Team development

Work collaboratively as a member of a team, ensuring that one’s own contribution maximises the team’s overall performance.

Peter Block
LEADERSHIP TOOLBOX
Team development

**Being Part of the Team**

It is as important a skill to be able to contribute as a member of a team, as it is to be able to lead a team effectively. You may lead one team at work, but you will often be a member of several teams. You may need to adopt different roles in each to help the team achieve its objectives.

**Team definition**

A team is *'a group of people united by a common purpose'*. The definition implies harmony, but not necessarily action. More important for business is a definition of a winning team, where achieving results is important.

Teams need different team working skills at each stage of their development towards becoming winning teams. The models in this module will help you analyse the current status of your team's development and decide what actions you need to take to improve performance.

Group dynamics are complex and by nature people's reactions are uncertain and unpredictable. Applying any or all of these models cannot provide an instant solution to all group or performance problems. However, the models are based on detailed research and many managers find them useful tools in terms of providing some structure for thought and activity and do achieve good results.

You are probably a member of many different teams both at and outside of work. Forming a team to undertake work tasks is often seen as the answer to organisational problems. However, there are inherent advantages and disadvantages and team members need to be aware of these in order to make the most of the opportunities team working offers.

**Advantages and disadvantages of working as a team**

Some aspects of team working such as flexibility, a greater use of talents, more ideas, group loyalty, are almost taken for granted, but there are other advantages:

**Risk taking**

Research into teams and group dynamics shows that a team or group is more likely to take risks. This can be an advantage. A person working in isolation is less likely to go for a risky but more profitable option than a team. Research has shown that a team of individuals will take greater risks because the blame for failure can be spread among the individuals.

Of course, risk taking can be a disadvantage too, if the decision which is taken is one that leads to problems.

**Group norms**

A group tends to be 'self-policing' and will set its own rules and 'norms'. Very often the team will deal with cases of under-performance within itself.

**Synergy**

Synergy *(defined as: the combined power of a group of things when they are working together that is greater than the total power achieved by each working separately: Team work at its best results in a synergy that can be very productive)* is one of the most important concepts in team work. Simply expressed, synergy is the ability of a team to produce better results and better-quality decisions than one would expect when looking at the individuals in
isolation. It depends on the sensible construction of the team, which is an aspect we shall look at later in this module.

Advantages usually tend to outweigh the disadvantages, but it is as well to be aware of the potential disadvantages which may include:

- taking more time to make decisions
- the potential for conflict
- the time it may take a team to get established
- the opportunity for prevarication.

**Winning Teams**

Some of the teams you have belonged to will have been more successful than others. So what makes the difference between a team and a winning team? One definition of a winning team is:

A group of people who work together co-operatively and accomplish a common purpose.

Factors which contribute to a winning team include:

- clear objectives and goals
- openness and confrontation
- support and trust
- co-operation and conflict
- sound and agreed procedure
- appropriate leadership
- regular review
- independent development
- sound inter-group relations.

How well these characteristics are developed in a team depends upon the influences which the following factors have upon the team:

- the team climate
- the make-up of the team
- the task the team has to perform
- the inter-relation of these three factors.

**Stages in Team Development**

Let's look at how the team climate contributes to team development.

A successful relationship between two people might develop from the early stages of polite small talk and first impressions, through making assessments about character to finding common ground, finally arriving at a relationship in which accommodates differences and similarities.

A group of people coming together to work as a team goes through a similar process - though because there are more personalities involved, each of the stages can become more intense.

Bruce Tuckman, and other behavioural scientists have argued that any team which
eventually forms an efficient, cohesive, functional unit, proceeds through certain stages.

These four stages of development can be described as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Characteristics shown by team members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forming</td>
<td>Considerable anxiety, conformity to expectations, hidden feelings, poor listening, covering up weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storming</td>
<td>Rebellious, emotive, volatile, opening up risky issues, testing, tensions, disillusion, assessing relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norming</td>
<td>Mutual support, listening improves, willingness to experiment, reconciliation, team 'norms' develop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>Open relationships, mutual trust, risk taking, concern for people, pride in team, constructive confrontation, flexibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let's look at each of these stages in turn.

**Forming**
The team has just been formed and the impetus comes from the initial enthusiasm. Team members tend to keep within their known functional or hierarchical roles whilst they explore the new environment. There is a period of getting to know and assess one another. Team members examine the purpose and function of the team, look at its skills, knowledge, cohesiveness and balance, identify the blocks, frustrations and culture.

However, where a team finds it difficult to get fully involved, the group may perform only adequately and its members may consider the group to be superficial and lacking in real commitment and depth. Team members may be reluctant to speak out, preferring to keep relationships amicable. In the end this results in a less mature and less effective team.

**Focusing the forming group**
A group at the forming stage needs to set aside time to examine what it is like as a group, how it is organised and how it functions.

Activities which can help the group to explore how it is working include:

**Voicing feelings**
Ask individual members to say, or write down, what their feelings are towards the group and its task. Share these feelings with the rest of the group.

**More and less**
Ask team members to think what they would like the team to do more of, and what they would like it to do less of.

