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Groups and teamwork

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Introduction

Are you always the quiet one when it comes to group discussion? This course will help you improve your working relationships with other people in groups of three or more. This course also deals with project life cycles, project management and the role of the leader.

This OpenLearn course provides a sample of level 1 study in Engineering

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- describe the main features of work groups and teams
- discuss the main group processes that affect work group or team effectiveness
- describe the main features of projects, project teams and project management
- discuss some types of theories about effective leadership.

1 course outline

The focus of this course is on relating to groups of other people rather than one-to-one relationships. Reading 1 develops some general concepts about 'groups' and 'teams', not just those at work. The later readings look at groups from particular perspectives or contexts, with the aim of discovering ideas about how to make them function more effectively.

This is, in fact, the main aim of this course: to help you understand how you might function more effectively in a group by improving your working relationships. There are difficulties in tackling this aim via a set of readings like this. More traditional ways of tackling it involve training programmes that emphasise the importance of experiencing the issues involved. There is no doubt that, without the experiencing, the ideas remain theoretical and will not actually help you to improve the way that you function, just as reading a cookery book cannot alleviate hunger. To have any effect, the ideas (or the recipes) have to be put into practice.

Putting the ideas into practice involves thinking about yourself and others in a different way. This runs straight into the obstacle of the deeply ingrained habits that we all have in thinking in this area. I suggest that you adopt a quite moderate aim at first and try out one or, at most, two of the ideas presented. Choose the idea that seems to you most attractive, for whatever reason, and decide upon some specific occasions when you are going to put it into effect. Whenever possible, try to enlist the help of someone else to give you feedback on how you performed. The pay-off you get from this limited experiment will probably encourage you to try another idea. That's fine, but don't get carried away and try everything at once; you'll simply forget and frustrate yourself. If you can add one or two new approaches or insights to your repertoire of relating to others, then this course will have achieved its major objective.

Reading 2 is concerned with the dynamics of group behaviour. This is a very broad topic and the subject of many textbooks. The initial approach taken in the reading is to look at the basis on which people are members of a group. The main part of the discussion of groups is concerned with the way that groups evolve and the sorts of process that determine whether the group is successful or not. This provides a number of ideas that can be used to make sense of group behaviour and to help a group function more effectively.

Another side of working in groups is how to cope in, or with, a team of people who have been set up to work on a specific project. Reading 3 looks at the nature of projects and the consequent effects on the team or teams of people involved. Projects also tend to have project managers, raising issues about *leading* other people rather than just working alongside them.

This final aspect of leadership is also the subject of Reading 4. Again, this is another vast area of interest where there are dozens of theories and prescriptions about how to be an effective leader. Some indication of the range of these theories is given in the reading, and their strengths and weaknesses are assessed. It becomes clear that there is no simple prescription for being a good leader; yet there are some characteristics that most effective leaders have in common.

2 Reading 1 Groups and teams

2.1 What is a group?

Our tendency to form groups is a pervasive aspect of organisational life. As well as formal groups, committees and teams, there are informal groups, cliques and cabals.

Formal groups are used to organise and distribute work, pool information, devise plans, coordinate activities, increase commitment, negotiate, resolve conflicts and conduct inquests. Group working allows the pooling of people's individual skills and knowledge, and helps compensate for individual deficiencies. It has been estimated that most managers spend 50 per cent of their working day in one sort of group or another, and for top management of large organisations this can rise to 80 per cent. Thus formal groups are clearly an integral part of the functioning of an organisation.

No less important are informal groups. These are usually structured more around the social needs of people than around the performance of tasks. Informal groups usually serve to satisfy needs of affiliation, and act as a forum for exploring self-concept as a means of gaining support, and so on. However, these informal groups may also have an important effect on formal work tasks, for example by exerting subtle pressures on group members to conform to a particular work rate, or as 'places' where news, gossip, etc., is exchanged.

2.2 What is a team?

Activity 1

Write your own definition of a 'team' (in 20 words or less).

You probably described a team as a group of some kind. However, a team is more than just a group. As noted above, when you think of all the groups that you belong to, you will probably find that very few of them are really teams. Some of them will be family or friendship groups that are formed to meet a wide range of needs such as affection, security, support, esteem, belonging or identity. Some may be committees whose members represent different interest groups and who meet to discuss their differing perspectives on issues of interest.

In this reading the term 'work group' (or 'group') is often used interchangeably with the word 'team', although a team may be thought of as a particularly cohesive and purposeful type of work group. We can distinguish work groups or teams from more casual groupings of people by using the following set of criteria (based on those proposed by Adair, 1983). A collection of people can be defined as a work group or team if it shows most, if not all, of the following characteristics:

- a definable membership: a collection of three or more people identifiable by name or type;
- a group consciousness or identity: the members think of themselves as a group;

- a sense of shared purpose: the members share some common task or goals or interests;
- interdependence: the members need the help of one another to accomplish the purpose for which they joined the group;
- interaction: the members communicate with one another, influence one another, react to one another;
- sustainability: the team members periodically review the team's effectiveness;
- an ability to act together, as one.

Usually, the tasks and goals set by teams cannot be achieved by individuals working alone because of constraints on time and resources, and because few individuals possess all the relevant competences and expertise. Sports teams or orchestras clearly fit these criteria.

Activity 2

List some examples of *teams* of which you are a member – both inside and outside work – in your learning file. Now list some *groups*. What strikes you as the main differences?

Your team examples probably highlight specific jobs or projects in your workplace, or personal interests and hobbies outside work. Teamwork is usually connected with project work and this is a feature of much work, paid and unpaid. Teamworking is particularly useful when you have to address risky, uncertain or unfamiliar problems where there is a lot of choice and discretion surrounding the decision to be made. In the area of voluntary and unpaid work, where pay is not an incentive, teamworking can help to motivate support and commitment because it can offer the opportunities to interact socially and learn from others. Furthermore, people usually support what they create (Stanton, 1992).

By contrast, many groups are much less explicitly focused on an external task. In some instances, the growth and development of the group itself is its primary purpose; process is more important than outcome. Many groups are reasonably fluid and less formally structured than teams. In the case of work groups, an agreed and defined outcome is often regarded as a sufficient basis for effective cooperation and the development of adequate relationships.

Clearly there are overlaps between teams and groups: they are not wholly distinct entities. Both can be pertinent in personal development as well as organisational development and managing change. In such circumstances, when is it appropriate to embark on teambuilding rather than relying on ordinary group or solo working?

In general, the greater the task uncertainty the more important teamworking is, especially if it is necessary to represent the differing perspectives of concerned parties. This is evident in government decision making, in areas such as technology and innovation policies, where scientific facts may be collated to support opposing arguments for new policy developments. In such situations, the facts themselves do not always point to an obvious policy or strategy for innovation, support and development: decisions are partially based on the opinions and the personal visions of those involved. When expertise does not point to obvious solutions for problems, teamworking can often come up with a compromise between the varying perspectives and vested interests of concerned parties.

There are risks and dangers, however. Under some conditions, teams may produce more conventional, rather than more innovative, responses to problems. The reason for this is

that team decisions may regress towards the average, with group pressures to conform cancelling out more innovative decision options (Makin, Cooper and Cox, 1989). It depends on how innovative the team is, in terms of its membership, its norms and its values.

Teamwork may also be inappropriate when you want a fast decision. Team decision making is usually slower than individual decision making because of the need for communication and consensus about the decision taken. Despite the business successes of Japanese companies, it is now recognised that promoting a collective organisational identity and responsibility for decisions can sometimes slow down operations significantly, in ways that are not always compensated for by better decision making.

2.3 Types of teams

Different organisations or organisational settings lead to different types of team. The type of team affects how that team is managed, what the communication needs of the team are and, where appropriate, what aspects of the project the project manager needs to emphasise. A work group or team may be permanent, forming part of the organisation's structure, such as a top management team, or temporary, such as a task force assembled to see through a particular project. Members may work as a group continuously or meet only intermittently. The more direct contact and communication team members have with each other, the more likely they are to function well as a team. When a group as a whole functions well, then not only do the individual members of the group function well, but they also tend to gain a sense of satisfaction from being part of the group. Thus getting a group to function well is a much prized management aim.

Below, I discuss some common types of team. Many teams may not fall clearly into one type, but may combine elements of different types.

Many organisations have traditionally been managed through a hierarchical structure. This general structure is illustrated in Figure 1, and consists of:

- staff performing similar tasks – grouped together reporting to a single supervisor;
- junior managers – responsible for a number of supervisors and their groups;
- groups of junior managers – reporting to departmental heads;
- departmental heads – reporting to senior managers, who are responsible for wide-ranging functions such as manufacturing, finance, human resources and marketing;
- senior managers – reporting to the managing director, who may then report to the Board.

The number of levels clearly depends upon the size and to some extent on the type of the organisation. Typically, the 'span of control' (the number of people each manager or supervisor is directly responsible for) averages about five people, but this can vary widely.

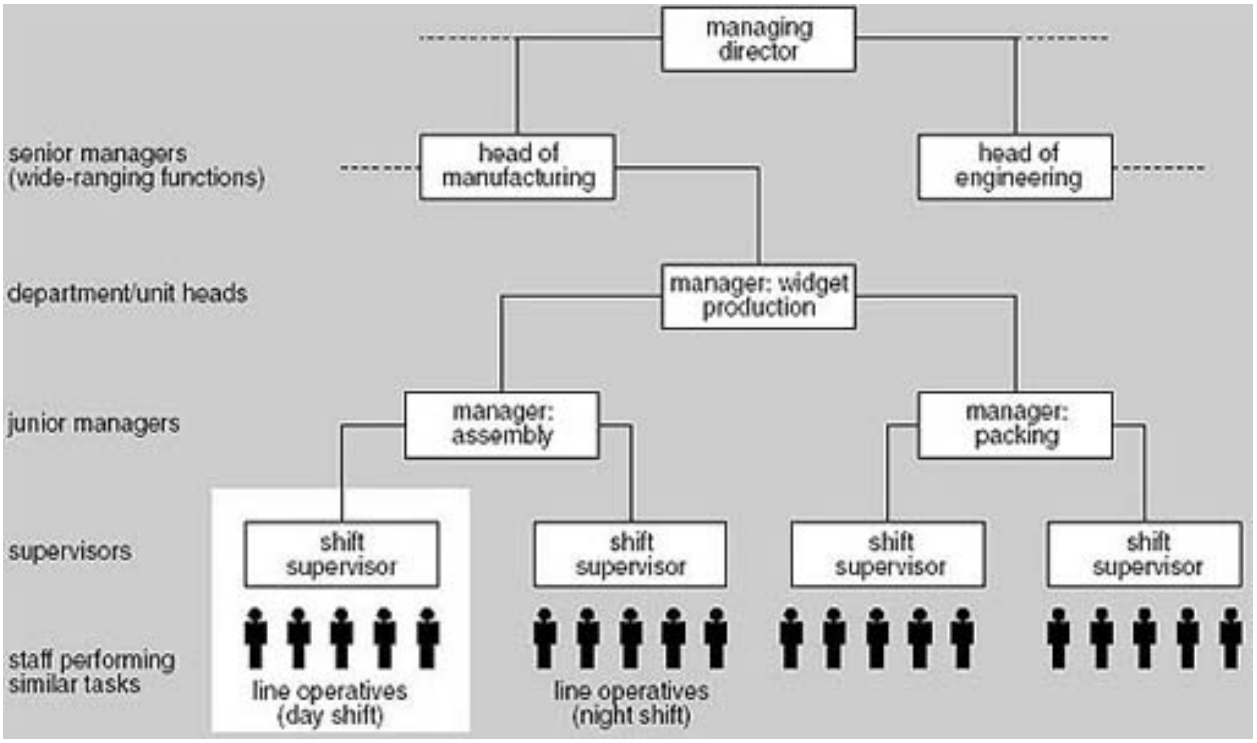

Figure 1 The traditional hierarchical structure. The highlighted area shows one supervisor's span of control: the people who work for that supervisor

While the hierarchy is designed to provide a stable 'backbone' to the organisation, *projects* are primarily concerned with change, and so tend to be organised quite differently. Their structure needs to be more fluid than that of conventional management structures. There are four commonly accepted types of project team: the functional team, the project (single) team, the matrix team and the contract team.

2.3.1 The functional team

The hierarchical structure described above divides groups of people along largely functional lines: people working together carry out the same or similar functions. A functional team is a team in which work is carried out within such a functionally organised group. This can be project work. In organisations in which the functional divisions are relatively rigid, project work can be handed from one functional team to another in order to complete the work. For example, work on a new product can pass from marketing, which has the idea, to research and development, which sees whether it is technically feasible, thence to design and finally manufacturing. This is sometimes known as 'baton passing' – or, less flatteringly, as 'throwing it over the wall'!

