 90 days at a time and delivering on at least 90% of our agreements (like Rocks, To-Dos, and KPIs). To that end, we ensure that everyone has enough time to honor the agreements that take things to the next level (like Rocks) in addition to their seat's everyday roles, accountabilities, and responsibilities.

Because time is a finite resource, we try really, really hard not to take on what we call "Non-Rock Rocks," or Rocks outside of our normal 90-day process. The fact is, when we take on a Non-Rock Rock, we compromise our ability to fulfill our existing commitments.

Consequently, unless there's just no way this opportunity or Issue can wait, we strongly recommend creating Tiger Teams as a part of your [quarterly planning process](#).

**2. What needs to be achieved?** For example, do you need to build a team to manage your payment processing migration or oversee a data integration project? Use [the SMART framework](#) to clearly outline the goal so everyone's on the same page about what "done" looks like.

**3. Who needs to be involved?** Decide which specialists across your organization are most qualified to tackle this challenge or opportunity and will have the capacity required to deliver. You need the right people in the right seats.

**4. How are team members involved?** Tiger Team members should clearly understand their roles, accountabilities, and responsibilities (RARs). The RACI matrix serves as an important tool to ensure everyone aligns on the Vision and goals of the initiative as well as their own personal role in the team.

**5. What do we need to do to get from here to there?** The key to achieving success, both in business and in life, is to understand the right balance between inputs and outputs. The project outcomes are outlined in the RACI matrix, which provides the transparency, alignment, and mapping required to ensure your inputs lead to the delivery of outstanding outputs.

## Core Disciplines of Tiger Teams

**1. Set clear goals and agreements.** Tiger Teams only win when everyone is clearly aligned around which task they're addressing, who is involved in making it happen, how they are involved, what their deliverables are, and how they will measure success. Making the Rock SMART, establishing a meeting cadence, and setting up a RACI matrix are critical to success.

**2. Select a team leader.** When more than one person is accountable, no one is accountable. Select a team leader to organize efforts and be accountable for the team's overall success. This person doesn't need to be the most senior leader on the team, just

someone with the appropriate leadership and project management skills for the given effort.

**3. Assemble the right team.** The success of your Tiger Team hinges on selecting members and a team leader who can quickly and clearly grasp the problem or opportunity, collaborate effectively, and agree on how to deliver a solution.



## Hopefully Helpful Hints

**Use collaborative tools and regular meetings to keep everyone on the same page.**

Opening lines of communication should be one of the first orders of business for any Tiger Team. What platform or methods should team members use to communicate progress updates, discuss issues, and keep everyone on the same page? At Ninety, we use the [Meetings tool](#) with a custom agenda to make the best use of our time. We also recommend having a real-time communication channel through Slack or a similar platform to make sure roadblocks can be addressed quickly.

**Focus on what can be done during the given time frame with the allocated resources.**

The team must identify the boundaries of the project and agree on what “done” looks like. Document any additional ideas outside the scope of the Rock in the [Long-Term Issues list](#)

to address in a future quarter.

## Takeaway

Organizations create Tiger Teams whenever they need to assemble a temporary group of people for some extended period of time to address a specific business challenge or opportunity — such as entering a new market, eliminating a product defect, evaluating security risks, responding to customer feedback, or innovating — that will likely require weekly or bi-weekly meetings to ensure everything is appropriately moving from start to finish. The biggest superpower of Tiger Teams is their ability to focus on tackling a complex opportunity for the long-term good of the organization.

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