**Brainstorming**
Write down all ideas about a topic, regardless of their apparent worth or absurdity. Nothing is criticised initially - only clarification sought. This technique, often used for creative problem solving, can be constructive in the early stages of team development in allowing all members to voice their views about the goals of the team, whilst breaking down inhibitions.

**Storming**
Many issues which were previously hidden tend to come to the fore now as team members get to know one another better and make assessments about character, etc. This stage often results at least in an uncomfortable atmosphere, sometimes in outright conflict, but is important in clearing the air and enabling people to agree on ground rules and objectives for
the way the team operates.

This is a vital but often difficult stage, as the team seeks to resolve power issues and individuals try to establish their personal identity within the team, testing the limits of their influence and importance to the group.

Until these power issues have been sorted out and the group has established its processes for decision making, it is likely to keep returning to these issues without progressing further. One way of helping to draw team conflicts into the open in a constructive way at this stage is to construct a sociogram.

**Sociograms**
Each member of the team writes down the name(s) of the person/people in the team who are most effective at helping the group to achieve its task. The team members' names are drawn in a circle and the nominations made are drawn in as an arrow. This builds up a picture of central members and will possibly isolate members. It can provide a base for discussing how the group might be improved, not as a tool for attaching blame to any one individual. Sometimes it also shows sub-groupings emerging.

Look at the example below. Here the main contributor is seen as F.

Constructing a sociogram may raise political or emotional issues for the team. Check before trying this sort of team activity that you feel confident that team members will be able to deal with any resulting conflict constructively and assertively.

**Norming**
This is the way the team starts to operate once the storming is out of the way. Agreed procedures may be established and the team may start to work methodically towards its goals.

The rules of conduct and group identity start to develop, and as they do so, there is more group cohesion. Those who were in conflict are reconciled and resistance is overcome.

At this stage of a team's development, when everything seems to be going well and the team is starting to 'gel', there is a potential danger to avoid.
**Group Think** is a term coined by the American researcher I. Jannis in the 1960s to describe an aspect of group behaviour that caused concern. After the ill-fated invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs, senior military staff and politicians began to ask how such a decision could have been made by Kennedy's apparently cohesive and high-performing administration. The decision to invade was taken in the face of well-documented indications that it would fail. Group pressure to conform acted to repress individual concerns about the action being taken.

In this type of situation, others in the group may have reservations about the action to be taken but are afraid to speak out against what is perceived as a consensus decision. Hence a decision may be made which nobody really agrees with, but which each member of the team believes represents the wish of the majority.

Ensure this doesn't happen, by encouraging free and open discussion before decisions are taken in a group, whether you are the leader or a member of the team.

**Performing**  
With the basic ground rules established and the team proving that its members can work well together, this stage often comes when needs of individual team members have been met and the team as a whole can appreciate the need for development in order to improve performance further.

There is likely to be a genuine seeking for agreement, and with the development of trust within the team, there is a more co-operative approach to getting things done. As the team starts to devote more time and energy to the task its successes generate a powerful team bonding effect.

Time is needed now to ensure adequate monitoring and review processes are in place to maintain the team success.

As you can see in the following diagram, an immature team going through all stages of development becomes a mature one.
Although all teams are likely to go through these stages, they will not necessarily follow the same sequence and any particular group may spend more or less time in any one stage.

The fact that a team has passed through a stage does not mean that it will not go back to it. For example, each time a member of the team changes and a new person is introduced, the team may return to the forming stage.

Where a group is highly interdependent, it will be more necessary for it to spend time in the norming and storming phases. Groups which are not performing adequately may need to return to these phases to re-address the issues which are preventing successful performance.

These stages of development all affect the interlinked factors of:

- the performance of the task
- the individual
- the team climate

which we'll now go on to look at in more detail.

The task
At each stage of the team development process, team members tend to react differently to the task the team has been established to achieve.

Forming and Storming

- These statements typify the reactions of a team which is still in the first two stages of its development. (Find the full content for these statements.)
- Team members constantly look to the leader for guidance on working methods.
- Team members are frequently seeking reassurance about the nature of the task and how it is to be tackled.
- Sub-groups or pairings can be identified amongst the group.
- Members frequently question the feasibility of the task.
- Team members challenge the authority and/or competency of the leader.

Norming and Performing

The statements below tend to typify a team which has moved beyond the first two stages to a point where it can begin to focus its energies more fully on the task, and work together as a team to achieve it.

- Team members are establishing work standards.
- Ground rules have been laid down for the way the team makes decisions.
- Team members co-operate on achieving the task.
- Team members are comfortable with their team roles and how they relate to others in the team.
- Team members focus most of their energy on achieving the task.
- Constructive task work is achieved most of the time.

The successful outcome of a team task depends partly upon the team climate. An effective team balances concern for achieving the team task by successfully:

- defining the action
- gathering the information
- clarifying
• summarising
• making decisions
• establishing procedures for action
• taking action
• being aware of time

together with establishing a team climate where individuals feel:

• accepted
• understood
• supported
• respected
• involved
• creative
• that they are developing their skills

because the team encourages:

• supportive behaviour
• participation
• listening
• sharing of contributions
• assertiveness
• harmony
• dealing with conflict constructively
• risk taking
• learning from mistakes
• open communication of feelings
• giving and receiving feedback
• humour.