2.3.2 The project (single) team

The project, or single, team consists of a group of people who come together as a distinct organisational unit in order to work on a project or projects. The team is often led by a project manager, though self-managing and self-organising arrangements are also found. Quite often, a team that has been successful on one project will stay together to work on subsequent projects. This is particularly common where an organisation engages repeatedly in projects of a broadly similar nature – for example developing software, or in construction. Perhaps the most important issue in this instance is to develop the collective

capability of the team, since this is the currency for continued success. People issues are often crucial in achieving this.

The closeness of the dedicated project team normally reduces communication problems within the team. However, care should be taken to ensure that communications with other stakeholders (senior management, line managers and other members of staff in the departments affected, and so on) are not neglected, as it is easy for 'us and them' distinctions to develop.

2.3.3 The matrix team

In a matrix team, staff report to different managers for different aspects of their work. Matrix structures are often, but not exclusively, found in projects. Staff will be responsible to the project manager for their work on the project while their functional line manager will be responsible for other aspects of their work such as appraisal, training and career development, and 'routine' tasks. This matrix project structure is represented in Figure 2.

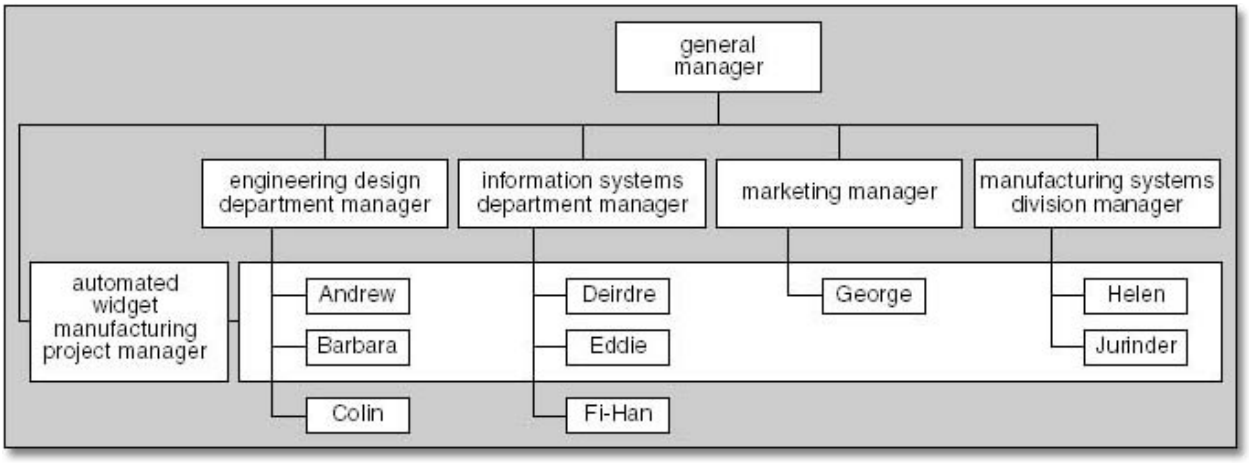

Figure 2 A matrix project structure

In this form of organisation, staff from various functional areas (such as design, software development, manufacturing or marketing) are loaned or seconded to work on a particular project. Such staff may work full or part time on the project. The project manager thus has a recognisable team and is responsible for controlling and monitoring its work on the project.

However, many of the project staff will still have other duties to perform in their normal functional departments. The functional line managers they report to will retain responsibility for this work and for the professional standards of their work on the project, as well as for their training and career development. It is important to overcome the problems staff might have with the dual reporting lines (the 'two-boss' problem). This requires building good interpersonal relationships with the team members and regular, effective communication.

2.3.4 The contract team

The contract team is brought in from outside in order to do the project work. Here, the responsibility to deliver the project rests very firmly with the project manager. The client will find such a team harder to control directly. On the other hand, it is the client who will judge the success of the project, so the project manager has to keep an eye constantly on the physical outcomes of the project. A variant of this is the so-called 'outsourced supply

team', which simply means that the team is physically situated remotely from the project manager, who then encounters the additional problem of 'managing at a distance'.

2.3.5 Mixed structures

Teams often have mixed structures:

- some members may be employed to work full time on the project and be fully responsible to the project manager. Project managers themselves are usually employed full time.
- others may work part time, and be responsible to the project manager only during their time on the project. For example, internal staff may well work on several projects at the same time. Alternatively, an external consultant working on a given project may also be involved in a wider portfolio of activities.
- some may be part of a matrix arrangement, whereby their work on the project is overseen by the project manager and they report to their line manager for other matters. Project administrators often function in this way, serving the project for its duration, but having a career path within a wider administrative service.
- yet others may be part of a functional hierarchy, undertaking work on the project under their line manager's supervision by negotiation with their project manager. For instance, someone who works in an organisation's legal department may provide the project team with access to legal advice when needed.

In relatively small projects the last two arrangements are a very common way of accessing specialist services that will only be needed from time to time.

2.3.6 'Horses for courses'

Different team structures have different advantages and disadvantages. A structure may fit a particular task in one organisation better than another. On the next page, Table 1 sets out the strengths and weaknesses of different team structures.

Table 1 Strengths and weaknesses of different structures for project teams

	Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Functional	Lowest administration costs Reasonably successful in past	Coordination across functional areas is more difficult
	Reasonably successful in past	Inflexible
	Pools technical and professional expertise	Communication across functional areas is more difficult
	Handles routine work well	Long, slow chain of command
	Allows training and apprenticeship in departments	Possibly poor communication with client
	Line management has control of projects and change	Tends to push decision making upwards
	Easy to set up and terminate projects	Novel objectives difficult to achieve
		Limits career development outside recognised paths for staff members

		Tends to dampen creative initiatives
Matrix	Acceptable to 'traditional' managers	Dual reporting lines of project staff
	Retains functional strengths and control of paperwork	Staff appraisal and performance measurement difficult
	Some planning power in project team	Can cause conflicts of priorities for staff
	Faster start-ups	Wider skills required of project manager (e.g. teambuilding more difficult)
	Top management retains control of projects but relieved of day-to-day decisions	Project manager may not be able to influence who is assigned to the project
	Flexibility of personnel assigned	Dilutes the resources available from functional areas
	Reasonable interface with clients and customers is possible	
	Some teambuilding is possible	
Project	Greater authority and control	High administrative costs
	Team members contribute to, and share, objectives	Project manager involved in more administration
	Teambuilding and communication made easier	Difficult to graft on to established organisations
	Quicker decisions	Project more difficult to terminate
	Fewer political problems Good client contacts	Project staff may feel a lack of job security
	Good client contacts	Project staff may feel let down on return to functional job
	High degree of management skills development	Project staff may feel they have undefined career paths
	Easier for top management to coordinate and influence	Slow to mobilise
	Can give career development/change for team members	Often limited number of good project staff available
	Builds synergy in team	
	Clear responsibilities, can be profit centres	

2.3.7 New types of team

In addition to the traditional types of teams or groups outlined above, recent years have seen the growth of interest in two other important types of team: 'self-managed teams' and 'self-organising teams'.

During the 1990s many organisations in the UK became interested in notions of empowerment and, often as a consequence, set up self-managed or empowered teams. An Industrial Society Survey (1995) commented:

> the trend is becoming a powerful one, set to take self managed teams from leading edge status to mainstream.

A typical self-managed team may be permanent or only temporary. It operates in an informal and non-hierarchical manner, and has considerable responsibility for the way it carries out its tasks. It is often found in organisations that are developing total quality management and quality assurance approaches. The Industrial Society Survey observed that:

> Better customer service, more motivated staff, and better quality of output are the three top motives for moving to [self-managed teams], managers report.

In contrast, organisations that deliberately encourage the formation of self-organising teams are comparatively rare. Teams of this type can be found in highly flexible, innovative organisations that thrive on creativity and informality. These are modern, often very new, organisations that recognise the importance of learning and adaptability in ensuring their success and continued survival. However, self-organising teams exist, unrecognised, in many organisations. For instance, in traditional, bureaucratic organisations, people who need to circumvent the red tape may get together in order to make something happen and, in so doing, spontaneously create a self-organising team. The team will work together, operating outside the formal structures, until its task is done and then it will disband.

Table 2 shows some typical features of self-managed and self-organising teams.

Table 2

Self-managed team	**Self-organising team**
Usually part of the formal reporting structure	Usually outside the formal reporting structure
Members usually selected by management	Members usually self-selected volunteers
Informal style of working	Informal style of working
Indirectly controlled by senior management	Senior management influences only the team's boundaries
Usually a permanent leader, but may change	Leadership variable – perhaps one, perhaps changing, perhaps shared
Empowered by senior management	Empowered by the team members and a supportive culture and environment

With both forms of team, managers need to rethink their traditional approach to teamworking. Equality of team membership is a key feature of modern teams, with every member playing an equally important role in discussions, problem solving and decision making processes.

Managers are no longer expected to control or strongly direct the activities of the team but rather to support and work with the team by acting as coach, facilitator or adviser as needed. This has important implications for the kinds of skills needed to work effectively in this new role. Managers and supervisors need to develop expert interpersonal and communication skills, but above all they need to be prepared to 'let go' and to trust their colleagues and junior members of staff. A 'command and control' approach will not work with these modern forms of teamworking and staff with experience of the traditional models will need to resist the temptation to step in at the first sign of difficulties, and also to refrain from apportioning blame if things do not work well in the early stages. The team

members will need encouragement, support and help in learning from any mistakes or difficulties.

Many organisations set up self-managed or empowered teams as an important way of improving performance and they are often used as a way of introducing a continuous improvement approach. These teams tend to meet regularly to discuss and put forward ideas for improved methods of working or customer service in their areas. Some manufacturers have used multi-skilled self-managed teams to improve manufacturing processes, to enhance worker participation and improve morale. Self-managed teams give employees an opportunity to take a more active role in their working lives and to develop new skills and abilities. This may result in reduced staff turnover and less absenteeism.

Self-organising teams are usually formed spontaneously in response to an issue, idea or challenge. This may be the challenge of creating a radically new product, or solving a tough production problem. In Japan, the encouragement of self-organising teams has been used as a way of stimulating discussion and debate about strategic issues so that radical and innovative new strategies emerge. By using a self-organising team approach companies were able to tap into the collective wisdom and energy of interested and motivated employees. In the Open University, several academics may get together informally and form a self-organising team in order to share and develop the initial ideas for a new course. Participants in self-organising teams benefit from the exchange of ideas and viewpoints, and the implicit need to get things done. Self-organising teams provide a fertile learning environment and participants may acquire new knowledge, new ways of thinking and behaving, and enhanced understandings of the organisation and their role in it. Self-organising teams can play a particularly valuable role as part of an innovative organisational change programme.

2.8 Why do (only some) teams succeed?

Clearly, it is not possible to devise a set of rules which, if followed, would lead inexorably to team effectiveness. The determinants of a successful team are complex and not equivalent to following a set of prescriptions. However, the results of poor teamworking can be expensive, so it is useful to draw on research, experience and case studies to explore some general guidelines. What do I mean by 'team effectiveness'? – the achievement of goals alone? Where do the achievements of individual members fit in? and How does team member satisfaction contribute to team effectiveness?

Borrowing from Adair's 1983 leadership model, the left-hand side of Figure 3 shows the main constituents of team effectiveness: the satisfaction of individual membership needs, successful team interaction and the achievement of team tasks. These elements are not discrete, so Figure 3 shows them as overlapping. For example, team member satisfaction will be derived not only from the achievement of tasks but also from the quality of team relationships and the more social aspects of teamworking: people who work almost entirely on their own, such as teleworkers and self-employed business owner-managers, often miss the opportunity to bounce ideas off colleagues in team situations. The experience of solitude in their work can, over time, create a sense of isolation, and impair their performance. The effectiveness of a team should also relate to the next step, to what happens after the achievement of team goals.

