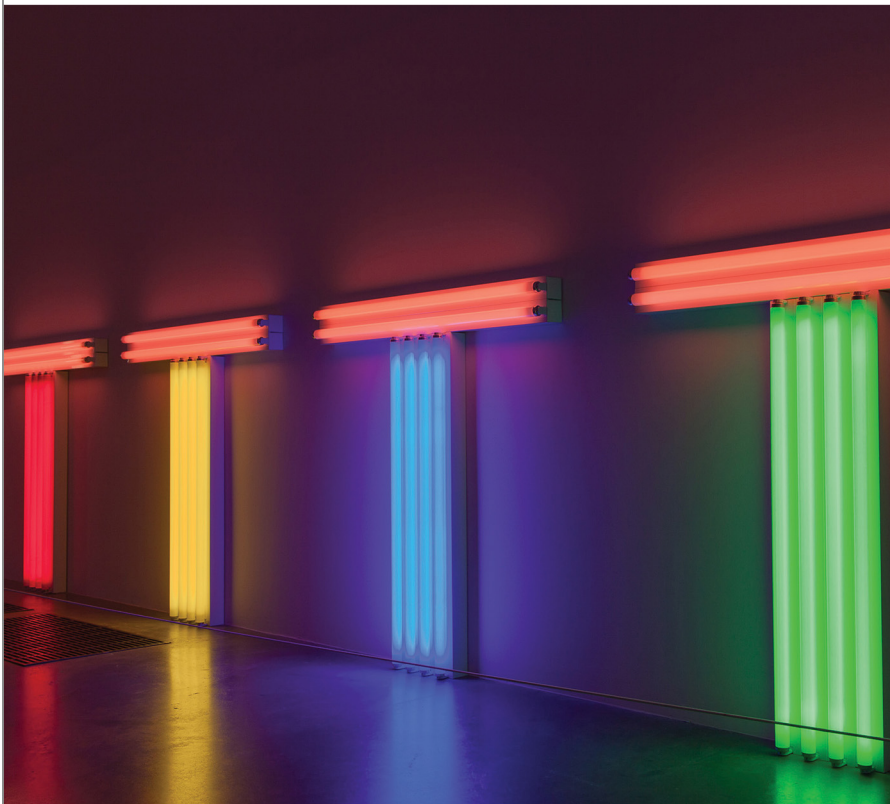


Working in groups and teams



Working in groups and teams



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Introduction

Being able to work with people so that the right things happen is a core management skill. Managing people effectively perhaps demands most of managers when individuals come together to work in a group or in a team, which requires leadership as well as facilitating and overseeing group and team working, and managing conflict. This week we explore team working from start to finish. This includes deciding if the creation of a group or team is the best approach to the task in hand (it is not always!), selecting individuals to work in it, setting up the team-working processes, supporting teams through the different stages of development, reviewing progress and evaluating team outputs. The main activity involves problem-solving, based on a current situation with a team or group that you manage or with which you are familiar.

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Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- recognise the difference between groups and teams and understand when each is more appropriate
- understand issues in team constitution (team roles)
- identify the different stages of team development and how a manager can support the team at each stage
- understand and identify team processes (inputs, throughputs and outputs) and the manager's role
- understand and manage conflict.

1 Working in groups and teams

This section provides a general introduction to groups and teams used in workplaces, when they are needed, and how the task influences the size and constitution of a group or team. In many organisations groups are referred to as teams, but there are differences, which you should be able to identify as you read.

Activity 1 Group/team work: A reflection

Allow 20 minutes for this activity.

This activity is designed to help you to consider the range of issues that managers need to be aware of in order to understand and successfully manage group and team work. This will help to prepare you for the unit, which takes a holistic approach to the team-work process.

First, consider a team or group in which you have participated. You can choose a work group or team, or a group or team from another area of your life, for example, a voluntary action group or team.

Now respond to the questions below. Note any other thoughts not prompted by the questions. Your responses may help you in Activity 2.

Group/team work: A reflection

What was the purpose of the group or team?

Provide your answer...

How well did it achieve its goals and aims?

Provide your answer...

Who was involved in it?

Provide your answer...

How were members selected?

Provide your answer...

Did they have different skills and experiences?

Provide your answer...

If so, were they complementary?

Provide your answer...

What processes and activities worked well and what did not work so well?

Provide your answer...

What are the positive features you can remember?

Provide your answer...

What are the negative features you can remember?

Provide your answer...

Other thoughts

Provide your answer...

Activity 1

Discussion

This activity was probably not too difficult if the group or team you chose was, for example, a work-based project team. In these cases, it is sometimes difficult to know when to call a group a team. In long-serving groups and teams, goals and objectives can also change over time. In voluntary groups, members may select themselves. Sometimes it is hard to judge the extent of difference between the skills or experiences that members have if the group or team is short-lived, or if members are required to carry out a very similar task without very much interaction. Thus, you may have found some questions were not as easy to answer as they seemed at first.

1.1 Making teams work: An introduction

In today's organisations, more and more work is carried out by teams and groups of people working together towards a common objective. Making teams and groups work effectively is a challenging task for the manager. Bringing individuals together can slow down and complicate everyday processes and conflict can make even the simplest task difficult to achieve.

Team working has benefits, however. It provides a structure and means of bringing together people with a suitable mix of skills and knowledge. This encourages the

exchange of ideas, creativity, motivation and job satisfaction and can extend individual roles and learning. In turn, this can improve productivity, quality and customer focus. It can also encourage employees to be more flexible and can improve the ability of the organisation to respond to fast-changing environments. The benefits and difficulties of team working are summarised well by Mabey *et al*:

A team can ... achieve what none of the individuals within it can do alone; with the right dynamic, a collection of ordinary individuals can achieve extraordinary feats. But the converse can also occur: a team can fail to achieve what any of its members could easily accomplish.

(Source: Mabey *et al*, 1998)

The challenge of learning how to make teams work begins with understanding what teams and groups are.

1.2 Defining groups and teams

The terms 'group' and 'team' are often used interchangeably. Is there really a difference between the two terms and if so what is it? A starting point in exploring this difference is to say that *all teams are groups* but *not all groups are teams*. From this it follows that what is said about groups will apply to teams but that teams will have special characteristics of their own.

Kakabadse *et al.* (1988) suggest that groups may be *formal* or *informal*, *primary* or *secondary*.

Primary groups have regular and frequent interactions with each other in working towards some common interests or tasks. A small work group and a project team are primary groups. They usually have an important influence on their members' values, attitudes and beliefs.

Such groups can be *formal*, in that they were deliberately created to serve an organisation need, or *informal*, in that the group forms outside formal structures to meet the specific needs of individuals. Boddy (2005) argues that informal teams are a powerful feature of organisational life because they bring together people who have common interests and concerns and who exchange knowledge and information.

Secondary groups are those whose members interact less frequently. These are often larger than primary groups (an example is a large committee). Their members do not have the opportunity to get to know each other well and as a result they are usually less cohesive than primary groups.

When does a group become a team? The example in Box 1 illustrates the difference very simply.

Box 1 Group or team?

A number of people kicking a football about in the car park at lunch time is probably a group. There is little structure to what is happening; it is just a few people acting in whatever role they choose (or possibly several) because they want to get some exercise and/or they like spending time with their friends before going back to work.

However, taking this group and turning it into a football team would be a major task. Unlike the group, the team would have a clearly-stated task: for example, winning as many

matches as possible. Ensuring that the team performed this task would involve choosing the right people according to their abilities and particular skills to perform clearly-defined roles. Team training would need to be available to help the individuals work better together. The performance expectations of individuals would be defined by the roles they held. For example, no-one expects, except in very unusual circumstances, that the goalkeeper will score goals or that the strikers will defend the goal. When a game is won the team is seen to have achieved the task, although individuals may still be singled out for praise, or for criticism, as appropriate.

A team, then, is a special type of group which 'unites the members towards mutually-held objectives' (Bennett, 1994).