As you can see from these lists, relationships and feelings affect both individual contributions and the way the team works together.

**The individual**
The following list of team behaviours illustrates the way in which individual team members’ behaviour contributes to the team climate. It would be natural for each individual to express negative behaviours from time to time. If negative behaviours outweigh positive approaches, or typify the way team members react most of the time, the team will find it difficult to perform well together. You can use this list to assess how your own behaviour contributes to the team climate, by considering for each statement whether you:

- do this most of the time
- need to do more of this
- need to do less of this.

**Positive behaviour**
**Negative behaviour**

Supporting
Expressing praise or appreciation of others' ideas Attacking
Participating
Reacting to others' comments Withdrawing
Listening and showing you are listening Interrupting
Sharing out contributions

Team development_SampleStudyUnit
Working to make sure quieter members are heard/ensure no one is ignored

Monopolising
Expressing own feelings about the way the team is working
Harmonising
Helping people reach an agreement
Mediating on different views
Dealing with conflict constructively
Risk taking
Learning from mistakes
Open communication of feelings
Giving and receiving feedback
Humour Cold and aloof

**Team climate**
The importance of developing a trusting and open team climate is shown by looking at the connection between the quality of teamwork and organisational success. The following model explains this:

- The individuals in the team have a fixed amount of energy.
- Each individual uses as much of their energy as is necessary to ensure their emotional 'survival' - i.e. to avoid getting hurt and to lick their wounds or get revenge if they are hurt.
- The balance of energy is available to devote to the task.

The diagram shows how the energy available for the task increases dramatically as the improving team climate reduces the amount of energy the team members need to put into safeguarding their emotional well-being.

Negative or destructive conflict moves the team towards a threatening environment.
Constructively resolved conflict can move the team towards a more supportive team climate.

Reproducing this diagram and asking team members to mark where they think the team is, can reveal differing perceptions. Use the results as a starting point for discussing any action required to move towards the supportive end of the spectrum.

As a team progresses through the developmental stages it can, by adopting effective team behaviours, develop to a point where it is such a cohesive unit that it can begin to devote energy to developing co-operative links with other teams, without jeopardising any part of its own success.
Effective Team Behaviours

Effective teams work together to create the sort of team climate which will support each team member in achieving the team's aims. This assumes that everyone in the team is able to stand back sufficiently to be able to see where they need to make changes in order to move the team towards a more effective team climate.

A checklist of effective and ineffective team characteristics such as the one below can be a good starting point to help everyone in the team identify:

- the team's current performance
- where it would like to improve performance.

It is important to gather the views of everyone in the team, and to provide the opportunity for constructive discussion of the views gathered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Effective Team</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Ineffective Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
<td>Informal, relaxed, all involved and interested</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>Formal and tense, undercurrents of indifference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Everyone contributes with relevance</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>Dominated by a few, often irrelevant, undirected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Formulated, understood and accepted by all</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>Not clear or agreed. Hidden agendas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Everyone prepared to listen - own views on the table</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>Poor - suggestions overlooked, ignored or re-visited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Careful attempts at resolution, valuing differences</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>Suppressed or open conflict, aggressive behaviour or opting-out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Formulated, understood and accepted by all</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>Not clear or agreed. Hidden agendas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Everyone prepared to listen - own views on the table</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>Poor - suggestions overlooked, ignored or re-visited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Careful attempts at resolution, valuing differences</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>Suppressed or open conflict, aggressive behaviour or opting-out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions</td>
<td>General consensus, freedom to disagree, aware of process</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>No systematic discussion of method, decisions unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
<td>Welcomed and constructive, in supportive environment</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>Destructive or absent/avoided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>Expression accepted and valued</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>Hidden or misdirected, often 'taboo'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Clear, agreed and understood</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>Not clearly defined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairperson</td>
<td>Variety of styles, role shifts to others if appropriate</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>Dominates group or lacks control/facilitation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>Process Frequent and valued</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>What's 'process'?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>High levels of involvement</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>Couldn't care less, a selfish approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Wanted and valued</td>
<td>1________10</td>
<td>Lost in focus on task and speed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Team Dynamics
Let’s now look at the make-up of the team and how the team interacts.

Team dynamics looks at the importance of building strong and trusting relationships between team members and will help you to establish how best you and your colleagues can work together constructively in a team.

Team Roles
A job description describes an individual's functional role, i.e. what they do, and it is for this functional role that most people are appointed to teams. However, recent work has suggested that within a team there is an equally important team role, defined by an individual's behaviour and personality, and that greater emphasis and acknowledgement of the importance of this role when building teams can dramatically improve their performance.

The factors which underlie and influence an individual's team role behaviour can be presented as:

Belbin's team roles (see: http://www.belbin.com/)
Dr. Meredith Belbin has studied the nature of teams and teamworking over a long period, and he and his colleagues suggested that there are a number of different roles which people adopt when they are working as team members.