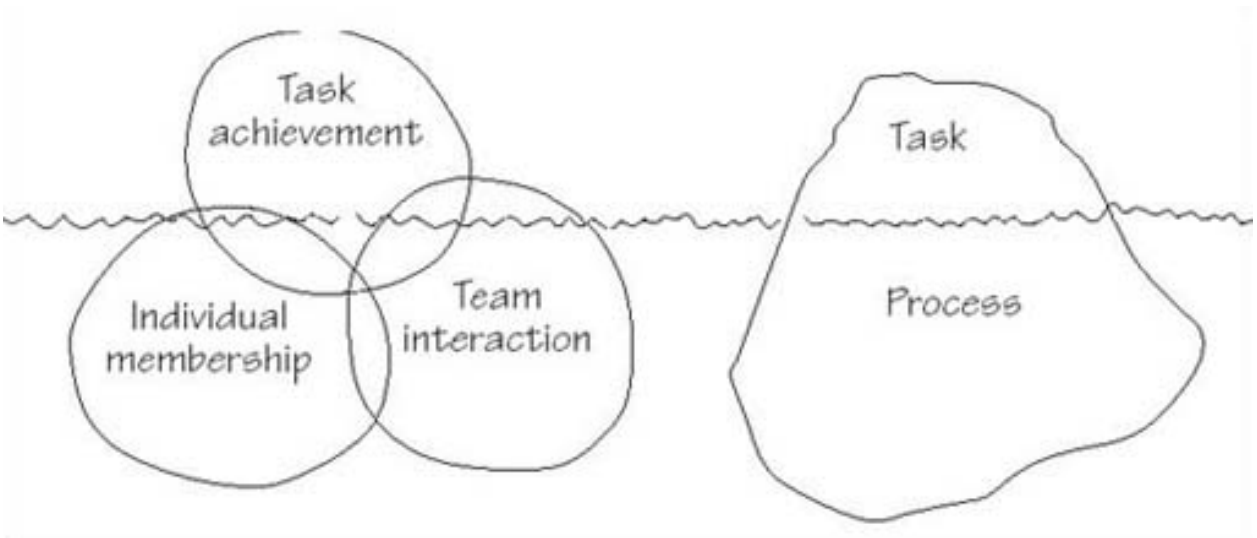

Figure 3 The internal elements of team effectiveness

The three elements could be reconfigured as an iceberg, most of which is below the water's surface (the right-hand side of Figure 3). Superficial observation of teams in organisations might suggest that most, if not all, energy is devoted to the explicit task (what is to be achieved, by when, with what budget and what resources). Naturally, this is important. But too often the concealed part of the iceberg (how the team will work together) is neglected. As with real icebergs, shipwrecks can ensue.

For instance, if working in a particular team leaves its members antagonistic towards each other and disenchanted with the organisation to the point of looking for new jobs, then it can hardly be regarded as fully effective, even if it achieves its goals. The measure of team effectiveness could be how well the team has prepared its members for the transition to new projects, and whether the members would relish the thought of working with each other again.

In addition to what happens inside a team there are external influences that impact upon team operations. The factors shown in Figure 4 interact with each other in ways that affect the team and its development. We don't really understand the full complexity of the nature of these interactions and combinations. The best that we can do is discuss each factor in turn and consider some of the interactions between them and how they relate to team effectiveness. For instance, discussions about whether the wider culture of an organisation supports and rewards teamworking, whether a team's internal and/or external customers clearly specify their requirements and whether the expectations of a team match those of its sponsor will all either help or hinder a team's ongoing vitality.

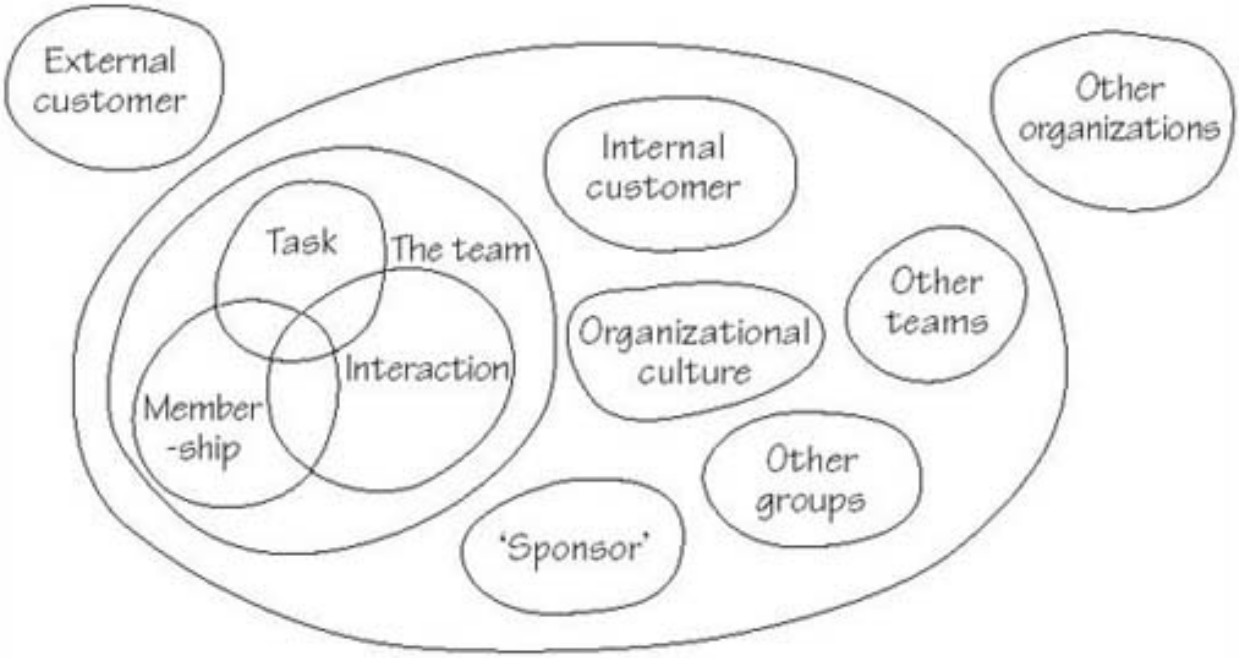

Figure 4 Systems map showing components influencing team effectiveness

2.9 Conclusions

This reading has addressed four questions: what characterises a group, what characterises a team, how project teams are organised and what can make teams ineffective. Groups can be formal or informal depending on the circumstances. Work groups or teams are generally more focused on particular tasks and outcomes, and use processes that aim to achieve a unity of purpose, communication and action. I looked at six major types of team: functional, project, matrix, contract, self-managing and self-organising. Each form has strengths and weaknesses that suit particular types of project within particular organisational cultures, and teams often involve a mixture of different forms. Team effectiveness is shaped by internal influences – task achievement, individual membership and team interaction – as well as external influences, such as customers, sponsors, other teams and organisational culture.

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3 Reading 2 Working in groups

3.1 Belonging to a group

Because work groups are of central significance in the functioning of an organisation they have been studied intensively, and much has been written about group processes. In this reading it would be inappropriate to attempt to review this vast literature, which covers an enormous range of topics and aspects of groups. Instead, I focus attention here on two particular aspects of groups. First, I examine the nature of the contracts within a group: what it is that people gain from belonging to a group and, by inference, what they contribute to the group. This focus helps to explain certain characteristic problems that arise in groups. Second, I examine the process of group development.

When an individual joins a group he or she undertakes a trade-off. Joining a group requires the individual to agree to abide by the 'rules' of the group. These are sometimes explicit (such as 'who is invited to the meetings' or 'what our area of responsibility is') but often implicit (such as modes of dress, attitudes, values, beliefs, subjects that are and aren't talked about, and so on). These rules serve many purposes, a very important one of which is to distinguish the group from the rest of the world; they are the features that identify it as a group and, amongst other things, define its boundary. A group with no boundary-defining rules would include everyone and cease to be a group!

Agreeing to abide by the rules of a group involves some loss of individuality or freedom. In some groups the loss can be extreme, as in some fanatical religious groups where even questioning the leaders' authority leads to expulsion. In other groups the loss of individual freedom is minimal. In return for this loss, the individual gains not only such things as access to information and help with problem solving but also the opportunity to satisfy psychological needs, such as affiliation and security.

The nature of the agreement between the individual member and the group has close parallels with the formal, informal and psychological aspects of the contract between an employee and an organisation. In the context of a group, the 'formal contract' involves things like the group objectives, membership, leadership, terms of reference and the responsibilities of individuals within the group. The 'informal contract' includes the way meetings are conducted, how disagreements are handled, what feelings can be expressed and in what way, and so on. The 'psychological contract' involves more nebulous matters such as the degree to which the group will tolerate and handle interpersonal issues, the degree of personal disclosure that is acceptable and how much support an individual can expect from the group. It consists of all the psychological expectations of the group and of the individual. In general, the formal contract may be openly discussed in group meetings and may also be referred to in discussions about procedures. The informal contract is likely to be talked about far less and falls more into the category of 'that's just the way we do things'. The nature of the psychological contract is unlikely to be addressed except in times of crisis, such as intense disagreements or failure to accomplish some major objective. As a result, it may not be easy to discover what the psychological contracts are in a group.

One important ingredient in the psychological contract involved in joining most groups (provided that joining is voluntary) is that in return for abiding by the rules of the group one finds oneself surrounded by people who share one's perception of the world, at least to

some extent. One of the key components in a good relationship is a sense of being understood and acknowledged. This can be understood in terms of individuals' need to test and affirm their sense of reality. It is possible, indeed common, to find that different people have different perceptions of the same events. By joining a group an individual agrees not to question certain assumptions about the world, and in return has the comfort of having this view of the world affirmed and reinforced.

The basic assumptions that cannot be questioned within a group form a sort of taboo area. Some of this area will be consciously known as a taboo area, while other parts will simply not be talked about. The precise relationship between the benefit of a confirmed perception of reality and the penalty associated with the taboo area varies enormously from group to group. A political group, especially a small extremist group, will usually have a large set of taboo areas: for example, members may be required to follow the party line on issues of employment, religion, sex, education, health care, foreign policy, and so on. Given the large number of taboos, it is not surprising to find that such groups repeatedly go through the process of dividing into factions. Although this is a fairly extreme example, the same processes operate in formal and informal work groups. For example, in the production of an Open University course there comes a point when it is essential that the members of the course team agree to the basic course aims and cease to raise fundamental questions of principle. If a team failed to reach such agreements, this could have very serious knock-on effects.

Another common ingredient in the psychological contract involved in belonging to a group is the emotional trade-off. Just as a group reinforces certain aspects of a particular view of reality, so too is it likely to reward certain types of behaviour and emotional expression whilst disapproving of others. For example, many political groups provide their members with a forum for expressing feelings of hatred or derision, provided of course that they are directed towards 'the opposition'. As in the case of group perceptions and taboo areas, less extreme requirements exist in typical formal and informal work groups. It is common to find work groups providing a forum for expressing positive and negative judgements of others' worth, for encouraging aggressiveness (as in sales promotion) or defensiveness. Another form of emotional trade-off often occurs around the issue of security. For example, members of an informal work group may agree among themselves to work at a particular rate, to gain some measure of security against undue pressure from supervisors.

In general, the trade-offs involved in belonging to a group will be balanced: the more an individual gives up in joining the group then the larger the pay-off expected. The level of trade-off involved, that is the size of the pay-offs and commitments, will strongly influence the group's ability to change. A group with very large pay-offs will resist change unless all the group members can see the prospect of an equivalent pay-off in the new arrangement. Exploring the resistance to change can be a powerful way of uncovering the important features of the contracts between an individual and a group.

Activity 3

Identify a team that you belong to, and list some changes to the team or its activities that you might conceivably be asked to make. Arrange them in order, from changes you would find very easy to accept to changes that you would find very hard to accept.

To what extent is this difference determined by what the proposed change would 'cost' you and what your 'pay-off' from it would be?

So far, the emphasis in the discussion has been on the group as a collection of individuals. It is also possible, and productive, to regard the group as a psychological entity in its own right. The concepts of self, self-concept, self-esteem and psychological energy that we normally apply to individuals, can to some extent apply to groups as well.

However, although this analogy is productive, it also has its limits. One important difference is in the levels of 'self-awareness' between individuals and a group. So far, I have assumed implicitly that everything that the individual member knows about the group, and that the group knows about the individual member, is shared by both parties. In fact this is not usually the case: for instance, there will often be 'hidden agendas' – things that an individual wants or expects from the group, but that the group doesn't know about. Common examples of hidden agendas are:

1 Someone using a committee meeting as an opportunity to impress the boss.
2 An individual raising an issue at a meeting in order to embarrass or force the hand of another member of the group.
3 Someone resisting a proposal for reasons they are not prepared to disclose (and thus being forced to invent spurious grounds for resisting).

There may also be things that the group knows about individual members which the individuals are unaware of themselves: that is to say, individual members may have what are termed 'blind spots'. For example, a member of a group makes a suggestion, which if accepted by the group requires some action to be taken. None of the rest of the group believes that the person making the suggestion is capable of carrying out the action needed, and consequently the suggestion is rejected. The person making the suggestion is aware of the decision but unaware of the reason behind it.