Some differences between groups and teams are given in Table 1.

Table 1 Differences between groups and teams

	Groups	Teams
Leadership	Strong, focused leader	There may be some sharing of leadership
Accountability	Individual accountability	Both individual and mutual accountability
Purpose	Identical to the organisation's mission	Work towards a specific purpose
Work products	Individuals within the group deliver individual products	Collective work products
Communication	Efficient (time bound) meetings	Open-ended discussion and active problem-solving
Effectiveness	Indirectly through their influence on others	Direct assessment of the collective work products
Work style	Groups discuss, delegate and then do the work individually	Teams discuss, decide and delegate but do the work together

The distinctions in Table 1 may be overstated: for example, a group may have a specific purpose and a team's effectiveness may not necessarily be directly assessed in terms of the collective work product. However, a difficulty in distinguishing groups from teams is that many so-called teams are really working groups because the emphasis is on individual effort. A real team is a small number of people with complementary skills, equally committed to a common purpose to which they hold themselves mutually accountable (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993). People doing exactly the same job in a call centre answering customer enquiries, with the same individual targets and being overseen by the same supervisor or manager, may be called a team, but it is best described as a working group. There is overlap between teams and groups, of course. But distinctions are useful when considering whether to invest time and effort in building a team when a group will do. For a team to be effective there needs to be a clear, shared understanding of team objectives, mutual respect and trust and an appreciation of individual strengths and weaknesses. There also needs to be an atmosphere in which knowledge and expertise can be shared openly, with opportunities for each team member to make a distinctive contribution.

1.3 Is a team or group really needed?

There may be times when group working – or simply working alone – is more appropriate and more effective. For example, decision-making in groups and teams is usually slower than individual decision-making because of the need for communication and consensus. In addition, groups and teams may produce conventional rather than innovative responses to problems, because decisions may regress towards the average, with the more innovative decision options being rejected (Makin *et al.*, 1989).

In general, the greater the ‘task uncertainty’, that is to say the less obvious and more complex the task to be addressed, the more important it will be to work in a group or team rather than individually. This is because there will be a greater need for different skills and perspectives, especially if it is necessary to represent the different perspectives of the different stakeholders involved.

Table 2 lists some occasions when it will be appropriate to work in teams, in groups or alone.

Table 2 When to work alone, in groups or in teams

When to work alone or in groups	When to build teams
For simple tasks or problems	For highly-complex tasks or problems
When cooperation is sufficient	When decisions by consensus are essential
When minimum discretion is required	When there is a high level of choice and uncertainty
When fast decisions are needed	When high commitment is needed
When few competences are required	When a broad range of competences and different skills are required
When members’ interests are different or in conflict	When members’ objectives can be brought together towards a common purpose
When an organisation credits individuals for operational outputs	When an organisation rewards team results for strategy and vision building
When innovative responses are sought	When balanced views are sought

1.4 Types of team

If you have chosen to build a team to perform a task, the second question is: ‘What type of team do I need?’. One way of approaching this is to consider the type of task to be performed and its level, from routine to strategic. These factors in turn influence several other key dimensions of teams identified by West (2004):

Degree of permanence. A team’s lifetime can range from weeks to years depending on the task

Skill/competence required. This depends on what levels of skill are needed to perform the task

Autonomy and influence. This may depend on whether the task is routine or strategic and at what level in the organisation the team is formed.

Peckham (1999) suggests four possible types of problem relating to how well it is already known and understood and to what extent there is already a solution to this problem.

These are set out in Figure 1. Four types of teams are identified to tackle these different problems: namely, problem-solving teams, creative teams, tactical teams and problem-finding teams.

	Known problem	Unknown problem
Unknown solution	Need: problem-solving team with autonomy	Need: creative team with freedom
Known solution	Need: tactical team with role clarity	Need: problem-finding team (analytical and creative)

Figure 1 Possible problem types

(Source: adapted from Peckham, 1999)

Thus, each type of team needs a different mix of individuals with specific skills and knowledge. The mix and balance of skills must be appropriate to the nature of the task.

1.5 How many people?

Does the task need a lot of people doing the same task (for example, a call centre) or a small, expert team addressing different parts of the task (for example, writing a textbook)? The size of the team needed will be an important consideration. The larger the team, the greater the potential variety of skills and knowledge, but as the size of the team increases each individual will have fewer opportunities to participate and influence proceedings. The size of a team is therefore a trade-off or balance between variety and individual input. A team of between five and seven people is considered best for the effective participation of all members, but to achieve the range of expertise and skills required, the group may need to be larger. This brings with it the challenges of how to manage and supervise a large team.

Homogeneous groups, whose members share similar values and beliefs, may be more satisfying to work in and may experience less conflict, but they tend to be less creative and produce greater pressures for conformity. In contrast, heterogeneous groups, whose members have a wider range of values and beliefs, are likely to experience greater conflict, but they have the potential for greater creativity and innovation.

This introduction has outlined differences between groups and teams but it has also highlighted the fact that *all teams are groups* but not *all groups are teams*. The remaining sections of this chapter sometimes relate specifically to teams and sometimes to groups and teams. Thus, we refer to all *groups* as *teams* rather than *groups and teams*.

2 Creating successful teams: A holistic view

This section focusses on an 'open systems' approach' to teamwork – a helpful approach which encourages managers to consider the context in which a team works. The approach considers team processes, which are divided into three parts: *inputs*, *throughputs* and *outputs*. These highlight the different issues and activities a manager needs to engage with or oversee during the life of a team. To prepare for activity 2, read this section with a specific team in mind. It could be the team you referred to in activity 1 or a different one. Ideally it should be a workplace group or team that you manage (or one in which you participate or have participated). Think about the processes the team went through (or will go through). Make notes as you read.

2.1 Inputs, throughputs and outputs

Teams need to be seen in the wider context of the organisation. It is then easier for the manager to see what he or she needs to do to ensure that the team functions successfully, and what needs to be controlled, monitored and/ or influenced within and outside the team. At the same time, the manager needs to consider the team in terms of its task phases and processes, from start to finish. This allows the manager to put a particular team-related issue in context in order to understand it better. Looking forwards, the manager needs to consider the development of team members and the skills and competences that will be useful to take to the next team and task.

A manager's task is to understand, plan and monitor all these different processes. This seemingly complex and unwieldy task is easier to understand and manage when broken down into its component parts. The open systems model of team work (Schermerhorn *et al.*, 1995; Ingram *et al.*, 1997) can help to explain and characterise effective team-work processes.

2.2 The open systems approach to team working

Schermerhorn and colleagues suggest that teamwork can be considered as a three stage sequence. Teams are viewed as systems which take in resources such as time, people, skills, problems (inputs) and through transformational processes (throughputs) such as decision-making and different behaviours and activities, transform them into outputs, such as work, solutions and satisfactions (Ingram *et al.*, 1997). This is illustrated in Figure 2.

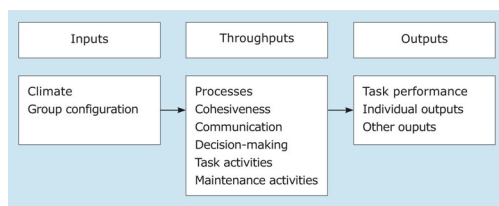


Figure 2 An open systems model of teamwork

(Source: adapted from Schermerhorn *et al.* (1995) in Ingram *et al.*, 1997)

Inputs are factors which are controlled and influenced by management. They include 'climate', the atmosphere under which the team works, and 'group configuration', how the team is put together, who is selected to work in it and why. Management will also influence how a team should work by making sure at the outset that the team strategy is in line with the vision and strategic direction of the organisation and that it uses the organisation's preferred work practices; for example, face-to-face or virtual working.

Throughputs refer to the activities and tasks that help to transform inputs into outputs. They may have the greatest influence on effective team work as they include team processes such as developing and maintaining cohesiveness, and communication. They also involve task activities which get the work done and maintenance activities which support the development and smooth functioning of the team.