These roles are defined, but by the way a person chooses to interact in relationships with others in the team rather than by job function or intellectual ability. Each role has a valuable contribution to make to the team.

A team which contains each of the roles can be predicted to work together well and achieve impressive results.

Belbin drew a number of conclusions from his research:

- individuals adopt preferred roles when working as part of a team
- nine distinct behavioural roles can be identified
- certain combinations of the roles within a team could be predicted to ensure an effective and successful team
- teams lacking one or other of the roles, or where several individuals were seeking to adopt the same role, were less likely to achieve success.
Belbin’s nine team roles are set out below, together with the allowable weaknesses which he sees as the price which has to be paid for the strength.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles and descriptions - team role contribution</th>
<th>Allowable weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plant</strong>&lt;br&gt; Creative, imaginative, unorthodox&lt;br&gt;Solves difficult problems.</td>
<td>Ignores details. Too preoccupied to communicate effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resource Investigator</strong>&lt;br&gt; Extrovert, enthusiastic,&lt;br&gt;Solves difficult problems.</td>
<td>Over-optimistic. Loses interest once initial enthusiasm has passed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Co-ordinator</strong>&lt;br&gt; Mature, confident, a good chairperson.&lt;br&gt;Clarifies goals, promotes decision making, delegates well.</td>
<td>Can be seen as manipulative&lt;br&gt;Delegates personal work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shaper</strong>&lt;br&gt; Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure.&lt;br&gt;Has the drive and courage to overcome obstacles.</td>
<td>Can provoke others. Hurts people’s feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monitor Evaluator</strong>&lt;br&gt; Sober, strategic and discerning.&lt;br&gt;Sees all options. Judges accurately.</td>
<td>Lacks drive and ability to inspire others.&lt;br&gt;Too critical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teamworker</strong>&lt;br&gt; Co-operative, mild, perceptive and diplomatic. Listens, builds, averts friction, calms the waters.</td>
<td>Indecisive in crunch situations. Can be easily influenced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementer</strong>&lt;br&gt; Disciplined, reliable, conservative and efficient. Turns ideas into action.</td>
<td>Somewhat inflexible. Slow to respond to new possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completer</strong>&lt;br&gt; Painstaking, conscientious, anxious.&lt;br&gt;Searches out errors and omissions. Delivers on time.</td>
<td>Inclined to worry unduly. Reluctant to delegate. Can be a nit-picker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specialist</strong>&lt;br&gt; Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated.&lt;br&gt;Provides knowledge and skills in rare supply.</td>
<td>Contributes only on a narrow front. Dwells on technicalities. Overlooks the 'big picture'.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These team roles should not be seen as stereotypes. Mature individuals use a limited repertoire of team roles in a flexible manner, to fit the needs of the situation.

Belbin suggested that of the nine team roles, some are:

- natural roles which a person adopts
- roles that a person can adopt if necessary
- roles that the person finds very hard to adopt.

Belbin noted from his research that managers observed in training exercises over a period of several years were seldom comfortable in all the roles, but that most had a preferred role and a number of secondary roles which could be developed and used if necessary.

Awareness of your own preferred team role(s) and those of colleagues in the team can help you to identify the best ways of working together, drawing on strengths and
seeking to minimise destructive conflict.

In a small team, it may be necessary for team members to draw on several of their preferred team roles to ensure all the roles are covered.

Using Team Strengths
Once teams are established they may develop their own characteristic way of working. If that approach is suited to the situation the team may perform very well. But situations change and effective teams need to be able to draw on a range of resources so that they can change their approach to meet different challenges. The strengths offered by the various team types are important at different stages of a project.

Useful people to have in a team
Project stage Team role(s)
Identifying needs Shapers, Co-ordinators
Finding ideas Plants, Resource Investigators
Formulating plans Monitor Evaluators
Specialists
Making contacts Resource Investigators
Establishing the organisation Implementers, Co-ordinators
Following through Completers, Implementers

You may rarely have an opportunity to put together a team from scratch. More often you are likely to be leading or joining an established team. But whenever you are starting a new project or assigning different responsibilities within a team, it can be very worthwhile to consider where the natural strengths of individual team members lie. You may choose to list out the preferred team roles and match them against individual team members and their functional responsibilities.

In this way you can complete a team profile for your team and clarify:

- any mismatch between team role and functional role for any member
- any areas where you might use the team role strengths of team members more effectively.

You may find, of course, that a team does not contain an ideal balance of different roles. In some teams there may be gaps where a particular role isn't in evidence, and others where one role outnumbers the others. In these situations, you may find it useful to draw upon the skills and characteristics of secondary preferred roles to bring out a more balanced approach. This can be a constructive developmental process in itself!

Managing Conflict
Developing teams need to be able to express and resolve conflict constructively in order to progress to a stage where they perform effectively.

Destructive conflict
Like stress, conflict may be constructive or destructive.

A certain amount handled constructively can be productive, but if conflict is allowed to become:

- personal
- prolonged
it will become destructive and can have very damaging results for the individuals and for the whole team.

Dealing with conflict is not the team leader’s role alone. Everyone in the team holds a responsibility for contributing to and developing a supportive team climate. Therefore it is important that all team members are able to identify and handle conflict constructively.