Both hidden agendas and blind spots impede the effective functioning of a group. In fact, it has been shown that their effect on group performance is much larger than one would intuitively guess. There is no simple explanation as to why this should be so. But it appears that small increases in a group's self-awareness (that is, the removal of hidden agendas and blind spots by encouraging the development of greater openness and trust) can release a disproportionately large amount of psychological energy, which would otherwise have been absorbed by defensive and protective checks and manoeuvres.

3.2 Group processes

So far, the emphasis has been on the factors that are significant in the relationship between an individual and the group. In this section I examine such issues as what tasks the group has to perform, how big the group is, who should be in it, how the group develops and so on. These are particularly important issues in the operation of formal groups within the organisation. These factors, mostly associated with the 'environment' of the group, can be critical in determining how effective a group is, both in accomplishing tasks and in a psychological sense.

3.2.1 Group context

Probably the two most important features of a formal work group are the task or objectives assigned to it and the environment in which it has to carry that task out. It is important that a work group be given a realistic task and access to the resources required to complete it,

and that the people in the group feel that the task is worth accomplishing, i.e. that it has some importance.

When a group fails to make headway, one common cause is that its brief covers several tasks, some of which require members to take up different roles. For example, a management group may be given the tasks of analysing why the introduction of a new information system has gone wrong and designing a new one. In the analysis of what has gone wrong the members of the group, as representatives of their departments or subgroups, may adopt generally defensive postures. Once defensiveness has been established as the group dynamic, it will be virtually impossible to establish the sort of cooperative and free-wheeling dynamic that is required in a creative group. There will be a tendency for managers to keep their departmental hats on and maintain their defensive postures. A simple solution to this sort of problem is to constitute two separate groups or committees. These may well have identical membership. However, by meeting under a different name, with different objectives and, preferably, in a different place, the participants are freed to create a new dynamic, one appropriate to the second task.

3.2.2 Group size

Another significant feature of a work group is its size. To be effective it should be neither too large nor too small. As membership increases there is a trade-off between increased collective expertise and decreased involvement and satisfaction of individual members. A very small group may not have the range of skills it requires to function well. The optimum size depends partly on the group's purpose. A group for information sharing or decision making may need to be larger than one for problem solving.

A simple calculation can indicate how quickly the number of two-way interactions in a group increases with increasing size. In a group of N people (where N stands for a number) each of the N individuals relates with N × 1 others, so there are N × (N − 1) / 2 possible interactions.

In many organisations, there is a tendency to include representatives from every conceivable grouping on all committees in the belief that this enhances participation and effectiveness. There is also the view that putting a representative of every possible related department into a given group helps smooth information flow and project progress. In practice, communication is usually *reduced* in larger groups. As the group size grows, members feel less involved in the process, alienation tends to increase and commitment to the project tends to decrease. The numbers most commonly quoted for effective group size in a face-to-face team are between 5 and 10, so reducing the number of interactions and lessening the risk of conflict.

There is a nice demonstration that the 'between 5 and 10' rule is due to communication limitations. If we devise special procedures to manage the interpersonal exchanges (as in some computer-based brainstorming systems, where the computers handle all the gathering and feeding back of ideas) the advantages of the small group disappears: the larger the group, the more ideas are generated.

However, in the normal face-to-face mode, if there are more than about 12 members in our team we are likely to encounter group-size problems. If the numbers cannot be reduced we might consider restructuring the team into sub-groups and delegating responsibility for achieving some of the team's objectives. We may find that if we don't do this deliberately it will happen anyway. For instance, members who like each other or share common interests may spontaneously form sub-groups.

Unfortunately, the breakdown of large groups into sub-groups and cliques may not help a team achieve its goals. One device for keeping large numbers of people informed about a project is for a small group to manage the task and for it to invite relevant people to attend particular meetings. Alternatively, the small group can arrange to give information seminars to larger groups of colleagues. So, for the purposes of achieving team goals it is better that the process of restructuring big groups into smaller groups is managed consciously and carefully.

3.2.3 Managing group membership

The range of people that makes up the membership of a team, and the relationships they have with each other, have great influence on the team's effectiveness. The members should all be able to contribute their skills and expertise to the team's goals to make the best use of the resources. If you are ever in the position of being able to select your own team, you will need to identify your objectives and the methods for achieving your goals. From this will come the competences – the knowledge, understanding, skills and personal qualities – which you need in your team members.

It is important to appraise as systematically as possible the relationship between team functions and required competences in order to identify gaps and begin to allocate responsibilities, organise training and so on. Figure 5 provides a useful way of weighing up the mixture of 'task' and 'people' functions (or 'faces') of a team.

Faces 1 and 2 are *external* to the team and concern:

- adapting to the environment and using organisational resources effectively in order to satisfy the requirements of the team's sponsor.
- relating effectively with people outside the team in order to meet the needs of clients or customers, whether internal or external to the organisation.

Faces 3 and 4 are *internal* to the team and concern:

- using systems and procedures appropriately to carry out goal-oriented tasks.
- working in a way which makes people feel part of a team.

Each face implies different competences.

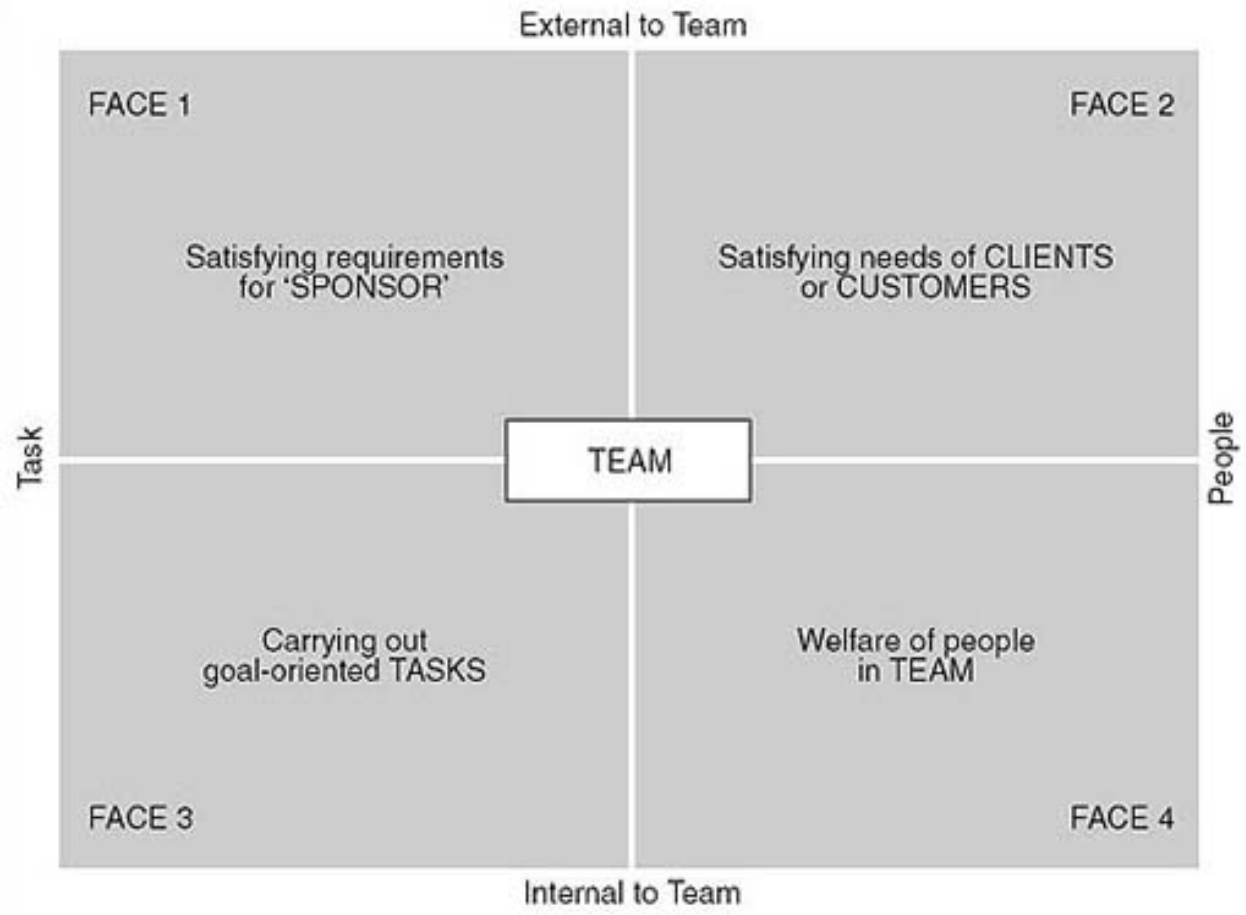

Figure 5 The four faces of a team (adapted from Lewis and Lawton, 1992)

We may find that when we are setting up a team we have to guess a little about the competences that are required. We may also find that as the team develops and gets on with its work, there are changes in everyone's perception of the skills and knowledge needed. It is therefore important to keep an eye on changes that affect the expertise needed by the team and actively recruit new members if necessary. It is frequently the case that team members have other work commitments outside the team. The implications of this should be taken into account when recruiting team members and allocating tasks and responsibilities to them. Team loyalties and commitments need to be balanced with other loyalties and commitments. Often we will have limited or no choice about who is recruited to the team. We may find that we just have to make do with the situation and struggle to be effective despite limitations in the competence base.

As well as competencies there are other factors that can influence the working of a team. The balance of men and women and people from different nationalities or cultural backgrounds all play a part. Differences in personality can also have a significant effect. Achieving the best mix in a team invariably involves working on the tensions that surround issues of uniformity and diversity. The pushes and pulls in different directions need to be managed. The dismantling of many of the restrictions in the European labour market supports moves towards recruitment practices which seek team members with proven capabilities to work in other countries. Legislation and social changes make it easier for organisations to develop and train their staff to appreciate ethnic and national differences in values, style, attitudes and performance standards. Nevertheless, there are counter-vailing tendencies, internally and externally.

Developing openness and trust, for example, can often seem easier in the first instance on the basis of a high degree of homogeneity; strengthening diversity can seem threatening in an established team.

3.2.4 Functional and team roles

When individuals are being selected for membership of a team, the choice is usually made on the basis of task-related issues, such as their prior skills, knowledge, and experience. However, team effectiveness is equally dependent on the personal qualities and attributes of individual team members. It is just as important to select for these as well.

When we work with other people in a group or team we each bring two types of role to that relationship. The first, and more obvious, is our *functional role*, which relies on the skills and experiences that we bring to the project or problem in hand. The second, and often overlooked, contribution is our *team role*, which tends to be based on our personality or preferred style of action. To a large extent, our team role can be said to determine how we apply the skills and experiences that comprise our functional role.

Belbin (1981 and 1993) researched the functional role/team role distinction and its implications for teams. He found that, while there are a few people who do not function well in any team role, most of us have perhaps two or three roles that we feel comfortable in (our so-called 'preferred roles') and others in which we feel less at ease (our so-called 'non-preferred roles'). In fact, Belbin and his associates identified *nine* such team roles. Some of the non-preferred roles are ones we can cope with if we have to. However, there are also likely to be others in which we are both uncomfortable and ineffective.

Belbin's nine team roles are listed in Table 3. It is worth noting that all nine are equally important to team effectiveness, provided that they are used by the team at the right times and in an appropriate manner.

When a team first addresses a problem or kicks off a project, the basic requirement is usually for innovative ideas (the need for a 'plant'), closely followed by the requirement to appreciate how these ideas can be turned into practical actions and manageable tasks (the 'implementer'). These steps stand most chance of being achieved if the team has a good chairperson (the 'coordinator') who ensures that the appropriate team members contribute at the right times. Drive and impetus are brought to the team's activities by the energetic 'shaper'. When delicate negotiations with contacts outside the team are called for, it is the personality of the 'resource investigator' that comes into its own. To stop the team becoming over-enthusiastic and missing key points, the 'monitor/evaluator' must be allowed to play a part. Any sources of friction or misunderstanding within the team are diffused by the 'teamworker', whilst the 'specialist' is used for skills or knowledge that are in short supply and not used regularly. The 'completer/finisher' ensures that proper attention is paid to the details of any solutions or follow-up actions.

It is essential that team members share details of their team roles with their colleagues if the team is to gain the full benefit from its range of roles; the team can then see if any of the nine team roles are missing. If this is the case, those team members whose non-preferred roles match the missing roles need to make the effort required to fill the gap. If not it may be necessary to bring in additional team members. Clearly, this sharing calls for a degree of openness and trust, which should exist in a well-organised, well-led team. Unfortunately, in teams that have not yet developed mutual trust and openness, some people who may be quite open about the details of their functional roles tend to be

somewhat coy about sharing personality details. A competent leader will handle this situation in a sensitive manner.