Outputs are those (successful) outcomes which satisfy organisational or personal goals or other predetermined criteria. The success of outputs may be assessed by a number of stakeholders, including the organisation itself and team members, and by a range of other stakeholders. Team outputs include the performance of team tasks and individual outputs (such as professional development).

How can this framework be applied in a way which highlights how to manage or lead a team and its task? Imagine you have been asked to put together a team to produce the company's internal newsletter. What inputs, throughputs and outputs would you need? What questions would you need to ask yourself about different aspects of the process? We now consider what you might need to think about for the newsletter example. Some of the questions could be adapted and applied to other situations as well.

2.2.1 Inputs

Inputs are often controlled or influenced by management. This may be the direct manager of the group or team or the result of senior management decisions and strategies. This means in practice that the way a team is put together and will function is influenced by the organisation's values, vision and strategy, and its practices and procedures.

Two main factors to consider at this stage are communication climate and group configuration.

Communication climate. In the case of the company newsletter you may need to think about the existing communication culture within the organisation and how the newsletter can enhance it. Consider the reasons for introducing the newsletter and to what extent it is in line with organisational strategy and vision. You may also want to see what existing processes and procedures can be used, what barriers and resistance there may be and what you may need to do to influence and smooth the way so that these are overcome or worked around.

Group configuration. Managers can influence the team process by their choice of team members. An effective team needs to be appropriate to the task: this includes size and the blend of talent. In the case of the newsletter, you would need to think about the skills needed and the people available to work on it. It is also useful to consider whether the task could be used as a development opportunity for someone. If so, is there also a person available to monitor and support them?

Some input-related questions for you to consider at this stage are given in Box 2.

Box 2 Input-related questions

How much support is there for this newsletter among senior management?

Who might need to be influenced?
What objectives will it fulfil?
What resources will be provided for it? What others might be needed? Where could they come from?
How will individuals working on this be rewarded or recognised?
What might they learn? What skills could they hope to develop?
How many people will be needed to perform this task?
What technical skills are needed (e.g. desktop publishing)?
What training and development opportunities are available?
What roles are needed (e.g. a co-coordinator)?
Who might work well together?

2.2.2 Throughputs

Some common throughputs include:

Team processes. A sense of unity is created through sharing clear goals which are understood and accepted by the members.

Cohesiveness. This involves encouraging feelings of belonging, cooperation, openness and commitment to the team.

Communication. This involves being clear, accurate, open and honest.

Decision-making. This involves making sure that established procedures are in place, that everybody is clear about leadership and an environment of trust is being created.

Task and maintenance activities. These include activities that ensure that the task is produced effectively, such as planning, agreeing on procedures and controls. They also include activities that minimise threats to the process, such as monitoring and reviewing internal processes and dealing constructively with conflict.

In the case of the newsletter project, you may need to think about ways of setting up the project. Would it be possible to have a team awayday? If so, what would the themes of the day be? Perhaps you could work backwards from the finished product. How do team members envisage the newsletter in terms of aim, goals, content and look? Can they come up with an appropriate design and name for the newsletter? Then, what needs to be done in order for this to be produced? Some ground rules for working together may also need to be set at an early stage. Some throughput-related questions are set out in Box 3.

Box 3 Throughput-related questions

What can you do to build a sense of belonging among the team members?
How will the group communicate? (Face-to-face, email, group software?)
Do any ground rules need setting up? How can this be done?
What established procedures for decision-making are there?
Will there be a team leader? How will the person be chosen?
What tasks need to be performed to complete the project?

What maintenance behaviours does the group need to exhibit to get the job done and to benefit and develop from the experience?

Who will be responsible for ensuring that the different tasks and maintenance activities are performed?

Are there structures and systems in place to review processes?

2.2.3 Outputs

Outcomes can be examined in terms of task performance, individual performance and other (incidental) outcomes.

Task performance. This may be judged on a number of criteria, such as quality of the formal outputs or objectives. In this case a product (the newsletter) and the time taken to perform the task are the criteria.

Individual outputs. These may include personal satisfaction and personal development and learning.

Other outcomes. These include transferable skills to apply in future to other teamwork. They include, for example, experience of effective teamwork and task-specific skills.

In general, it is always appropriate to evaluate outcomes. In this case you may need to think about:

Evaluating the newsletter itself. Was it well-received?

Evaluating individual outcomes. Have members developed transferable skills that they can take to new projects?

Evaluating other outcomes. Has the experience enhanced team members' ability to work in a team?

Some output-related questions are set out in Box 4.

Box 4 Output-related questions

Has the team completed the task it was given?

Has it kept to cost and to time?

What has the team learned from this experience?

Should the team now be broken up or could it go on to another activity?

What have individuals learned from the experience?

Have members experienced an effective team?

Have any learning and development needs been identified? How can they be addressed?

Have members developed transferable teamworking and other skills?

Where can these skills be used in the organisation?

The open systems model of teamwork shows us how effective teamwork can offer benefits to organisations and staff. However, it also shows us that these benefits do not occur without effort and planning. Managers need to ensure that the right team is put together to perform a given task and that it is given appropriate tasks. They also need to

secure the freedom, resources and support for the team to undertake the task. The model alerts managers to both the micro and the macro issues they will need to be aware of in managing effective teams.

Activity 2 Inputs, throughputs and outputs

Allow 40 minutes for this activity.

Using the notes you made, complete the following questions covering the inputs, throughputs and outputs (actual or anticipated) of your group or team. (You do not have to use the group or team you used in activity 1.) The group or team should be one that you manage or in which you participate or which you managed or participated in during the recent past. Use the input, throughput and outputs questions in [section 2](#) to help you. You should be able to answer these questions, or make informed judgements, even if the group or team has not completed its task (or it is a permanent one).

The first purpose of this activity is to help you to consolidate your thinking to help you draw on past experience to inform present and future practice. The second purpose of the activity is for you to assess whether groups or teams operate in more or less the same way in organisations. You may wish to use the Comments section below to share your results with other OpenLearners.

Purpose of group or team

Provide your answer...

Inputs

Provide your answer...

Throughputs

Provide your answer...

Outputs

Provide your answer...

The particular success factors are/were

Provide your answer...

Improvements could have been made in the following areas/processes

Provide your answer...

Activity 2

Discussion

In carrying out these activities you probably found the questions in the text invaluable; however, you may have thought of other good and relevant questions.

The following sections will set out in more detail some of the inputs, throughputs and outputs, how to manage throughputs and how to review team progress and evaluate its performance when the task is complete.

3 Team roles

Teams are often put together on the basis of the availability and skills of individuals, and managers are often not in a position to select team members. Yet such teams can and do function well. However, Meredith Belbin's theory (1981) of team roles is popular and influential so it is important that you know about it. What managers really require is an understanding of how people are likely to behave in a team. But note that the behaviour of people is not fixed: it is influenced by context and the behaviour of others.

Box 5 Glenda's troublesome team

Glenda recalled looking around the meeting room with satisfaction on the first day that her team met, feeling pleased that team members, between them, had the appropriate skills for the task. Three months later, however Matt, who had been chosen for his expert knowledge, never seemed to be able to see the 'bigger picture' – the entire task in context. As a result he occupied himself with detail and technicalities, and missed seeing important implications. Rob and Sara were quite the reverse but were argumentative. Jenny seemed uncommitted and Steve seemed to have lost all his initial enthusiasm. Glenda's initial hopes of delivering high-quality results had turned to worries about whether the task could be done to an acceptable standard.

A team is more than a set of individuals with the appropriate skills. People bring to the team not only their knowledge and skills but also their personal attributes and the ways in which they behave, contribute and relate to others. A popular idea is that these individual characteristics should be taken account of in constructing teams. While we may not be in a position to select team members, according to Belbin we need to consider these behaviours when selecting a team. A person who is known to be confident and enthusiastic is likely to behave in the same way when he or she joins a team. If all team members behave in the same way, then not only is conflict likely but the quality of the task is likely to suffer.