This involves:

• recognising signs of tension and conflict between individuals and within the team
• recognising different styles, opinions and approaches
• helping to provide a supportive climate in the team for constructive and mutual problem solving
• using appropriate strategies to help resolve conflict.

Causes of Conflict
The types of conflict you may have to deal with in a team can stem from a variety of causes such as:

• conflicting objectives
• interpersonal tension or personality clashes between two or more individuals, so that they work poorly together
• one team member not pulling his/her weight
• the team breaking up into factions which do not interact well with each other.

Whilst it's often comparatively easy to identify the cause of strained relationships, it's not so easy when emotions are running high to establish what can best be done to resolve the situation.

Conflict can cause:

• tension
• anxiety
• frustration
• job deterioration
• breakdown in relations.

Where there is conflict in a team, the impact may go beyond the individuals involved to negatively affect the attitudes of the whole team. The positive handling of conflict means:

• looking for solutions, rather than apportioning blame and making accusations
• avoiding turning confrontations into win/lose situations
• building a culture that explores the value in differences.

A Strategy for Managing Conflict
A three point strategy for managing conflict positively is:
• Recognise
• Reflect
• Respond assertively.

**Recognise**
Be sensitive to potential conflict situations within the team. These may arise from sources that are intellectual (based more on rational argument) or interpersonal (often based on personality issues).

Something may be wrong if an individual exhibits one or more of these danger signals, when he or she:

- expects you or others to solve their problems
- does not take responsibility for their own actions
- refuses to co-operate with another team member
- criticises destructively
- behaves aggressively
- shows no interest in their work.

At this stage, gather all the facts. If you are involved in the conflict, try to step back and look at the situation from the other person's perspective. Don't be tempted to react too quickly.

**Reflect**
Take some time out to consider the best and most constructive approach to resolving this problem. At this stage you should consider:

- your own rights and responsibilities as team leader and as a manager
- the needs of other members of the team
- the rights and needs of the individuals involved in the conflict.

Some of the options open to you include:

**Wait**
This may be a short term problem which will resolve itself without your intervention. In some cases no action is better than hasty action.

**Brainstorm**
If the problem is one which concerns a number of different people in the team directly and can be discussed at a process rather than a personal level, use the team's strengths to come up with a solution.

**Confront**
Certain situations demand that the problem is brought out into the open. Confrontation appears to carry the highest risk, but if handled assertively, is often the route to the most constructive resolution.

**Request help**
Some situations do require a second opinion or the involvement of a neutral third person to prevent a 'no-win' situation developing. Sometimes you may just need help from someone with greater experience or expertise in the area, whether from within or outside the team.

**Respond assertively**
If a conflict situation has degenerated into dissent, backbiting, gossip and generally unprofessional behaviour, the best tactic is often to gather those involved and get the issue out into the open.
For this tactic to work, some simple guidelines need to be followed to prevent the meeting becoming an opportunity for accusations and blaming.

Spoken and body language need to be open and non-threatening.

1. **State your own perception of the problem**

   - Describe the situation as you see it.
   - State your needs, interests and feelings clearly and calmly.
   - Be simple, direct and polite.
   - Use 'I', to show the other person you accept responsibility for the way you feel.
   - Focus on what the other person is doing and how you feel about it.
   - Be direct about the impact the other person's attitude or behaviour is having upon you.

   What you can say:
   - I need....'
   - When you say/do.... I feel'...
   - I have a feeling that'...
   - 'I'm not happy about...
   - 'I think....'

2. **Listen and acknowledge**

   Listen carefully to the other person to understand their perspective. Let the other person know you are listening and that you appreciate their position. Acknowledge that their needs and perception of the situation may be different from yours.

   What you can say:
   - 'I realise that...' 
   - 'I understand that...' 
   - I appreciate that...

3. **Ask for clarification if necessary**

   Use reflective questioning techniques to help gather additional information or if you feel that what is being said is obscuring the issue.

   What you can say:
   - So, are you saying that...' 
   - When you say... do you mean...' 
   - 'Does it present a problem for you when...' 

   Be careful that the tone of your voice or other aspects of your body language do not reveal criticism, irritation or a judgement already made.

4. **Specify your desired outcome**

   Tell the other person what you want to happen in order that the conflict can be resolved.

   What you can say:
'I would prefer...'
'I wish...'
'I would like...'
'I think...'

Having said what you expect from the situation you may then ask for a reaction from the other party. The best solution will be to go as far as you can to satisfying both sets of needs. Be prepared to compromise, as sometimes this may be the only solution.

If the conflict does not directly involve you, your role as team leader may be as intermediary to ensure each of these stages is followed and that each person is given a chance to speak and be heard.

**Inter-group Conflict**
Traditionally, inter-group conflict has been viewed as dysfunctional in organisations primarily because of the adverse effects it could have on organisational productivity. Conflict can lead to losses in productivity because of lack of co-operation between groups (departments) or failure to share important information.