Table 3 Belbin team roles

Team role	Team strengths	Allowable weaknesses
Plant	Creative, imaginative, unorthodox	Weak in communication skills
	An innovator	Easily upset
	Team's source of original ideas	Can dwell on 'interesting ideas'
Implementer	Turns ideas into practical actions	Somewhat inflexible
	Turns decisions into manageable tasks	Does not like 'airy-fairy' ideas
	Brings method to the team's activities	Upset by frequent changes of plan
Completer-finisher	Painstaking and conscientious	Anxious introvert; inclined to worry
	Sees tasks through to completion	Reluctant to delegate
	Delivers on time	Dislikes casual approach by others
Monitor-evaluator	Offers dispassionate, critical analysis	Lacks drive and inspiration
	Has a strategic, discerning view	Lacks warmth and imagination
	Judges accurately; sees all options	Can lower morale by being a damper
Resource investigator	Diplomat with many contacts	Loses interest as enthusiasm wanes
	Improviser; explores opportunities	Jumps from one task to another
	Enthusiastic and communicative	Thrives on pressure
Shaper	Task minded; brings drive to the team	Easily provoked or frustrated
	Makes things happen; pressurises	Impulsive and impatient
	Dynamic, outgoing and challenging	Intolerant of woolliness or vagueness
Teamworker	Promotes team harmony; diffuses friction	Indecisive in crunch situations
	Listens; builds on the ideas of others	May avoid confrontation situations
	Sensitive but gently assertive	May avoid commitment at decision time
Coordinator	Clarifies goals; good chairperson	Can be seen as manipulative
	Promotes decision making	Inclined to let others do the work
	Good communicator; social leader	May take credit for the team's work
Specialist	Provides rare skills and knowledge	Contributes only on a narrow front
	Single-minded and focused	Communication skills are often weak

	Self-starting and dedicated	Often cannot see the 'big picture'

Managers sometimes try to rationalise having teams that are unbalanced in a team-role sense by claiming that they have been assigned a group of people as their team and they must live with it. In most of today's workplaces there is a steady and regular movement of staff in and out of management groups and departments. When selecting or accepting new people into their groups or departments, managers with an understanding of team-role concepts will look for team-role strengths in addition to functional-role strengths.

Each team role brings valuable strengths to the overall team (team strength), but each also has a downside. Belbin has coined the phrase 'an allowable weakness' for what is the converse of a team strength. The tendency is for a manager to try to correct perceived weaknesses in an employee. But by doing this with allowable weaknesses we face the possibility of not only failing to eradicate what is after all a natural weakness, but also risking undermining the strength that goes with it. This is not to suggest that weaknesses should not be addressed. The point is that any attempts at improvement should be kept in balance and we should be prepared to manage and work around the weaknesses of our team colleagues and ourselves. Many people put on an act in an attempt to hide their weaknesses. Once they see that they can admit to them without prejudice, they feel a sense of relief and are ready to play their part in the team in a more open manner.

Activity 4

Consider a recent meeting you have attended. Identify two or three of Belbin's team roles that best fit your perception of your role in the meeting.

Try asking a colleague you know well who also attended the meeting for his or her perception of your team role(s).

What are your 'allowable weaknesses'? What could you do in a meeting to compensate for them?

3.2.5 Group development

Next on the list of priorities in the functioning of groups is the process of group development. One popular conception of the way in which groups 'gel' and become effective was first suggested by Tuckman (1965) and then extended by Tuckman and Jensen (1977). Tuckman originally identified four stages in this development process, which he named 'forming', 'storming', 'norming' and 'performing'. These stages (see Figure 6) can be summarised as follows:

Forming

The group is not yet a group but a number of individuals. At this stage, the purpose of the group is discussed, along with its title, leadership and life span. Individuals will be keen to establish their personal identities in the group.

Storming

Most groups go through a stage of conflict following the initial, often false, consensus. At this stage, purpose, leadership, roles and norms may all be challenged. Personal agendas may be revealed and some interpersonal hostility is to be expected. If successfully handled, this stage leads to the formulation of more realistic objectives and procedures. It is particularly important in the formation of trust within the group.

Norming

During this stage the group members establish the patterns of work and norms for the group. What degree of openness, trust and confidence are appropriate? At this stage, there will be a lot of tentative experimentation by individuals testing the climate of the group and establishing their levels of commitment.

Performing

Only when the previous three stages have been successfully completed will the group be able to be fully and sensibly productive. Although some kind of performance will be achieved at all stages prior to this phase, output will have been diminished by the energy put into resolving the group processes and by the personal hidden agendas. In many periodic committees the basic issues of objectives, procedures and leadership are never resolved and continue to plague the group in almost every meeting, leading to frustration and substantially reduced effectiveness.

To these four stages were later added a fifth stage:

Adjourning or mourning

The phase when a team eventually disbands, having completed its task, is also characterised by distinctive processes. Members may face significant uncertainties as they move away to new challenges. They may need feedback on how well they have done, what they have learned and how they are likely to cope with new challenges. The team leader may need to minimise the stress that is associated with changes and transitions. The team members may be feeling some sadness if their experiences within the team were particularly satisfying. If appropriate, the team leader may encourage the team members to maintain links with each other and develop their relations through new activities and projects.

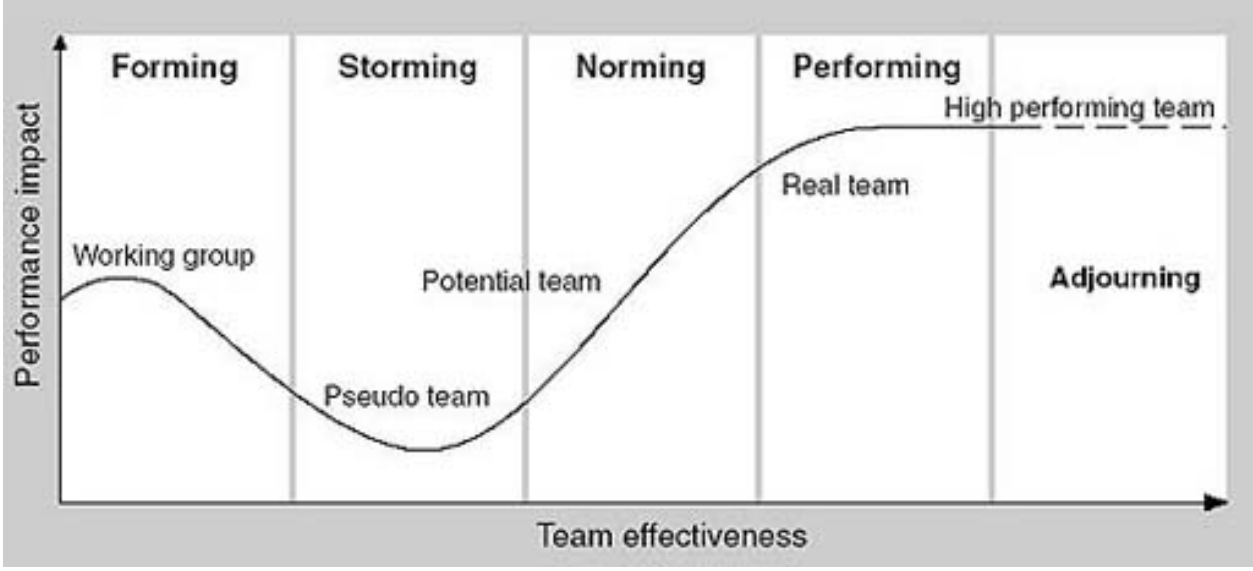

Figure 6 The stages of teambuilding (adapted from Tuckman and Jensen, 1977)

It is in the nature of the team development process that people need to exercise considerable sensitivity and judgement. There is an understandable tendency to think that we must always be actively intervening to move the process along, and exercising the appropriate team development skills. Very often, however, this is not the best course of action. An appreciation of team dynamics and the ability to 'read the situation' may suggest that a lightness of touch is called for. Far from intervening and trying to make things happen, the requisite skill is that of detachment. Team cohesion and productive

norms can often be nurtured most effectively by turning attention elsewhere. We need to be able to judge when it is appropriate to work directly and intensively on teambuilding and when it is best to allow the processes to occur less consciously. As Stanton (1992) discovered, teams which persistently give undue attention to their own development often end up being unproductive – and, indeed, generally unsatisfactory for their members.

In a group in which the task is clearly defined and regarded by everyone as highly important, the first three stages of the development process may initially be dealt with during the first meeting and some degree of consensus reached about how best to proceed. However, for most groups these stages will take time to work through or will recur from time to time. The stages may overlap, operate concurrently or be repeated, as old issues resurface or new problems appear. When people leave a group and/or new members join, the cycle may start again. Sometimes quite violent storming can occur at this time if the new members are strong personalities and raise issues that have previously been suppressed. The acceptance and appropriate handling of the storming phase is particularly important. If ignored, the disagreements and hostilities will be regarded as unacceptable and this will undermine the group's performance. The issues will still be discussed, however, and this discussion may go on outside the formal meetings in the form of politicking and the formation of cabals, thus further undermining the development of the group. In many organisations it is recognised that it takes time for a group to form and that this time should be included in the scheduling of projects and programmes. Many organisations also make use of team-building exercises and training programmes to encourage team members to work together more effectively.

3.2.6 The creative cycle

The creative cycle refers to the cycle of development that takes place within a single meeting of a group, as opposed to the longer-term cycle just described which may occur over many meetings. As in the case of the longer-term cycle, the creative cycle can be thought of as occurring in four phases: nurturing, energising, peak activity and relaxing (Figure 7).

Groups which function well usually have some sort of intuitive understanding of this cycle and have evolved a way of working that synchronises their work to the rhythm of their own creative cycle. Formal groups often fail because they fail to recognise the existence of this cycle or try to leave out one or more stages. For example, many committees and formal groups do not acknowledge the *nurturing phase* and get down to business as soon as all the members are present. These groups may find that their meetings are stiff and unproductive, and that they never really get going. A simple device for establishing this stage is to arrange for coffee or some form of refreshment prior to the business and to encourage members to use the time to mix informally with each other. Another device is to deal with the less important or routine matters during this 'warm up' period. If the main business of a meeting is the first item on the agenda then the proceedings may be slow and unproductive, because the *energising phase* has been missed out. There is an appropriate time for everything in a meeting, and people who are successful at handling meetings have an intuitive feel for this. The main business should be tackled once the group is energised, not any earlier and certainly not after the *peak activity phase* has been passed. (The most reliable indicator of a group's energy state is how any particular member feels at the time.) It is important to recognise the *relaxing phase*. If business is introduced into this stage, it will be cursorily dealt with and may even undo some of the work done earlier. Furthermore, meetings ended too quickly, before the relaxing phase is completed, will leave members with a sense of dissatisfaction or incompleteness. As the

pace of organisational life quickens there is increasing pressure on managers to rush from one meeting to the next, to start and finish at peak performance, often to the detriment of the effectiveness of the meeting.