By ensuring a balance of behaviours or 'roles' there is a greater likelihood that the team will perform well. Belbin's research (1981) (developed and slightly amended over the years) identifies nine clusters of behaviours, or roles. He suggests that individuals will be more effective if they are allowed to play the roles they are most skilled in or most inclined to play, although they can adopt roles other than their preferred ones, if necessary.

Each role has both positive and negative aspects. The nine roles are:

1. The implementer, who turns ideas into practical actions. Implementers may be inflexible, however, and may have difficulty in changing their well-thought-through plans.
2. The coordinator, who clarifies goals and promotes decision-making. Coordinators often chair a team. They can sometimes be manipulative and delegate too much work to others.
3. The shaper, who has the drive and courage to overcome obstacles, and 'shapes' others to meet the team's objectives. Shapers may challenge others and may be aggressive at times.

4. The plant, who solves difficult problems. Often creative and unorthodox, a plant will come up with ideas but may have difficulties communicating them.
5. The resource investigator, who explores opportunities and develops contacts. However, initial enthusiasm may not be maintained to the end of the project, and detail may be overlooked.
6. The monitor evaluator, who observes and assesses what is going on and seeks all options. Often working slowly and analytically, monitor evaluators come to the 'right' decisions but can be cynical and dampen the enthusiasm of others.
7. The teamworker, who listens, builds relationships and tries to avoid or reduce conflict between team members. Considered to be the 'oil' that keeps the team running smoothly, teamworkers are good listeners and diplomats. They can smooth conflicts but may not be able to take decisive action when necessary.
8. The completer finisher, who searches out errors and omissions and finishes on time. Often perfectionists, completer finishers are self-motivated and have high standards. They can worry about detail and can be reluctant or refuse to delegate work.
9. The specialist, who provides knowledge and skill. Specialists can be passionate about gaining knowledge in their field. However, their contribution to the team may be narrow and they may not be interested in matters outside their own field.

The weaknesses of Belbin's framework are that people's behaviour and interpersonal styles are influenced by context: that is, the other people in the team, the relationship with them and by the task to be performed. Moreover, research into the validity of Belbin's nine roles has shown that some are not easily distinguishable from one another and that the roles fit more easily into the more conventional framework of personality traits (Fisher et al., 2001).

However, Belbin's framework has been very influential on organisational and managerial thinking about team building and development (although it is not the only one). Such frameworks are helpful in guiding the composition of a balanced team. When, as a manager, you have no control over the composition of a team it is important to discuss with team members their strengths and weaknesses and preferred working styles.

4 The life cycle of a team

This section covers the stages that teams normally go through, from forming to disbanding. Note that the stages cannot always be clearly identified: this is likely to be the case if a team operates for a few days or if a team has changes in its membership. In the first case, there may be little 'storming' and in the latter there may be a considerable amount of it.

Managing a team means managing it through the ups and downs of the team process from beginning to end. The idea of different 'stages' of team development is useful in understanding what the team needs and how best to provide support. The stages of team development were most famously described by Tuckman and Jensen in 1977. They are:

1. 'Forming': the pre-team stage where people are still working as individuals.
2. 'Storming': the stage of conflict that many teams need to go through to achieve their potential. During this stage the team becomes more aggressive and challenges previously agreed or taken-for-granted rules and restrictions.
3. 'Norming': the consolidating phase in which the team works out how to use the resources they have to apply to the task.
4. 'Performing': the optimal stage in which the team works well and strives to be even better by concentrating on the development of the team, individuals and the task in hand.
5. 'Adjourning' (sometimes also referred to as 'mourning'): the stage when the team disbands and individuals move on to other responsibilities.

Your role as a manager in supporting and encouraging the team through each of these stages is set out in Box 6.

Box 6 Team stages: the manager's role

Forming

Your focus is to help the team members to get to know each other and put everyone at ease. Minimise fears, confusions and uncertainties by clarifying the goals, roles, responsibilities and relevant procedures. Discuss concerns and expectations: team members who have worked in teams before may bring specific expectations, worries or prejudices.

Storming

Listen to problems, provide feedback which acknowledges all points of view, and encourage the team to work towards shared goals. Attempts to suppress conflict are likely to disrupt team processes. The storming phase is really an opportunity to resolve conflicts and, if carefully managed, can help the team become more cohesive.

Norming

Ensure that rules and norms are arrived at by consensus and that they help the team's effectiveness. Time given to the creation of new rules by which the team wants to operate will make later stages more efficient. Facilitate team cohesion and ensure that each team member identifies with the team's purpose and values.

Performing

Evaluate team effectiveness by looking at individual and team efforts, satisfactions and successes. The team will be concerned with productivity, efficiency and potential. Praise the team for its successes. It is preferable to reward the team rather than individual team members in order to promote harmony and cohesion. Rewarding individuals can lead to competitiveness and hostility.

Adjourning (or mourning)

Provide feedback on how well the team has done, what team members have learned and how they are likely to cope with new challenges. If it is appropriate, encourage team members to maintain links with each other and develop their relations through new activities and projects.

Tuckman and Jensen's team stages are not always so clearly defined. For example, if new members join during the project, the team may need to return, at least in part, to the forming stage while performing at the same time. A variety of other changes may cause storming in well-established teams. However, the idea of team stages can be useful in anticipating what kind of support a team may need at a particular time.

5 Managing team processes

What steps do managers need to take to ensure that their teams are working effectively on a day-to-day basis? We set out the most important ones in this section, which covers mainly throughputs and some advice on management. Consider what you might do to make a difference to the management of a group or team you are responsible for, or what you might do differently with a future team.

5.1 Team goals and objectives

A team needs clear goals that members believe are important and worthwhile. A team is more likely to be effective if it can participate in developing team objectives and work out how they are to be achieved, even if the team's overall goal has been imposed from above. Discussions should lead to action planning, including specific milestones, timetables and monitoring activities to keep the team focused and to create an appropriate sense of urgency. Defining a measurable output gives the team a framework to work within.

5.2 Ground rules

The team needs to establish a mutually-agreed working approach. The means of participation and expectations of the team experience should be agreed on. Discussions will inevitably consider the norms and values held by the team and what rules are needed to preserve these.

Team members will also need to discuss process issues, such as how the group evaluates and self-regulates itself (that is, how any performance issues will be addressed) and how conflicts are managed.

5.3 Allocating tasks

The allocation of tasks, responsibilities and priorities of individual team members is usually done, at least partly, through joint discussion and negotiations in the team. If the team has a manager, it will be the manager's responsibility to see that this is done effectively. Usually the process will be supported and strengthened by regular supervision and appraisal. Key questions for the manager to ask are:

1. Has work been fairly distributed between team members?
2. Have roles and responsibilities of team members been decided?
3. Has each individual member taken personal responsibility for at least some aspect of the team task?

(Source: adapted from West, 2004)

5.4 Developing individual contributions

Based on their prior experience, team members will bring assumptions and ideas about how teams should operate, what is expected of them and what they can expect from the team-working experience. These assumptions, ideas and expectations may not be appropriate to the current situation. Conversations are essential to bring to the surface any possible tensions. Questions for the manager to address here include:

1. How well do the tasks allocated fit with the person's preferred 'role(s)'?
2. Who has the skills and experience to handle a particular task competently and efficiently?
3. Who will find the task useful for their development?
4. What further training, development or support might an individual need?