Conflict, it is often suggested, has a corrosive effect on the morale of employees. The consequences are seen as stress, frustration, increased anxiety: all detrimental to employee well-being. Because of this, the evidence of 'conflict' within a unit often marks the manager out for adverse criticism. On the other hand, the apparent peace and harmony of a unit may attract praise. In such perceptions, confrontation is seen as undesirable, and elimination or suppression of all conflicts is regarded as a desirable objective.

The emerging contemporary view of conflict takes a broader perspective by seeing the functional aspects as well as the dysfunctional. Although the potential negative effects of conflict must be recognised, there are benefits too.

**Potential benefits of conflict**

- It can be a catalyst for change.
- It can force organisations to re-examine corporate goals or reset priorities.
- It can force managers to face important issues which might otherwise be ignored and to make higher-quality decisions on those issues.

Inter-group conflict can jolt organisations from a stagnating position towards a more innovative environment.

**Potential negative effects of conflict**
Suppression of conflict can lead to covert sabotaging of ideas rather than confrontation of issues. Group energy dissipates through failure to direct effort into constructive problem solving processes.
Team Structures
Organisations today commonly contain many different team structures.

Different situations require different types of team. Part of the skill of building a team is to determine the appropriate team structure for the task the team is to perform.

As a team member within the organisation you may belong to a number of different teams, operating in different ways. To contribute fully to each, team members need to be able to:

- adapt to the changing team circumstances
- recognise the priorities, advantages and potential pitfalls of the various team structures.

By outlining some of the main types of team you are likely to come across, this section of the module will help you to see how you and your colleagues can perform best within each structure.

Traditional Structures
The traditional organisational structure developed along lines of a hierarchical pyramid, with many tiers of management, and each manager responsible for a 'team' or unit of people.

Managers in a hierarchical pyramid structure tend to be responsible for people grouped according to their specific functions, or locations, e.g. Information Technology department, or the Luton branch.

This is the way in which many large organisations evolved. Many still reflect this structure today. Increasingly there is growing recognition that the hierarchical structure is not appropriate in all situations and of its potential disadvantages.

Influences which have brought about a need for change in the way organisations structure their people include:

- the rapid pace of change - those at the top of an organisation can no longer collect and pass on to their subordinates all the information required to develop the organisation. A pro-active approach to change is required throughout all tiers of the organisation, with information and recommendations communicated up to senior management
- the need for innovation, in the face of this rapid change, if organisations are to remain leaders in their field
- the spread of information technology, making shared information more readily available and more easily accessed
- an increasingly well-educated workforce, with less respect for a hierarchy demanding unquestioning compliance
- recognition of the educational and motivational opportunities for personal development which team working can offer employees.
- the need to develop structures which are flexible enough to accommodate a range of different working situations, e.g. part-time working, home-working, geographically spread teams.

A typical hierarchical structure can be shown as a pyramid.
The strengths of the system are:

- clear downwards lines of communication
- good for ensuring policies and practices are carried out uniformly throughout the organisation
- good for situations which demand compliance with orders (for example in the armed forces)
- good for co-ordinating the work of teams in different locations.

Its weaknesses are:

- upwards communication and two-way feedback can be difficult to establish
- assumes the 'top' knows where to go!
- responsibilities become fragmented
- inflexible and static
- few individuals are able to develop a holistic approach to issues
- encourages 'us and them', reinforces position of power and status.

**Project Team Structures**

A project team usually consists of a group of people brought together to address and find a solution to a particular issue. Where the issue touches on several areas of the organisation, the project team members are likely to be drawn from a number of different functions and skill areas. The team has a specific objective. Project teams are not only formed for large-scale projects; there are many uses for a project team at a smaller scale around the organisation.

Individuals invited to become members of a cross-functional project team are likely to benefit from:

- personal development opportunities
- greater understanding of how their part of the organisation integrates with others.
- The organisation may benefit from improved:
  - opportunities and resources to find innovative solutions to problems
  - cross-team communication
  - co-ordination with other areas
  - co-operation with other areas.

The project manager usually manages the project team from the planning stage right through to implementation. However, team members may join the team to provide
specific skills or to represent certain functions and then leave again.

This can benefit the team by providing:

- a fresh supply of new ideas, and new insights, as new team members join
- specialist knowledge and skills when needed
- cross-organisational support for the task.

Whilst project teams can work very effectively to produce results and solutions which individual departments may not have had the resources or insights to produce alone, there are some possible disadvantages.

For example:
The transient team population can make it difficult to generate a real 'team' climate and sense of commitment.

- Unless there is a consistent core to the team, it may not have the opportunity to go through the stages of development needed to reach a point where it can perform effectively.
- New team members may upset the balance of team dynamics.

Matrix Structures
Matrix structures are a form of grouping developed in American aerospace companies in the 1960s. The matrix combines two forms of grouping, such as a functional department and a cross-functional project team, so that an individual belongs to two teams and reports to two managers.

If you were simultaneously working as part of a project team, representing your function, and reporting to the project manager, and also working within your function, reporting to your line manager, you could be said to be working within a form of matrix.

Matrix structures can be used effectively where an organisation is developing new products, processes or services, involving the collaboration of different functions and specialists.