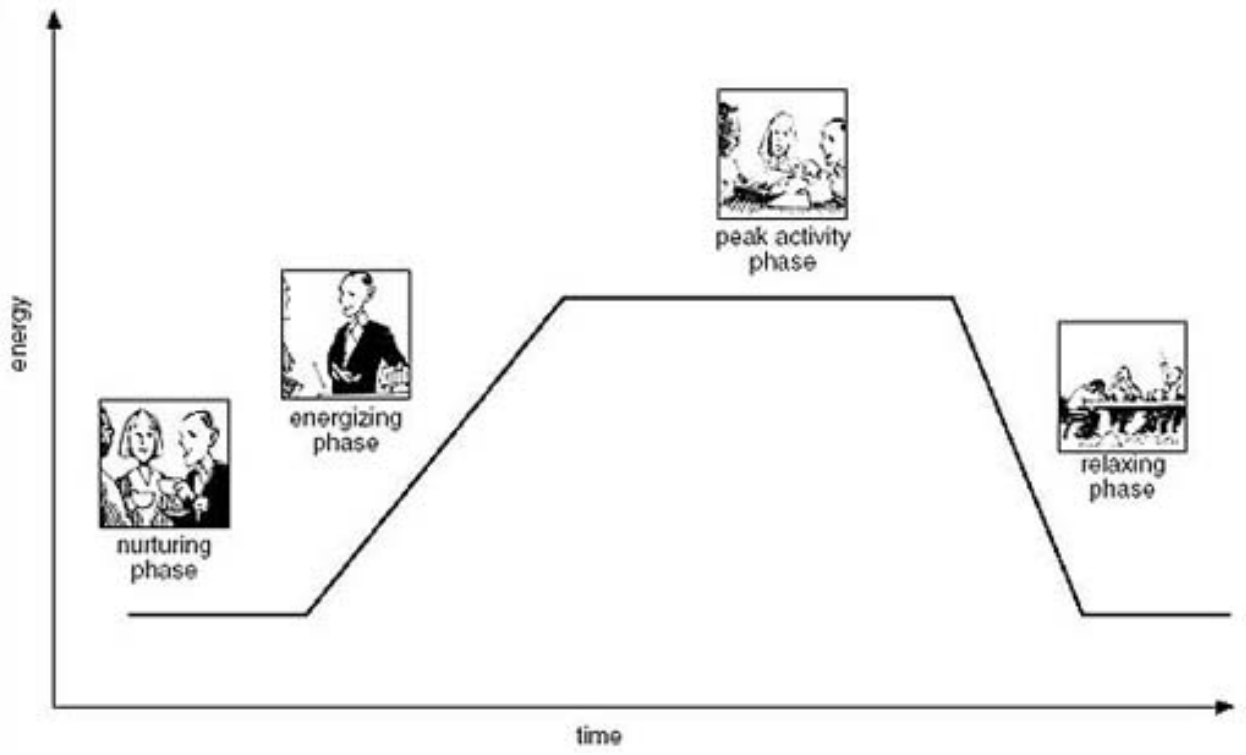

Figure 7 The creative cycle of a meeting

3.2.7 Ways that groups go wrong

Before leaving Reading 2, it is worth mentioning some of the characteristic ways that groups 'go wrong'. Why should a group, asked to design a camel, produce a horse? You might expect that when we pool the talents, experience and knowledge of a group, the result would be better, not worse, than that of any individual member. But as groups design 'horses' so frequently there must be some fairly familiar decision-making processes at work. Probably the most common problems are those that have already been discussed: unclear objectives, multiple tasks, the size and balance of the group, and non-completion of the stages of group development. However, there are other factors that don't fit easily into these categories. One such factor is what is termed 'groupthink'.

Groupthink is a process whereby a group collaborates systematically to ignore evidence suggesting that what it has done, or is planning to do, is ill advised. It is like a giant blind spot operating on the whole group. An example of groupthink is given in Box 2.1.

Box 2.1 Example of groupthink

Twelve people joined a group to help them give up smoking. On joining, each agreed to observe two rules: to make an immediate and conscientious effort to give up smoking, and to attend every meeting. At the second meeting of the group two of the most dominant members took the position that heavy smoking was an almost incurable addiction. The majority of the others soon agreed that no-one could be expected to cut down drastically. One heavy smoker took issue with this consensus, arguing that by using willpower he had

stopped smoking since joining the group, and that everyone else could do the same. Most of the others ganged up against the man who was deviating from the group consensus. Then, at the beginning of the next meeting, the deviant announced that he had made an important decision:

> I have learned from *experience* in this group that you can only follow one of the rules [try to give up, and attend all meetings], you can't follow both. And so I have decided that I will continue to attend every meeting but I have gone back to smoking two packs a day and I will not make any effort to stop smoking again until after the last meeting.

Whereupon the other members beamed at him and applauded enthusiastically, welcoming him back to the fold. No one commented on the fact that the whole point of the meetings was to help each individual to cut down on smoking as rapidly as possible.

(Adapted from Janis, 1972, p.8)

Groups affected by, or perhaps it would be better to say infected by, groupthink make bad decisions in four main ways:

- They make decisions that subvert their own official goals (as in Box 2.1). Faced with a decision where the achievement of those goals conflicts with the preservation of easy-going unanimity in the group, the official goals go out of the window.
- They don't test their decisions by considering information or opinions that contradict them or which point to substantial difficulties in implementing the decisions. Indeed, in the grip of groupthink, they often take care to screen out awkward facts or ideas. Hence, they are often surprised when their decisions do not work out as they hoped.
- There is a well-documented tendency for such groups to take more risky decisions than any individual member would take, or believe to be warranted. This is generally called the 'risky shift'.
- They have a disturbing tendency to make decisions that treat others as 'the enemy'. This can result in groups paying others scant consideration and respect, a fact that is particularly pernicious and accounts for some of the worst excesses of discrimination against other groups, distinguished on the basis of race, creed or gender.

So much for the need to take groupthink seriously; how can we tell if a group is suffering from it? Fortunately, there are a number of indicators that help us to diagnose groupthink:

1 First, some groups are especially vulnerable. I have already mentioned that it is most often found in groups that are friendly and collaborative; more precisely, they are rather cosy. The group has settled into a habit of discouraging and frowning on overt disagreement and conflict. When that is the case, individual members are more ready to suppress divergent ideas and, more powerfully, less inclined to think hard about whether or not they really agree with what is being decided.

2 Second, groups which have a certain prestige, and regard themselves as an elite group in some way, are also particularly susceptible. Groups which are at the head of some hierarchy often feel this way about themselves. The hierarchy doesn't have to be as large as a big company or a hospital – management committees of clubs or local associations are often the worst afflicted.

3 Finally, some groups are well insulated from opinion that might correct false assumptions and misperceptions. Design teams often manage to get themselves

into this position, sometimes deliberately because what they are doing is a close commercial secret, and sometimes by accident because they can't be bothered to undertake the lengthy business of explaining what they are doing to an outsider. The leaders of public-interest groups can easily get themselves into this position too – remote from a body of members who pay subscriptions and get a newsletter, and with few opportunities to comment on the decisions of the leaders.

More precise indicators come from the way the group goes about its work. In all groups the leader has a key role in establishing the processes and procedures of the group; he or she usually has the advantages of expertise, status, control of the agenda, and the power to distribute or withhold benefits to the members. If the leader uses these advantages to state preferences and propose a particular decision right from the outset of a discussion, it will be hard for other members to resist. A more sophisticated variant of this is when the leader announces that the group has to decide between a limited range of options, usually two. This gives the appearance of allowing genuine discussion, but has the effect of limiting the group's focus of attention in much the same way. With leadership of this kind, especially in a cohesive group, it will be easy to slide into groupthink.

The last indicator of groupthink is the one that should flash the loudest warning signals: it is the feeling of unbounded optimism, even euphoria. The group feels immensely proud of itself, and feels sure that it can overcome all the problems and lead the way to a bright new future. As all the members agree, each feels that what they have decided must be right. In these circumstances it is not just unpleasant to spoil things by taking a hard look at the limits of the group's power and the damage that might be done if it is wrong, it is also seen as rank disloyalty.

The second process whereby groups can go wrong involves seeking internal or external scapegoats. It is usual to find groups making a scapegoat of either the weakest member or the group leader. In other cases the group blames people external to the group for not doing their job or providing the appropriate resources for the group to be successful. In the latter case this external blaming is a blind spot. However, blame solves nothing and only serves to perpetuate the mistakes made.

Both of the processes described above are examples of groups resisting change in some sense. Where a group has not functioned effectively, then its first response is likely to be to defend itself, just like an individual. Under these conditions it adopts a 'fight-or-flight' attitude and this dominates the operation of the group. Ignoring evidence or blaming individuals are simply devices for resisting facing up to the need for change. Groups resist change for all the same reasons that individuals resist change – it is uncomfortable and potentially painful. This is accentuated in a group in which the individuals have very strong psychological contracts, that is, where the members have strong investments in the group. If the psychological contracts are largely unconscious, the group will probably have invented some rationalisation to explain its functioning. Before such a group can change its operation, it will need to give up this rationalisation and examine the psychological issues beneath it. This involves a more substantial change than the group can easily handle; it is a second-order change, involving a change in structure as well as objective.

3.3 Conclusions

The main points made in this reading have been:

1 Groups cannot be understood simply in terms of the interactions between individual members because:

- individuals have contracts with the group as a whole and this is distinct from their relationships with other members of the group on a one-to-one basis;
- people behave differently in groups;
- there are simply too many possible interactions between group members, including their sub-personalities, to make sense of group activity in this way.

2 The contracts that an individual has with a group may have several components, each of which may have conscious and unconscious parts. The main components are likely to include:

- certain ideas, attitudes or beliefs that support a particular perspective or view of the world;
- an emotional component, relating to certain values and the expression or denial of certain emotions.

3 People are most likely to function effectively as a group if:

- the group has a well-defined task that is seen as challenging and significant by group members;
- the group is not too large (has fewer than 10 members) and not too small (too small to have adequate resources and expertise);
- the expertise and characteristics of members of the group are complementary;
- the group allows itself time to go through the stages of development – forming, storming, norming and performing – and by doing so, develops trust by sharing hidden agendas and personal differences;
- each meeting is designed to allow for a creative cycle that involves nurturing, energising, peak activity and relaxation;
- the group explicitly discusses its objectives, how to organise itself, its leadership and the roles of members.

SAQ 1

Construct your own brief definitions or descriptions of the following:

(a) The informal contract between a group and one of its members.

(b) The psychological contract between a group and one of its members.

(c) Hidden agenda.

(d) Blind spot.

Answer

Your definitions should include at least the following features:

(a) Informal contract: not usually written down or discussed; includes assumptions about ways of working, what feelings can be expressed and in what ways. Taboo areas may be included.

(b) Psychological contract: the set of psychological expectations that the group has of the individual and *vice versa;* not discussed and only revealed in a crisis.

(c) Hidden agenda: an item known to a group member but not to the group as a whole.

(d) Blind spot: a characteristic or aspect of an individual recognised by the group, but not by the individual, involved. (Deep down, the individual may know about it but refuse to acknowledge it.)

SAQ 2

Calculate the number of interactions in groups with four, six, and eight members.

Answer

The formula is N × (N − 1) / 2.

With four members there are six possible pairings (AB, AC, AD, BC, BD, CD). With six there are 15 possible pairs. With eight there are 28 possible pairs. The number of possible interactions (and hence possible conflicts or misunderstandings) nearly doubles in going from a group of six to a group of eight.

SAQ 3

From your study of Reading 2, make a list of the four or five factors that you regard as most significant in determining whether or not a group will function effectively.

Answer

The most important factors are:

- worthwhile, clear, and attainable group objectives.
- group size and composition: it should be neither too big nor too small, and should include people with complementary skills and characteristics.
- adequate time to go through the stages of group formation, especially the storming phase.
- organisation of group meetings so that the stages of the creative cycle are each given adequate time.

Another important factor is the group's attitude to change. However, if the above items are all satisfied, then this, along with other factors, will probably get sorted out satisfactorily. In particular, if the group succeeds in generating trust in the process of group formation, then blind spots and hidden agendas will not be a major source of difficulty (since individuals will share them with the group).

Key for SAQs 4 and 5

The following paragraphs provide short descriptions of five different groups.

Group 1 – A management group has eight members and is chaired by the managing director. Two of the members of the group are candidates for an important promotion and are keen to impress the managing director, whose opinion is crucial to their chances.

Group 2 – A food-manufacturing company has a large number of separate production operations. Over the years it has had a record of poor staff relations, the main complaint being about working conditions. It has also had a record of poor product quality. In order to involve workers in quality-control issues the management decides to form shop-floor groups. These groups are convened by the area manager and, in order to get things going, they are given the fairly trivial task of assembling data on product quality in their area.

Group 3 – An institution has a long history of financial crises and departmental disputes, and a high turnover of senior staff. A decision is made to review the structure of the entire organisation. This is implemented by forming a 'structure review group', which consists of the heads of all 14 departments, 4 members from the consultative committee and 3

representatives from service groups outside the institution, plus representatives from the local council and a neighbouring institution, making a total of about 30 people altogether.

Group 4 – A marketing team had been together for a long time and had become used to formulating and implementing its own policies. For a new range of fashion fabrics it designed an unusual promotion campaign. Against the advice of the general management group it went ahead with its ideas. After six weeks of poor response the group put an increased effort into the advertising campaign and complained to the management group that the new fabrics were not up to previous standards.

Group 5 – The executive committee of Bloggs Engineering consists of the managing director, the director of manufacturing, the marketing director, the heads of finance and personnel, the company secretary and the chief buyer. For several years there has been a long-standing dispute between the marketing director and the director of manufacturing. The managing director is unaware of this and is frequently dismayed that apparently simple tasks are not accomplished between meetings. He often begins meetings by hauling one or other of the members over the coals for not completing the assigned task.

If you have difficulty answering the next two questions and arrive at different answers from the ones given here, bear in mind that the answers are subjective. There is no single correct answer. The aim is to gain additional insight into what is going on, as a preliminary to working out possible ways of tackling the problems.

SAQ 4

From the descriptions given above, and the discussion in Reading 2, suggest likely sources of problems in the effective functioning of each group. (Note that more than one explanation may fit in some cases.)

Answer

The main sources of problems are likely to be:

Group 1: Two members of the group have very powerful hidden agendas.