5.5 Task and maintenance activities

One way of monitoring the successful functioning of teams is to look at two different types of behaviours. Task behaviours are those that aim to achieve the project or overall tasks set. Maintenance behaviours are those that keep the team running smoothly. It is important that both types of behaviours are present. Some examples are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Task- and maintenance-orientated behaviours

Task	Maintenance
<i>Proposing</i> : Proposing ideas or courses of action that help the achievement of the task	<i>Gatekeeping</i> : Making a positive attempt to bring a person into the discussion or making an equally clear attempt to prevent a person from being excluded
<i>Building</i> : Adding to other people's proposals	<i>Encouraging</i> : Behaving or responding in a warm and friendly way
<i>Disagreeing</i> : Contesting proposals that seem to be misconceived and might work against the achievement of the task	<i>Resolving conflict</i> : Being ready to compromise and accept what others want to do
<i>Giving and seeking information</i> : Providing data and opinions relevant to the task achievement	<i>Giving feedback</i> : Giving position feedback on feelings and opinions
<i>Summarising</i> : Summarising a discussion or the group's progress	<i>Recognising feelings</i> : In general, recognising that people have personal feelings about their work

Finding a balance between the two types of behaviours can be difficult. Managers may need to work hard to control the emergence of individuals' personal interests, motivations and agendas which can be detrimental to team working. Trust between team members can help individuals to suppress their personal interests for the good of team development and performance.

5.6 Developing trust

A reasonable degree of trust is an essential ingredient of any successful relationship. Without trust, communication will deteriorate because people will begin to hide their views or try to impose them.

Each member of a team must take some responsibility for the development of trust, although team leaders and managers have the greatest responsibility and the greatest influence. Trust is likely to develop when people listen to and respect each other's views, irrespective of whether or not they agree with them. Then they are able to share their ideas and views without fear of recrimination.

A team manager can help to ensure the development of trust by involving team members in setting team and individual goals and by giving the team members the necessary autonomy to carry out their tasks without undue interference. Managers should take care, however, that delegating responsibility to team members does not result in abdicating responsibility – that is, ceasing to monitor the performance of team members. A team must also have ways of monitoring and giving feedback on the performance of its members. Any effective team will need to conduct regular reviews.

The higher the level of trust a group has, the easier it will be to deal with conflict when it (almost inevitably) occurs.

5.7 Arriving at consensus in a team

Conflict is perhaps most likely to arise in team work during decision-making. You can help to avoid unnecessary conflict by ensuring that individuals see and understand the logic of what you are proposing, by exploring and discussing the proposals and by making sure there is agreement before proposals are finalised. Some guidelines are:

1. Present a position logically, pointing out strengths and weaknesses and illustrating with examples.
2. Try to avoid using your extra power as team leader or manager.
3. Demonstrate the benefits as well as any disadvantages of the proposal.
4. Avoid changing your mind or agreeing with something because this is easier than promoting or defining what you regard as a good proposal.
5. Remember that consideration of a variety of ideas and opinions is likely to be constructive.
6. Make sure that everybody has access to all the information needed to reach considered opinions.

Sometimes during the life of a team, conflict can run so high that communication is impaired and intervention may be necessary. At such times, the team will need to examine its own progress. Here, the manager or leader will need to:

- ensure that behaviour between members is appropriate
- reinforce and support desirable behaviour
- be prepared to raise the issue of inappropriate behaviour
- create a sense of fairness by empowering or sharing power across team members

- make sure the team goals are shared.

(Source: adapted from Hill and Farkas, 2001)

5.8 Some tips on leading and managing teams

Team leaders and managers need to make sure the task is done and that the team develops in ways that benefit both the task and the experience of individual team members. Figure 3 illustrates how the task, the team and the individual are always linked. For example, team members' satisfaction will be derived not only from the achievement of tasks but also from the quality of team relationships, team morale, trust and team spirit, and the more social aspects of teamwork.

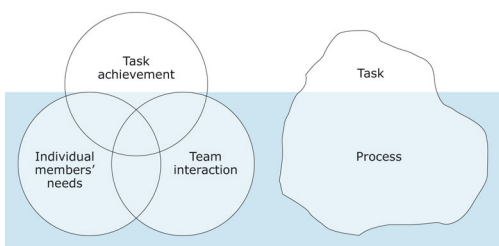


Figure 3 The internal elements of team effectiveness

(Source: Adair, 1983)

Different leaders will inevitably have different styles and approaches to leadership. Some leaders may tend towards a more directive style, wanting to tell team members what to do. The danger here is alienating the team and not allowing room for creativity and spontaneity. The challenge for a leader who adopts this style will be to try to involve team members more and to seek their opinions. Other leaders may adopt a democratic approach, asking questions and getting people involved. The danger here is that debate drifts too much and no clear direction emerges. The challenge is to develop structure. Leaders may also differ in their degree of involvement in the task. However, successful and effective team leaders have some common characteristics. These include:

- listening to team members
- questioning them to understand their point of view
- being responsive to feedback.

Similarly, there are reasons why team leaders fail (Hackman, 1990, 2002). These are set out as reason and remedies in Box 7 with additional contributions by West (2004). Because of the overlap between leadership and management, some remedies cover management issues.

Box 7 Why team leaders fail: reasons and remedies

Reason: Calling the performing unit a team, but really managing them as individuals.

Remedy

- Assign individual responsibilities but coordinate them so that the efforts of individuals combine to form the whole-team product
- Alternatively, assign a team task and give members responsibility for determining how that task should be completed.

Reason: Exercising too little or too much authority: a typical mistake is giving a team too much autonomy early in its life when direction is needed and then intervening too heavily later when the team is not performing well.

Remedy

- Work closely with the team at the outset
- Draw up ground rules, including the amount and timing of management intervention
- Agree on a regular review process.

Reason: Assembling a large group in which structures and responsibilities are not clear.

Remedy

- Make sure that a well-designed team task is in place, that the team is balanced and suitable for the task and that members have clear and unambiguous information about the extent and limits of their authority and accountability. Team members will then not do things that are not required or make decisions that are not appropriate for them to make.

Reason: Specifying challenging team objectives but providing too little organisational support.

Remedy

- Ensure that resources and support are available
- Hold regular team reviews
- Ensure provision of individual training and development.

Reason: Assuming incorrectly that members already have the skills to work well as a team.

Remedy

- Conduct a team skills audit early in the team process: this can be a simple identification and review of members' skills
- Address any training and development needs that emerge from this
- Encourage open discussion about individual strengths and weaknesses and team roles.

(Source: adapted from Hackman, 1990, 2002 and West, 2004)

5.9 A checklist

A useful checklist for team leaders and managers is set out in Table 4.

Table 4 A checklist for team leaders and managers

Action	Purpose
Create conditions for team effectiveness	The team has a clear mandate or purpose The team structures itself to do the work efficiently
Agree goals	Performance expectations and objectives/outputs are clear
Facilitate communication	Participation is monitored; those who are not participating are encouraged to do so Different conversational and participation styles are encouraged There is active listening (the focus is on what is meant rather than how it is said) Influence is based on task-relevant knowledge and skills rather than external status and personal dominance
Adopt a rigorous decision-making process	Sufficient time is spent identifying and framing the problem, task or project Information and alternative solutions or methods are thoroughly examined Team members are aware of and happy with the decision-making process used
Develop appropriate working methods	Constructive task conflict is encouraged and supported Collaboration is encouraged The team is a 'safe' place to share information and ideas Reflection on team process is encouraged Mistakes are a source of learning
Be sensitive to team diversity	Team members make an effort to understand and adapt to each other's working styles Team members understand how demographic differences such as culture and age might influence participation and influence The team has processes for utilising diversity
Manage context	There is action to remove external barriers to the team's effectiveness There is action to provide the resources the team needs and to promote the team's interests with key stakeholders.

(Source: adapted from Hill and Farkas, 2001)

6 Managing conflict

Conflict will occur almost inevitably in groups and teams – and between individuals who do not necessarily work together in a group or team. Conflict can arise through:

1. Misunderstandings between individuals; these often arise by accident.
2. Differences in beliefs and values; these may be personal beliefs or values, or may arise from structural divisions in the organisation, for example, production and marketing.
3. Differences of interest and ambition; such differences can result in competition for power, status and resources.
4. Interpersonal differences: people have different personalities and temperaments.
5. Feeling and emotions: people may have strong feelings and emotions but disguise them in work settings by talking about ‘the principle of the matter.’ Conflict itself can arouse emotion, leading to further conflict.