However, people who may feel quite secure and perform well as team members in a single function team may find it difficult to adapt to the different requirements of a cross-functional team.

To contribute most effectively in a matrix structure, team members need to have:

- flexible perspectives - to be able to understand the wider view
- open attitudes - to avoid stereotyping members by the functional department they belong to. For example, 'John would say that, he's a typical accountant'.
- a flexible team role style - to be able to adapt to fulfilling two potentially different roles in two teams
- negotiation skills - to be able to balance and negotiate trade-offs between conflicting team objectives
- an open attitude to change.

Self-managed Teams
A survey of 500 personnel managers conducted by the Industrial Society found that 40% worked in organisations with self-managed teams. The average team in this
survey comprised eight people and the main reasons cited for their use were improved customer service, increased staff motivation and quality of output. **Source:** Self Managed Teams, The Industrial Society, London, 1995.

It has been argued that team management, coaching and leadership should be the responsibility of all team members.

Even in teams where one person is designated team leader, the team will perform more effectively where each person feels a commitment to these responsibilities.

In some contexts the concept of a self-managing team is formalised to enable different individuals to take over the leadership role in certain situations. For example, members rotate role of chairperson at team meetings.

In other teams, the process may be less formal, with team members all recognising their responsibilities to the team's success and tacitly enabling different people to take on one of the leadership roles in situations which suit them best.

For example, one person may take the leadership role in department meetings, whilst another uses his or her customer liaison skills to full effect by taking the lead in presentations or briefings with external customers.

Another example might be if a team of people are involved in managing a discrete part of an operation, possibly being responsible for solving a particular problem, without a nominated leader.

Formal and informal self-management is more likely to succeed in mature teams which have gone through the various stages of development and which contain a balance of team roles.

**Virtual Teams**
Virtual teams occur when for several reasons team members do not share the same geographic work area. Some international organisations now never sleep! When the European part of the team stops work, the US collaborators have started; when they stop, the Japanese part of the team takes over. One of the key success factors is collaboration.

Collaboration and communication can be maintained by telephone, computer (e-mail, video links) as well as the usual fax and post. Apart from the technology there is nothing new about a team which does not meet and is not office based. Sales people traditionally fall into this category; their office is mainly the car, with communications made by telephone and occasional meetings. Another example of course is distance learning students who do not share the same location, but keep in touch with their group through the telephone, fax, post and increasingly e-mail, meeting occasionally at training workshops.

**Case Study**
**IBM AND LOTUS INSTITUTE**
Chris Brennan has been working for four years on the development of virtual teams, first at Lotus Institute and then at IBM.

Chris believes that a facilitated, face-to-face team development session is important before the team can operate effectively at a distance; our work suggests that the complication in a virtual team is to do with discipline and alignment. If you have ten people located in ten locations and they are not sure they know what they are doing,
chaos breaks out - it is critical that they establish a relationship and trust each other.

A new virtual team is brought together in the same room for a two-day team-building session at the start of a three-month programme of coaching and development. The two days include some traditional team-building techniques, agreement on values, objectives and roles and responsibilities, as well as instruction and practice with some software designed to enable virtual teams to work. The facilitator inputs the teamwork criteria into the database to act as a constant reminder to the team members.

Source: The Wide-awake Club, by Ron Young, People Management, Vol 4 No 3; 5 February 98.

Current studies into virtual teams suggest that the first two stages of forming and storming are best achieved at the same time and the same place - or at least at the same time in a different place. Consider how far you feel the above programme facilitates this outcome.

Case Study
BP

BP is a lean and flat organisation for a business with $70 billion in revenues, 53,000 employees and some 90 business units around the world. There is nobody between the general managers of the business units and the group of nine operating executives who oversee the businesses with John Browne, CEO. The way Browne sees it, the people in the business units - those closest to BP's assets and customers - should run their businesses. Browne considers that value can be derived from sharing knowledge - not geographical locations. At a time when bureaucracy is a dirty word, it's easy to forget that a bureaucracy historically served an essential purpose, connecting the leaders to their businesses and allowing the businesses to share essential knowledge.

Browne looks to his virtual team network for this important work. The aim of this computer network is to allow people to work co-operatively and share knowledge quickly and easily regardless of time, distance and organisational boundaries.

The network is a rapidly growing system of sophisticated personal computers equipped so that users can work together as if they were in the same room and can easily tap the company's rich database of information. The PCs boast video conferencing capability, electronic blackboards, scanners, faxes, and group-ware. These PCs, as well as the other 35,000 basic PCs in the company, are connected to an intranet that contains a rapidly growing number of home pages. Everyone at BP now has the capability and authority to create his or her own home page. The home pages serve a number of purposes. There are sites where functional experts describe the experience they have to offer, sites listing current projects and performance agendas.

"If it's easy for people to connect, communicate and share knowledge they will do it. If it isn't, they won't", says Kent A Greenes, BP's virtual teamwork project director. To make it easier, BP is experimenting with a variety of approaches, making videos that can be seen on the network, creating electronic yellow pages that can be searched in a variety of ways.

BP discovered that virtual teamwork required a new set of behaviours, it required people to be co-operative and open about what they know, and not be possessive about information.