Group 2: The group has been given a trivial objective. *There* is also a history of discord between members and the convenor.

Group 3: The group is far too large to do anything effective.

Group 4: The group has isolated itself from criticism and from data which might prove it wrong. This is groupthink coupled with seeking external scapegoats.

Group 5: It's difficult to know what the main problem with this group is, it has so many. There are hidden agendas and a massive blind spot: both indicative of inadequate group formation. There is also evidence of very poorly managed meetings with the nurturing stage being used for disciplinary action!

SAQ 5

Below are descriptions of patterns of behaviour in groups. Which, in your opinion, is most likely to apply to each of the Groups 1–5 described above, bearing in mind the points covered in Reading 2? (Hint: you might find it easier to begin by producing your own description of what each group is like and then match your description to one or more of those below.)

1 Group meetings are poorly attended, regarded as a drag and typified by long rambling conversations of little consequence.

2 The group makes decisions easily but then finds that they are either not carried out or do not have the desired consequences.

3 Group meetings are generally argumentative with members interrupting each other and 'getting at' each other personally.

4 The meetings seem to go on for ages without getting anywhere. Everyone expresses a sense of frustration and alienation from the main issues.

5 During meetings there are often long, uncomfortable silences.

6 Group meetings are characterised by a strong sense of camaraderie. Most problems are blamed on one or two outside bodies.

7 Meetings tend to go very slowly, often getting off to a bad start, which puts people in a defensive mood.

Answer

It is difficult to identify just one aspect as being typical of a group's behaviour. The reason for this is that when things go wrong the way this is revealed depends on a host of chance factors. In what follows, I present first the answer I intended when constructing the question and then alternative answers that seem appropriate.

Group 1 might well suffer from argumentative meetings (3). The hidden agendas are of an interpersonal nature, and so I would expect to see the potential candidates 'getting at' each other in an atmosphere of hostility. They might suffer from aimless meetings as well (4), because with strong, undeclared hidden agendas people can argue about issues without resolving the concealed reasons for disagreement.

Group 2 might well suffer from meetings that are poorly attended (1), meetings that are interminable (4), and, quite possibly, meetings with difficult silences (5). The group has a trivial objective, so I would expect it to have very little energy or enthusiasm, reflected in poor attendance and rambling discussions of no consequence. Because the main issue of staff relationships is not openly on the table people might well feel frustrated and, with low interest combined with a potentially enormous taboo area, there could be times when no one wants to say anything.

Group 3 might well suffer from interminable meetings (4) and meetings that get off to a bad start (7). The group is too big and it is likely to be frustrating for everyone involved. Discussions may get lost in the need for everyone to have their say and there are likely to be formal 'points of order' raised, alienating people from the real issues. With a large group the level of interpersonal contact and trust will be low; one cannot get to know much about 30 other people at the beginning of a meeting!

Group 4 is likely to show a strong sense of 'us' and 'them' (6).

Group 5 really is an appalling set-up and could have every kind of unhelpful behaviour, such as:

- long silences (5) because no one wants to tell the managing director about his or her blind spot;
- slow starts (7) because of the way the managing director starts the meetings;
- decisions that never happen or misfire (2) because of the long-standing conflict between two of the directors, each of whom will be trying to undermine the other; and
- argumentative meetings (3) because of the conflict between the directors and the fear of being 'disciplined' next time around.

SAQ 6

Which of the following groups is likely to be susceptible to groupthink?

1 A group of people, drawn from a number of companies, attending a week-long management training course.

2 The finance committee of an organisation facing a serious financial crisis.

3 A local group formed to protest about the planned development of a dangerous chemical dump in its neighbourhood.

4 A group of parent governors of a comprehensive school working on plans to turn it into an independent one.

5 A group of shop floor workers and a supervisor from one section of a factory who meet regularly to discuss quality problems that arise in that section of the factory.

Answer

It seems likely that the finance committee (2) and the parent governors (4) would score high on two of the three groupthink criteria in section 2.2.7 – feeling themselves to be an elite and insulated from contrary opinion. The protest group (3) is a more difficult case. It is unlikely that its members would be insulated from local opinion, but they may be very remote from expert evidence of the dangers of the dump. Additionally, on the information available, there is no way of knowing if they are an elite of some kind, or simply the people who happened to be prepared to take on the work.

SAQ 7

Why is it difficult to tell if a group of which you are a member is suffering from groupthink?

Answer

A defining characteristic of groupthink is that each member (and that includes you) genuinely concurs in the decisions made by the group; hence it is difficult to take the step of looking at the group's decisions in a fresh light.

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4 Reading 3 Projects and project teams

4.1 Types of projects

Formal projects are a familiar part of nearly all work situations and are often a staple part of some organisations. Because of this it is worth looking at some of the features of formal projects and their management, as they have some different characteristics from other ongoing activities.

To write about projects, we have to define what they are and describe how they arise. Projects and project work are often contrasted with process: 'process', in this sense, describes the normal day-to-day activities of an organisation, while the word 'project' is often used to describe something outside normal day-to-day work. Of course in some fields, such as construction, research and software design, the normal day-to-day work involves carrying out projects. What then is a project?

Projects vary so much that they are difficult to define. What follows are some definitions offered by writers about projects.

> A project is a unique venture with a beginning and an end, conducted by people to meet established goals within parameters of cost, schedule and quality.
>
> (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992).

> A project is a set of people and other resources temporarily assembled to reach a specified objective, normally with a fixed budget and with a fixed time period. Projects are generally associated with products or procedures that are being done for the first time or with known procedures that are being altered.
>
> (Graham, 1985, pp. 1–2 quoted in Buchanan and Boddy, 1992).

> [A project has] dedicated resources, a single point of responsibility, clear boundaries across which resources and deliverables move, limited duration, [it is a] one-off task and [has] objectives. It is a useful way of organizing work. Projects don't arise without deliberate intervention.
>
> (Gray, 1994).

> The simplest form of a project is a discrete undertaking with defined objectives often including time, cost and quality (performance) goals. All projects evolve through a similar 'life-cycle' sequence during which there should be recognised start and finish points. In addition the project objectives may be defined in a number of ways, e.g. financial, social and economic, the important point being that the goals are defined and the project is finite.
>
> (Association of Project Managers, 1993).

Key features of these definitions are that a project has the following characteristics:

- A project is a unique undertaking: each one will differ from every other in some respect.
- Projects have specific objectives (or goals) to achieve.

- Projects require resources.
- Projects have budgets.
- Projects have schedules.
- Projects require the effort of people.
- Measures of quality apply.

The uniqueness of projects means that they take place in an atmosphere of risk and uncertainty. For our purposes, I will define a project as organised work towards a pre-defined goal or objective that requires resources and effort, a unique (and therefore risky) venture having a budget and schedule. A project's success can be measured in terms of how closely it comes to meeting the goal or objective (and this is an issue of quality) within the parameters of its budget and schedule. Once a project completes, it ceases; therefore project work is also characterised by impermanence.

Let's look at some illustrative examples of projects.

- An aircraft manufacturer finds that the nose wheel on the prototype of a new aircraft collapses too easily, and institutes a project to strengthen the nose wheel design. (Where designs are the result of a 'committee' or 'concurrent engineering' approach, as is often the case in the aircraft and automotive industries, what one group does with its part of a design may force another group to redesign. For example, when the wing strut in one aircraft design was strengthened, maintenance to part of the aircraft became impossible – the fitter couldn't reach existing wiring because the maintenance access shrank to make room for the stronger wing strut! A project had to be initiated to redesign the maintenance access.)
- A construction firm may be asked to construct access roads and a group of small factory units on derelict land in order to generate business and jobs in a depressed area of the country. This may involve surveying, demolition of walls, clearing any rubble, removing trees and shrubs, levelling the site, laying out the access roads and constructing them, constructing foundations and erecting the buildings required by the plans.
- A research and development department in a chemical firm may be asked to devote time to exploring the possibilities of developing new products using a new polymer.
- A software development firm may be asked to make modifications to an existing database system in order to improve the ability of users to prepare reports directly using the data retrieved rather than having to transcribe it to a word-processing system. This may involve developing an understanding of the database and the word-processing systems, interviewing or observing users, developing specifications, writing and testing code, installing the new version of the software and providing training and documentation.
- The marketing group of a company may be asked to prepare the launch of a new product. This may involve market research, planning and executing an advertising campaign, organising promotional events and press releases, and liaising with wholesalers and retail outlets.
- A charity working in the Third World may determine, in consultation with local people, that a well needs to be dug. This may involve consulting people to determine a good site, consulting an expert hydrologist, organising local labour and materials, and carrying out the work. It may involve earlier effort to determine the best local materials available and the best ways of using them for this project. It may also

involve training local people to maintain the well and working with local groups to ensure that the new resource is shared fairly.

- A government body may have to respond to legislative changes. For example, at one point UK local taxation changed from its old basis: 'the rates' (based on 'rateable value', which was related to property value) to a new basis: 'the community charge', or 'poll tax' (which was a charge on individuals). This obliged local government bodies to make major changes to computer systems and undertake a major effort to identify whom to tax. Subsequently, the change from the poll tax to the council tax (which combines a highly modified element of the poll tax with an element of the tax based on property value) required further major system changes and another major effort to assess properties to assign them to tax bands. These formed, in a relatively short period, two separate major projects to institute the changes: one for the poll tax and then one for the council tax.

Sometimes the work needed to achieve a major organisational objective will be far greater than can easily be organised and carried out in a single project. This may mean that the organisation will undertake a *programme* that consists of a number of interrelated projects. The Association of Project Managers defines a 'programme' as:

> … a specific undertaking to achieve a number of objectives. The most common examples of programmes are development programmes or large single purpose undertakings consisting of a series of interdependent projects. Examples include product and economic development programmes where the programme follows a concept/design/development life cycle before moving into implementation of multiple projects.
>
> (Association of Project Managers, 1993).

There are many ways to organise projects.

- tTey can be entirely within an organisation ('in-house' projects): one group can be deputed to carry out the project on behalf of the whole organisation, a division or a department.
- Parts of the project work can be put to tender for bidding. Organisations interested in taking on the work will prepare an estimate and use it to develop a bid which they will submit, with the successful bidder making a contract with the client organisation. In other words, the successful bidder becomes the 'contractor'.
- All the project work can be put to tender and contracted for. The contractor can do all of the project work, or can divide it and let parts be done by subcontractors.
- Part or all of a project can be tendered for by consortia (this is particularly so in the case of projects such as the Channel Tunnel, which require such large amounts of cash and other resources that they cannot be financed by a single contractor).

We need to make a distinction between contracting and subcontracting on the one hand, and putting together a consortium of companies that will bid for a contract on the other. The major difference is in the process of putting together a bid or tender. A potential *contractor* may put subsets of work out for formal tender by potential subcontractors before, during or after making its own bid to the client, or even after the bid has been accepted and a contract drawn up. A *consortium* initially comes together in a more informal way, as interested organisations seek each other out and determine a strategy for bidding. A consortium will also choose an 'umbrella' name for itself and develop a more

formal organisation. The Channel Tunnel was an example of a project that both involved a consortium and used traditional contractual arrangements.

4.2 Project life cycles

Earlier I said that a project is: 'a unique venture with a beginning and an end' (Boddy and Buchanan, 1992, p. 8). But it must have a middle, too. We say that a project has a 'life cycle'. This is based on an analogy with living things which are born, live for a period of time, doing things like consuming food and water, breathing, moving, etc., and then finally end (die). There is much discussion about whether there is only one 'true' model of a project life cycle or many, and whether any of these are reasonably accurate descriptions of what happens in real life. Some writers include the feasibility study as part of the project life cycle; others believe that the project proper only begins once the feasibility study is completed and the proposal accepted, or when cost headings for the project are defined. I will use proposal acceptance, since management normally give approval *after* they have been presented with the feasibility study and decided to go ahead with further work. If you find it helpful, think of the work needed to carry out a feasibility study as being a mini-project in its own right.

Even with the best of plans and most stringent of controls, real life is always more chaotic than the models we apply to it; the same is true to projects. Nevertheless, in the case of projects, models are useful to help us recognise different ways of moving from the project's beginning to its end, and the broad phases where the activities that take place change from one type to another.

There is no single life cycle that applies exactly to all projects but there are enough similarities for me to consider a basic project life cycle, adapted from a five-phase model described by Weiss and Wysocki (1994). In doing so, I have adopted a somewhat different terminology here from that which has been commonly used in the past. The basic project life cycle is shown in Figure 8 as a series of arrows proceeding from definition to closure.