Not all conflict is destructive, however. Some conflicts are best discussed openly: managed constructively, such discussions can lead to deeper understanding and better decisions. The problem is that conflict tends to be seen in terms of win–lose – that is, one argument will win and the other will lose. But it is possible to reach an outcome in which elements of both arguments are accepted – a win–win situation. Negotiations over pay are a simple example: employers may agree to pay employees more in exchange for changes in working practices. For win–win outcomes, however, there need to be mechanisms for open discussion and fair decision-making. The likelihood of resolving conflict depends on the behaviour of those involved. To understand this better, it can be helpful to classify people’s responses to interpersonal conflict in five categories (Figure 4). These categories reflect the balance between cooperation (attempts to satisfy the other person’s concerns) and assertiveness (attempts to satisfy your own concerns).

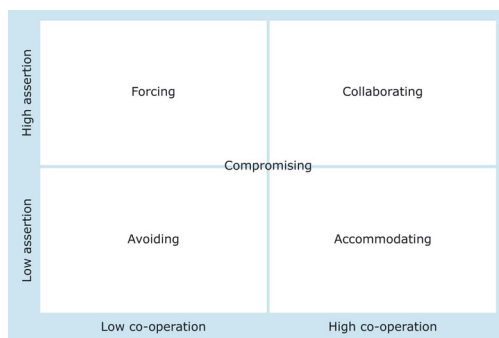


Figure 4 A two-dimensional model of conflict behaviour

(Source: based on Ruble and Thomas, 1976, and Whetten and Cameron, 1984)

Forcing represents the wish to satisfy one’s own needs at the expense of others’ needs. It may involve the use of formal authority, physical threats, majority rule, or disregarding the claims of the other person. This form of conflict management usually results in hostility and resentment and is an extreme example of a win–lose strategy. Nevertheless, sometimes it is necessary – in matters of health and safety, for example, or at times of crisis.

In contrast, accommodating satisfies the needs of the other person at the expense of one's own needs, often to maintain friendly relations. It may work when the quality of the relationship is more important than other considerations. However, it can lead to difficulties: discipline is seen to be negligible, decision-making becomes difficult and you lose respect and self-esteem – a win–lose situation.

Avoiding potential conflict is a common response to confrontation, particularly if a manager lacks self-confidence. It is the classic lose–lose situation, creating frustration and tension because issues are never resolved. Its use is normally justified only when an issue is unimportant or when time is limited.

Compromising seeks to obtain partial satisfaction for both parties. It is the preferred strategy of many managers since it avoids some of the adverse consequences of other behaviours. It is particularly useful in complex situations and where there is time for negotiation and discussion.

The only truly win–win strategy is collaborating, seeking to find solutions that are understood and appreciated by all parties. The focus is on the problem, not on personalities, blame or fault. It requires you to be both assertive and cooperative, and works when there is time to establish a collaborative environment.

6.1 Ways to deal with conflict

Once you have identified a disagreement and understood why it has arisen, you then have to decide what to do about it. You will need to consider a number of factors, including the seriousness of the conflict, the timescale (whether it needs to be resolved quickly or not), the ideal or preferred outcome, and your own power and preferences, strengths and weaknesses. If the conflict is relatively trivial or is a 'healthy' disagreement, you may decide that it is better to let it run its course. However, if there is a danger of the conflict escalating and becoming destructive, you will want to act. You have three choices: to ignore it, to prevent it occurring, or to resolve it.

Non-intervention. This is quite common and can be successful. However, there is always the risk that the conflict will become destructive; failure to intervene may make the situation worse.

Prevention. Your chances of preventing conflict will increase if you create a climate in which people seek win–win solutions. You can contribute to this by:

- establishing common goals: identify higher-level goals on which all people can agree
- changing the roles or groupings of individuals: this can remove sources of conflict
- improving communications by encouraging an atmosphere of debate and questioning.

Resolution. When conflict is not constructive you may have to intervene to find a solution by:

- facilitating: this will usually involve allowing individuals to explain their feelings and encouraging them to put their conflict into perspective
- imposition: people can sometimes be forced to behave differently through a threat of disciplinary action; however, this may not resolve the cause of the conflict and may cause further problems in the future

- negotiation: this involves bringing people together to seek and agree a solution; it is likely to require concessions from both sides, and may benefit from creative approaches to find a solution to the problem.

These different approaches to resolving conflict are illustrated in the example in Box 8.

Box 8 Managing conflict

Johanna groaned as she read the memo from the HR Director saying that all staff would be required to keep worksheets for activity costing. She had expected this, but she knew it would cause massive opposition from staff. After some thought, she asked Barbara, her secretary, to visit staff members to ask them approximately how much time they expected to spend on each project. Barbara would complete and send the worksheets. This way Johanna would avoid conflict with her staff, while still providing the information needed.

Just as Johanna finished reading the memo, the fire alarm went off. Two hours later, after the fire brigade had left, she was looking at the kettle with its burnt cord – no major damage had been caused, but it had seriously disrupted work. After lunch she wrote a memo to all staff in the building: no personal electrical appliances would be permitted. There were perfectly adequate kitchens on each floor, and the safety risk was too great. She was therefore content to impose a solution.

She then went to talk to Monica and Andrew, both members of the same project team who were complaining angrily about one another. Andrew, recruited for his technical knowledge, had told Johanna earlier in the day that he could not work with Monica because she had too little experience and she seemed unwilling to take his views seriously. Monica had complained about Andrew's disruptive behaviour and lack of technical knowledge. Johanna suggested to her that if she were to be successful in the organisation she needed to develop the ability to work with people like Andrew. He had experience that she lacked, and his skills would be needed to implement the project. Johanna suggested that Monica gave weight to Andrew's views in team meetings, and gave him clear accountability for parts of the project. Later, she told Andrew that his experience was vital to the success of the project, and that he should see part of his role as guiding and developing team members such as Monica. Johanna would talk to Monica and Andrew again in a week. It was important that these two learned how to work with each other, so she would take the time to facilitate this.

7 Reviewing and evaluating team performance

This section is one that is generally applicable to the management of people, not just groups and teams. It will help you to identify sources of conflict and the ways in which conflict can be managed. Note that not all conflict is bad: sometimes it can be constructive, if handled effectively. There are times when it is better to ignore conflict. However, in each case, you will have to use your judgement.

Evaluating team performance is an important element of team working. It can take a number of forms, such as: reporting on progress informally at weekly team meetings, group reviews at key stages along the way, and full and formal external evaluation once the project is completed. Encouraging the team to take responsibility for this evaluation process makes it much more a part of everyday work and less of a management control exercise. Managers and teams need to agree what needs to be reviewed and evaluated, how it is to be done and how it can help the team to be more successful.

Here we present a number of approaches for reviewing team progress and processes and for evaluating team effectiveness at the end of a team task or project. We suggest you use whatever seems most suitable for your purposes.

Adair's model of team work (1983) is useful as a framework for reviewing and evaluating because it highlights the interdependency between the task, the team and the individual in achieving team effectiveness. Questions to consider are:

The task

- Are there enough resources and internal and external support (external climate)?
- Is the task fully understood? Has it been broken down sufficiently into component parts?

The team

- Are there the right constituent parts to achieve the current task?
- Has the group formed well?
- Are team members communicating well and reviewing their progress regularly?

The individual

- Are individuals learning from the experience?
- How are they dealing with their expectations, hopes and fears of this team-work experience?
- Are there issues from previous group-work experiences that need addressing?
- Do they have enough support and development opportunities to perform and develop their roles?
- Are they aware of the consequences of their individual actions in working with or against team processes?

West (2004) proposes that there are two fundamental dimensions of team functioning: the *task* the team is required to carry out and the *social factors* that influence how members experience the team as a social unit. He suggests that for both of these to work effectively teams need to:

- review objectives and find ways of achieving them
- reflect on the ways in which the team provides support to members, how conflicts are resolved and what the social climate of the team is like.