BP has also extended membership to outside organisations - such as business partners Shell in the Gulf of Mexico exploration, and with contractors, Brown & Root in
A big drop in working hours needed to solve problems as a result of improved interactions between land based drilling engineers and offshore rig crews.
A decrease in the number of helicopter trips to off shore oil platforms.
The avoidance of a refinery shutdown because technical experts at another location could examine a corrosion problem remotely.
A reduction in rework during construction projects because designers, fabricators, construction workers, and operations people could collaborate more effectively.
BP estimates that the virtual team network produced at least $30 million in value in its first year alone.


Consider whether your organisation could benefit from a virtual team network, and if so, how.

Other virtual teams exist in organising remote 'teleworkers', e.g. British Telecom, where some telephone operators work from cottages in the Scottish highlands and islands. The person phoning the operator will be routed by complex software to any operator who is free, but these workers may only visit the office once a month for team meetings. Some people find this means they can work more flexible hours to suit family commitments. Managers are finding the challenge of supervising workers requires a whole new set of management values that are based on trust, empowerment and good communication skills.

Virtual teams need trust
Charles Handy writes in June 1995 Harvard Business Review on Trust and the Virtual Organisation. He identifies seven 'cardinal principles of trust that we should keep in mind'.

1. Trust is not blind
To trust someone you usually need to know them. So a manager with fifty or more staff will probably have difficulty in trusting his team workers. So for trust to work, smaller units should be established. Handy cites a job where he was referred to as MKR/32 and was required to write to FIN/4 or PRO/23; he never met these people, and rarely heard their names. He had no reason to trust them and frankly no desire to.

2. Trust needs boundaries
Unlimited trust is, in practice, unrealistic. Most organisations usually need to have confidence in the competence of the individual to achieve a goal. Control then comes after the event when the results are assessed. Trust based organisations need to re-engineer their work, pulling back from the old models of organisation, where everything was based on its component parts or functions. New working practices need more holistic designs as individuals need to be able to move more freely within the boundaries.

3. Trust demands learning
Organisations need to create a real learning culture capable of learning new technologies and able to impart sufficient flexibility to individuals to react when customers demand it.
4. Trust is tough
The reality is that even the best recruiters will get it wrong sometimes. When trust proves to be misplaced - not because people are being deceitful or malicious, but because they do not live up to expectations or cannot be relied on to do what is needed - then these people have to go. Where you cannot trust you have to become a checker once more, with all the systems of control that this requires. So for the sake of the organisational objectives and new structure an individual that does not perform must leave for the sake of the whole.

5. Trust needs bonding
Self-contained units responsible for delivering specified results are the necessary building blocks of an organisation based on trust. For this to work the smaller units must be working towards the overall goals of the whole organisation. This requires people to understand and commit to the vision and vision needs leaders. Trust is not and never can be an impersonal commodity.

6. Trust needs touch
Visionary leaders, no matter how articulate, are not enough. A shared commitment still requires personal contact to make it real. High tech needs to be augmented by high touch. Paradoxically the more virtual an organisation becomes, the more its people need to meet in person. The meetings however focus on process rather than task, more concerned with getting people to get to know each other (to promote trust) rather than to deliver results. Video conferences are more task focused, but are productive if the individuals know each other as people. (Note the experience of IBM from the case study.)

7. Trust requires leaders
At their best the teams /units in good trust-based organisations hardly have to be managed, but they do need leaders.

'If a trust-based organisation means trust for some and the old, instrumental contract for the less able, then trust will become a dirty word, a synonym for selfishness.' - Charles Handy.
You've considered a number of different types of team structure in this module:

- traditional (hierarchical)
- project
- matrix
- self-managed
- virtual.

Effective team members need to have a range of skills regardless of the type of structure of the team. These include:

- knowledge of and confidence in their own and others' team roles
- recognition and willingness to hand over tasks which would be better performed by someone else in the team
- willingness to accept roles and tasks for which their team role makes them most suited
- good personal management skills, e.g. time management, objective setting
- a commitment to open communication
- a commitment to developing the team.
Summary
As teams develop towards becoming truly effective they pass through different stages, each of which raise issues a good leader will tackle successfully. In this module we describe models of team development and team roles that provide practical frameworks for analysing your own team.

We also look at how you can manage conflict within a team. We review a variety of team structures to help identify how best to perform in each structure.

We focus on the issues involved in the development of teams, looking firstly at what makes a winning team.

We describe four main stages in team development - forming, storming, norming and performing - and look at how an effective team moves through each stage. The task, the individual and the team climate each play a part in the overall performance of the team, and we examine some key characteristics that define an effective team.

The role each of us plays as a member of a team contributes to the dynamics of the team itself. We describe the nine roles Belbin identified to help you analyse the composition of teams to which you currently contribute.

Managing conflict effectively is a key skill for every team member, and we suggest a strategy for dealing with conflict within a team which emphasises the positive aspects that effectively managed conflict can bring.

Finally, we review a range of different types of team structure, each with their own advantages and disadvantages, and return to trust as the basis for meeting the challenge of working in teams today.

Further reading


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