West has developed a questionnaire, set out in Box 9, to measure how well these two factors are working. He suggests it is completed individually without consultation. It could then be used as a means of identifying and agreeing problematic areas to work on.

Box 9 Team function questionnaire

Rate on a scale of 1 (very inaccurate) to 7 (very accurate) how each statement describes the situation in your team. Add up the scores for the task dimension and the social dimension separately. If more than one person completes the questionnaire, divide the total *for each dimension* by the number of people who complete the questionnaire to calculate an average for each dimension. Compare the average score for each dimension with the values shown at the end of the questionnaire. The questionnaire can also be used to compare different teams.

Task dimension

We review our objectives

We regularly discuss whether the team is working effectively together

The methods we use to get the job done are often discussed

In the team we modify our objectives in light of changing circumstances

We often change our team strategies

How well we communicate information is often discussed

We often review our approach to getting the job done

We often review the way decisions are made in the team

Social dimension

We support each other when times are difficult

When things at work are stressful the team is very supportive

Conflict doesn't last long in this team

We often teach each other new skills

When the pressure is on, we 'pull together' as a team

Team members are always friendly

Conflicts are dealt with constructively

People in the team are quick to resolve arguments

High 42 – 56

Average 34 – 41

Low 0 – 33

(Source: adapted from West, 2004)

7.1 Observing group processes

Another method for reviewing and evaluating team processes is through observation. A method suggested by Boddy (2005) is that one team member observes the team for an hour and keeps a careful record of what members say or do. They also note how other members react and how that affects the performance of the team. Suggestions on what to observe are listed in Box 10.

Box 10 Reflecting on group interaction – some questions to consider

Who spoke?

How?

How were the roles allocated?

How were decisions reached?

What stated or unstated rules were being used?

What was the climate (or atmosphere) in the group like?

How did you personally feel during the activity?

(Source: adapted from Boddy, 2005)

An observer who may or may not be the team leader or manager could look out for unhelpful personal behaviours. Sometimes it is difficult to see whether a particular action is a maintenance-oriented or a self-oriented behaviour: that is, whether it is intended to maintain harmony in the group or to satisfy personal needs. Some examples of self-oriented behaviours, as described by Kakabadse *et al.* (1988), are given in Table 5.

Table 5 Self-oriented behaviours

Attacking/defending	Attacking or rejecting others' positions or defensively strengthening one's own position
Blocking/stating difficulties	Placing blocks or difficulties in the path of others' proposals or ideas without offering an alternative proposal or giving a reasoned argument
Diverting	Moving the discussion away from areas in which you feel your position is threatened or weak
Seeking sympathy/recognition	Attempting to make others sorry for you, and therefore willing to support you, or actively attempting to gain positive feedback on the value of your contribution to the group process
Withdrawing	Refusing to make a contribution
Point scoring	Winning petty triumphs over other members to enhance your status
Overcontributing	Monopolising discussion in the group; using the group process to satisfy individual power and control needs
Trivialising/diluting	Picking on minor faults in others' proposals or contributions in order to undermine their position

(Source: Kakabadse *et al.*, 1988)

Identifying and discussing such behaviours (and providing evidence to support your claims) can be constructive. The questions set out in Box 11 relating to how comfortable individuals feel in the team could be incorporated into such a discussion.

Box 11 Satisfaction with team social processes

Does the team provide adequate levels of social support for its members?

Does the team have constructive and healthy approaches to conflict resolution?

Does the team have a generally warm and positive social climate?

Does the team provide adequate support for skill development, training and the personal development of all its members?

(Source: West, 2004)

7.2 End of project evaluation

Bateman *et al.* (2002) suggest six areas for the investigation of team effectiveness, which can be evaluated on an ongoing basis, retrospectively at the end of a project or at a specific stage in the group-working process. These are:

Team synergy. There is a shared sense of purpose and identity.

Performance objectives. There are clear performance objectives in terms of budgets, activity or throughput levels, which are monitored.

Skills. Team members are adequately trained and are competent to do their work. They are also flexible.

Use of resources. All resources including people, buildings and equipment are used effectively and to their full potential.

Innovation. The team constantly looks for ways to improve products and systems of work.

Quality. There is a high level of customer awareness; standards are identified and monitored.

Statements relating to these six areas of investigation are shown in Table 6. They can be used for group review discussions and as a means of identifying problematic areas for further investigation.

Table 6 Shared purpose and identity

Statement	Yes/no
There was a common sense of purpose	
Members were clear about their roles	
There was effective communication	
Individuals felt valued as members of the team	
Individuals felt proud to be a member of the team	
Morale within the team was high	
There was effective and appropriate leadership	

All the individuals performed to the best of their abilities

There was a willingness to be flexible and perform other roles and jobs

Members of the team felt that they were fully utilised

The team had the resources it needed to do the job

Team members were encouraged to be innovative

Problems were quickly identified

The team was quick to address the problem once identified

Problem solving was seen as an opportunity for learning and growth

(Source: adapted from Bateman *et al.*, 2002)

7.2.1 Team reward

Team evaluation, both internal and external, can be used as evidence that a good job is being done. Rewarding team effort is not always easy, however. Traditional appraisal systems focus on individual performances, so in some appraisal processes there is a danger that insufficient importance is given to contributions to teamwork. Nonetheless team leaders and managers can take time at the end of a task or project to celebrate the success of the team.

7.2.2 The benefits

Evaluation and review provide a means of identifying and dealing with task and team issues in a timely way. They allow team members to demonstrate progress as well as to voice any concerns. Post-task evaluation is a means of disseminating project achievements to colleagues and stakeholders. It is also a way of focusing on lessons learned which need to be carried forward to future projects and also to identify any training and development necessary. Team evaluation and review need to be approached with care, however. The more the team itself can have ownership of this process, the less threatening it will be and the more it will just seem part of everyday group processes.

Activity 3 Reviewing/evaluating performance

Allow 1 hour for this activity.

Use one or more of the tools or techniques in [section 7](#) to review or evaluate a group or team you currently manage or participate in to assess its effectiveness. If necessary use a team you recently managed or participated in. The technique of observation is often very useful but cannot be carried out if the group or team is no longer operating. If you want to observe a current group or team, it will take more preparation and time than using the other tools and techniques. Observation needs the consent of all members of the group or team. Thus, you are advised not to choose this technique without consulting your team and your tutor, who will provide specific advice.

All of the techniques are best used in conjunction with team members because the views of group or team members may differ (and be different from your own). People can feel threatened when performance and effectiveness are reviewed. This is more likely if it happens irregularly and if they are not involved in the process. For this reason, you may want to answer the questions based on your own experience and views. You will have to do this if you do not lead or manage a group or team or if it is

too difficult to get consent from the manager/leader and members for such a discussion.

Choose one or more tools and techniques and respond to the questions, issues or statements in the selected tools or techniques. Identify the tools and techniques you have used and record your responses in the following forms.

Technique or tool used:

Provide your answer...

Question, issue or statement 1:

Provide your answer...

Response:

Provide your answer...

Question, issue or statement 2:

Provide your answer...

Response:

Provide your answer...

Activity 3

Discussion

This activity is likely to have revealed issues that you perhaps had not considered while reading. It should help you to identify an issue or area for improvement to work on in the final activity.

8 Modern forms of groups and teams

Please note that this section , along with the activity contained within, is optional.

This section sets out a number of approaches a manager or team leader can use for ongoing review and final evaluation. Sections [3](#), [4](#) and [5](#) inform the content of the checklists and questionnaires presented in Section [7](#). You will need to select one or more approaches for [Activity 3](#), so it would be a good idea to assess their usefulness as you read.

You will need to read this section if the group or team you want to focus on in the final activity is a virtual or multicultural group or team. It covers the particular needs created when the primary means of communication is via ICT and when there is cultural diversity.

Activity 4 Group or team issue

Allow 3 hours for this activity.

Your task in Activity 4 is to identify a current group or team problem or area for improvement, analyse it and set out your recommendations for addressing it. If the team is one you lead or manage, you may be able to implement your proposed solution immediately, thus improving the effectiveness of the group or team. If you are basing the activity on a group or team you led or participated in during the recent past, then your proposed solution should enable you to consider how you might revise your group and team work and management practices.

Your work on Activities [2](#) and [3](#) should have helped you to identify a number of potential problems or areas for improvement. Select what you consider to be the most important. This is likely to be something that has the greatest impact on team effectiveness, such as conflict in the group or team.

Use the forms below to guide you through the activity and as a template for your response. If you find that you cannot resolve the problem for some reason, say how it might have been avoided.

Problem identification and brief description

What is the issue or the problem?

Provide your answer...

Problem analysis

What are the 'symptoms' of this problem?

Provide your answer...

What are the different aspects to it?

Provide your answer...

How do these relate to team inputs, throughputs and outputs?

Provide your answer...

What information do you have to hand about the issue?

Provide your answer...

What extra information do you need?

Provide your answer...

Who do you need to talk to?

Provide your answer...

What assumptions do you need to make?

Provide your answer...

Conclusion

Provide your answer...

Recommendations

What are the options for addressing the issue or problem? *Note here that your choices are likely to depend on the degree of influence you have, but do not restrict yourself too much: you may be in a position to influence others.*

Provide your answer...

How could these options address the problem or areas for improvement that you identified?

Provide your answer...

Which appeals to you most and why?

Provide your answer...

Which would you be reluctant to use and why?

Provide your answer...

Who else do you need to work with or influence?

Provide your answer...

Select one or more options (if more than one solution needs to be put in place) and set it or them out as a set of SMART recommendations. State any assumptions you have had to make. Say how you will monitor, review or evaluate the success of the solution(s).

Provide your answer...

Strengths, weaknesses and implications

Consider these carefully. When working with groups and teams, implementing solutions can sometimes be complex if all group or team members need to be involved. Implications can mean that a solution is unworkable if it requires, for example, additional resourcing which you are unable to secure.

Provide your answer...

Activity 4

Discussion

Unless the problem you identified was relatively small, internal to the group and did not involve an input problem, such as a mismatch between the group or team and task, then you are likely to have found it more difficult to identify a solution than to identify the problem. Indeed, it may be the case that a solution seemed impossible and you may have resorted to how the problem might have been avoided. Although you will have no solution to implement, you will be able to draw lessons to inform your current and future management practices.

Working at a physical distance from colleagues, managers, partners and clients is becoming a feature of the way we work. More and more members of teams are not physically located in the same workplace. Such teams are often referred to as 'virtual teams'. The reasons for this change in working practices include:

- organisation-wide initiatives that reach across national boundaries
- changes to organisational structures due to mergers, acquisitions and/or downsizing
- entering new markets
- offering possibilities for homeworking

- the need to reduce costs
- reducing the time taken for a product or service to reach its intended market.

In such situations, co-location of team members in the same workplace may not be possible, and it may not be possible for team members to travel regularly to meet face to face.

8.1 What is a virtual team?

A virtual team is one whose primary means of communicating is electronic, with only occasional phone and face-to-face communication, if at all. However, there is no single point at which a team 'becomes' a virtual team (Zigurs, 2003). Virtual working offers benefits to both organisations and individuals. Benefits to the organisation include:

- people can be hired with the skills and competences needed regardless of location
- in some cases working across different time zones can extend the working day
- it can enable products to be developed more quickly
- expenses associated with travel and relocation can be cut
- carbon emissions can be reduced.

Benefits to the individual include:

- people can work from anywhere at any time
- physical location is not a recruitment issue
- travelling expenses and commuting time are cut
- relocating is unnecessary.

8.2 Managing and facilitating virtual team processes: Guidelines for managers

Challenges for virtual groups include communicating effectively across distance, which may involve learning how to make full use of all of the communication technologies available to the group in question.

A typical mistake when moving to virtual working is to believe that only small adjustments to established working practices will be required. This may result in managers failing to think through and plan for working virtually; this can result in reduced performance and heightened stress among team members. Successful virtual working means analysing and agreeing on communication practices, using the communication technologies available and building trust in the virtual team. Although dependent on technology, virtual teams are more likely to fail through lack of the development of 'soft skills' (that is, the social processes).

Guidelines for managers in helping teams through virtual team-working processes are set out throughout the rest of this section.

8.2.1 Trust

As with conventional teams, the building and maintenance of trust between members is vital.

Ways to facilitate the building up of trust include:

- initial face-to-face start ups (with team-building activities) periodic face-to-face meetings
- visits to each other's workplaces
- establishing clear codes of conduct and ground rules
- recognising and publicly rewarding performance
- taking care with the tone and language used in emails to reduce the risk of being misunderstood
- ensuring that team roles are made clear to everybody
- discussing and clarifying team goals
- making use of conference calls for in-depth discussions.

8.2.2 Accountability

Associated with trust is the accountability of individual team members. This needs to be based on agreed measurable outputs not on 'presentism'—that is, joining in communication without making any significant contribution.

8.2.3 Team building

Virtual teams need a clear and distinct team identity. When an organisation creates a face-to-face group, the organisation's day-to-day processes give it identity; for example, the room bookings system says 'Supplier Payments IT Team 14.00 –16.00'. The meeting's agenda includes items such as 'Report from the Supplier Payments IT Team'. Members of the Supplier Payments IT Team also identify with the team; they see themselves as part of the team.

The external identity of virtual teams is often less visible than in the above example, and there may be less opportunity for virtual teams to build their own identity. Ideas for helping a team build an identity include:

- using visual material and photographs in communications
- having a message board and photos of team members with some biographical background
- designing a team logo
- celebrating successes with the whole team
- sending out news items on matters of interest for the whole team
- having a team blog.

8.2.4 Multicultural groups and teams

When groups or teams comprise people from just one culture, there are often agreed but unspoken social, organisational and national ways of behaving that do not need to be explained. It can usually be assumed that everyone has a common understanding of what

a group is, how it will work, and how leaders and followers will behave. But such assumptions do not hold true when people are from different cultures.

In France, the common assumption is that the authority to make decisions comes as a right of office or rank, while managers in the Netherlands, Scandinavia and the UK often make their decisions in consultation with others and may be prepared to be challenged.

When creating multicultural groups or teams, managers need to consider the following points:

1. While professional skills are important, you may want evidence of a person's ability to work with others
2. Provide the team with initial support – for example, bring the whole team together for two days with the specific aim of
 - providing them with an awareness of cultural differences and their impact on organisational style and systems, management style, decision-making and interpersonal behaviour
 - helping them become aware of their different roles, preferences and strengths and how these can complement each other
 - building an international micro culture through exploring culture and cultural differences
 - identifying methods of communicating swiftly and effectively
 - developing a set of ground rules for maintaining group effectiveness when working together and when working apart.

Realistic ground rules for such a team might include:

- do not make assumptions; if you do, check them
- do not be impatient
- allow time to express yourself
- have the courage to challenge
- learn more of the others' cultures
- give and ask for feedback
- try to eliminate stereotyping
- take a positive attitude
- accept the differences.

(Source: based on Neale and Mindel, 1992)

Virtual and multicultural groups and teams present challenges not only because their creation and management are more demanding but often because organisations and managers have no prior experience to draw on. There will be no substitute for seeking information, clear thinking and good planning if such initiatives are to be successful.

Conclusion

This free course provided an introduction to studying Business & Management. It took you through a series of exercises designed to develop your approach to study and learning at a distance and helped to improve your confidence as an independent learner.

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Acknowledgements

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Figure 1: Management Standard Centre (2008) 'Structure of the standards', *Taking Management and Leadership to the Next Level*, Management Standard Centre.

Table 4: Adapted from Hill, L. A. and Farkas, M. T. (2001) 'A note on team processes', Harvard Business Online.

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