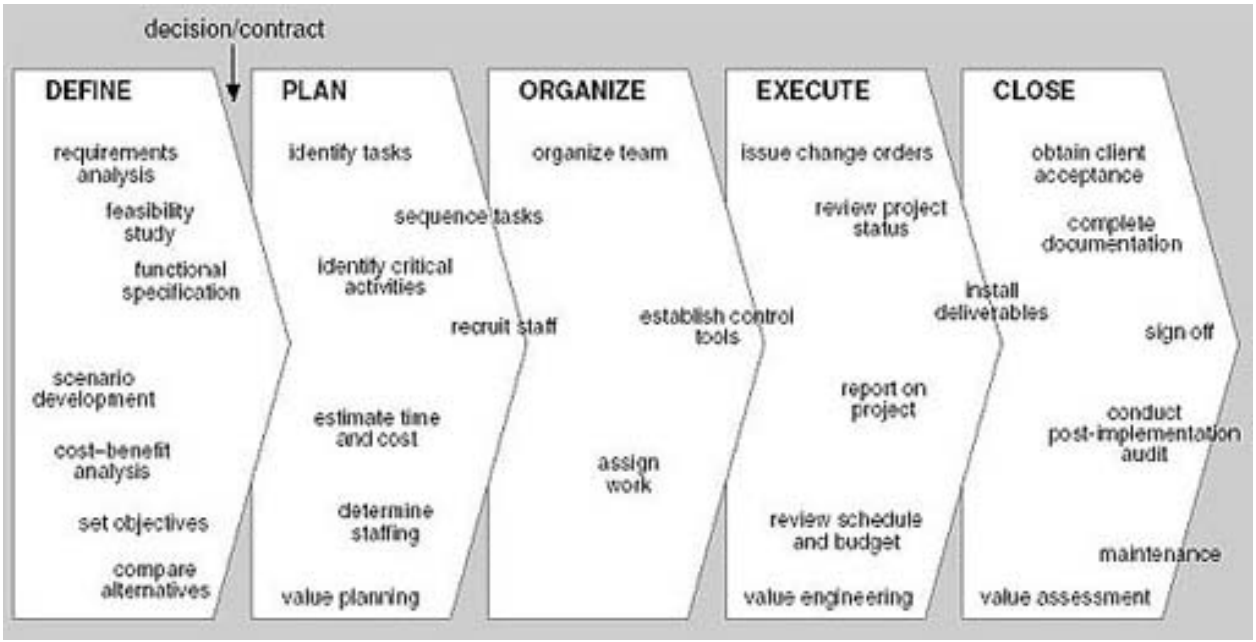

Figure 8 The basic project life cycle

The overlapping areas between the major phases of work in Figure 8 show that the change from one phase to the next is not abrupt: in many projects activities that seem to be part of the planning phase can overlap with activities from the organising phase, and so on.

Proposals are formulated, estimated and tested for feasibility, and sufficient plans are made to enable a 'go/no-go' decision to be made, often in the form of a contract. The decision forms the end of the stage often called the 'definition phase'. Many writers refer to this as the 'feasibility phase'.

Once a decision to go ahead has been made, a project enters a 'planning phase'. Some plans and general costs, of course, will probably have emerged from the definition phase. However, these earlier plans and cost estimates will have been developed simply to enable a decision to be made about whether to pursue the proposal further, not to plan its execution in detail. Much more refined figures are now needed.

The major tasks that must be carried out in the planning phase include:

- task identification and sequencing;
- identification of activities critical to success;
- estimating and budgeting;
- staffing.

By the end of the planning phase, work can begin on the 'organisation phase'. Some or all of this phase may overlap with the planning stage. The aim during the organisation phase is to put in place the teams, controls, tools and communications that will be required for the next phase.

The next phase is 'execution', or 'implementation'. The important activities in this phase are:

- communicating with management, client, users and others;
- reviewing progress;
- monitoring costs;
- controlling quality;
- issuing orders for change;
- managing changes.

This phase comes to a close as the agreed deliverables are installed.

The final stage of the project is the 'closure phase'. The results of the project can then be put into operation.

When there is significant overlap in time between activities in different phases, for example when planning activities continue at the same time as organisation is under way and execution may even have begun, we say that these activities exhibit 'concurrency'. Since changes are an inevitable fact of project life, there will also be times when activities such as estimating or even recruiting or assigning work have to be done again in response to such changes.

4.3 Managing projects and project teams

Projects take place within organisations whose structures, philosophies and cultures affect how work is planned and carried out. I shall briefly discuss organisations and how

they go about planning as they relate to projects. Projects also exist within a social environment consisting of people who are affected by and have an influence on the outcome of projects.

4.3.1 'Players in the game'

A surprisingly large number of people in addition to the project manager and project team members can be involved in one way or another with projects. All of these people are important to some degree either because they are affected by the outcome of the project, or because they can affect its outcome, favourably or adversely. These various 'players' in the project 'game' may only be involved peripherally. It is important to be aware of who all the players are and what role they play in the project's environment.

Most projects will have someone in the role of project 'sponsor'. One definition of this role is:

> The sponsor is the person providing the resources for the project: the person who should be responsible for ensuring that the project is successful at the business or institutional level. [The sponsor's] role, which is akin to the Chairman of the Board, is different from that of project *champion*.
>
> (Morris, 1994).

The project or proposal 'champion' may or may not be the same person as the sponsor. A champion is someone who acts as an advocate for a proposal or project; someone who has the ear of people who are in power and who promotes the cause of the proposal or project. Boddy and Buchanan (1992) use it in the sense of 'cajoling', 'providing support in times of difficulty', or 'pushing changes through'.

A term often used in contracts to signify the person or organisation contracting to obtain professional services is the 'client'. This is the person or organisation in the position of buying the services of a contracting organisation or person. A client may be a sponsor or champion, or those roles may be taken by someone else (or several other people). I will use the term to mean the one who pays for contractual services, even in cases where the contract is an informal one, as it might be, say, between one department and another in the same organisation.

'Customer' is a term similar to 'client'. Its most common meaning is one who buys, but it can also mean a person with whom one has to deal. In talking about quality, it is common to say that it is important to 'keep the customer satisfied' and it is in this sense that I will use this term.

The term 'owner' can be taken to mean something similar to client or customer, though in a legal sense it is much more narrowly defined, where we note problems that may arise with the legal concept of property (that is, ownership). Boddy and Buchanan use the term 'owner' more in the sense of one with an attitude to strong attachment to the aims of a project.

The politics of organisations are such that many people who may not be directly involved with a project nevertheless have an interest in its completion and success. Any such person, whether directly involved or not, can be called a 'stakeholder'. This term includes anyone for whom the success of the project is important in any terms – the project manager, project team members, the sponsor, the champion, the client – for reasons of anticipated increased profitability, job security, financial reward, personal satisfaction or improved working conditions.

4.3.2 Setting goals and objectives

Whatever the structure and culture of an organisation and the range of people involved, goals and objectives are usually seen as a valuable management tool. This is as relevant to a project team as it is to a whole organisation. What I will focus on here are some of the tensions and ambiguities surrounding the management of goals, especially in the context of team development. To be effective in clarifying and achieving the team task, we need to take account of the variety of (often conflicting) purposes served by team goals. We also need to think about the dilemmas associated with goals – the fact, for instance, that they need to provide a clear, measurable framework whilst being flexible and alterable in the light of changing circumstances – or that they need, at the same time, to be both elevating (to give challenge and incentive) and feasible (to provide support and prevent demoralisation resulting from failure). Goals need to provide scope for individual and team development whilst enabling organisational tasks to be achieved.

It is too much to expect that goals will always be clearly identified. Social, economic and political factors may cause sudden changes or force change upon organisations continuously and relentlessly. Team goals should be the foundation for team activities, but major external changes can cause subsidence. Changes in organisational strategy and customer demand may also create sources of uncertainty. Even the work methods followed by teams are not invulnerable to change and uncertainty; technological changes are radically altering the means by which the ends are attained. All organisations are changing or being changed. As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, 'Everything is in a state of flux', and the rate of flux has been very fast in recent decades. So, it may be particularly difficult for teams to set and follow clear goals when they are besieged by external changes.

It is not always easy to distinguish between goals and objectives. Goals usually relate to organisational strategy and reflect a longish term direction for the team. Objectives help to break down these goals into specific, achievable, measurable areas. In this way, objectives point the way to the implementation of strategic goals. There is a comparable problem in the overlap between team goals and the definition and planning of the detailed activities and targets which will be necessary to ensure that the team's task is achieved. Within a framework of commonly-held, over-arching goals, the staff and managers of any dynamic organisation have to develop the capacity for moving beyond a rather mechanistic notion of setting goals and specifying tasks, to a much more fluid way of operating on the basis of having a wide and shifting range of goals within an equally wide and shifting range of teams and purposes.

In this way, when setting appropriate team goals it is important to acknowledge the function of these team goals in mediating between organisational goals on the one hand and individual goals on the other. It is useful to bear in mind that team members have individual goals and hidden agendas. So team members who comply with team goals may agree with them to a greater or lesser extent. Members may secretly disagree with team goals but comply with them for their own reasons. They may need the job to pay the mortgage or they may use the team as a 'can-opener' to further their organisational ambitions. So, there is a crucial political dimension to goals, and a key area to manage in teamwork is the potential clash between team goals and the team members' goals. Team leaders and champions of team ideas should be aware of the concerns and individual goals of less enthusiastic members. More generally, for team effectiveness, it is important that the goals are: achievable; amenable to evaluation; and agreed with, or at least understood by, the team members and their sponsors, whether internal or external to the organisation.

Another approach to assisting teams in accomplishing their tasks is provided by the recent resurgence of interest in extending the autonomy of teams and work groups. In very general terms, this means that the wider employing organisation specifies the required outcomes and the resources available. Within this framework, teams have varying degrees of freedom to determine how to allocate tasks and responsibilities. In some ways, a production environment lends itself most readily to such an approach to teamworking, but the practice is being explored across all industries and sectors at the present time. The process of decentralisation within many departments of both central and local government and the creation of 'internal markets' and systems of contracting within former state bureaucracies are all rooted in such an approach to teams and tasks. Such moves are often associated with the values of empowerment.

There is an enormous variation in the forms of flexible teamworking that exist. On the one hand there are teams with a fairly traditional team leader or project manager who consults with his or her assorted staff about how to achieve a task. On the other hand, there are self-directed or self-managed working groups, in which 'everyone is a manager', and which function with a high level of internal and external autonomy.

4.4 What does a project manager do?

So what is project management and what does a project manager do? Project management involves managing teams of people from different disciplines to achieve unique project objectives. For example, a new product development team may never develop exactly the same product again. However, the competences used in product development may be transferable to other projects.

Project management usually takes place within a constrained environment. Typical factors which impinge on project management include time pressures, competitive market pressures, limited budgets and quality targets. There are, in the case of product development, concerns with product quality, particularly health and safety issues. There are also time pressures associated with bringing out a new product in order to remain competitive.

Belbin (1981) suggests that the quickest and most certain way of changing the fortunes of a firm is to replace the top person. Leading or managing a project team may be equally significant for effectiveness in team operations. Successful team leadership depends on a number of factors: the personality of the team leader and his or her preferred style, the maturity of the team members and their familiarity with the project to be undertaken, as well as the importance and urgency of the task. Team leaders are not concerned with staff simply for the sake of being concerned. Improved standards result from managers being actively concerned with the team's ability to tackle its work competently. *This is because team effectiveness depends on both task- and relationship-oriented behaviours*.

What follows is an outline description of the major areas with which project managers are concerned, and the knowledge, skills and tools that project managers need. Although project management is quite different from line management some issues are very similar, e.g. handling relationships between staff. As noted earlier, projects are designed to change something: the manager must be able to cope with the risk inherent in managing such changes. People working on the project may come from other areas; indeed, they may be contractors or subcontractors or employees of member firms in a consortium.

4.4.1 Task-oriented behaviours

Estimating and planning

The project manager, or someone under his or her direction, has to collect information about what exactly needs to be done and how it is to be organised; how much it will cost and how long it will take; and the interdependencies of various tasks, skills and other resources. The results are a project plan and a project budget.

Assembling a team

A project team can make or break a project. Often the project manager has little say in who works on the project: people with the right skills may not be available. Even if the project manager has a free choice, the pool of people from whom he or she can select is limited. A project manager's skill lies in assembling people and making them into a team – motivating them, managing conflict and ensuring good communication.

Reporting and liaising

The project manager is the spokesperson for the project. It is his or her job to liaise with senior management, clients, regulatory bodies and everyone contributing to the project.

Putting tools in place

A number of tools exist to help manage and control projects, and to undertake estimating and reporting. Specific tools also exist for specific types of projects. The manager has to see that the appropriate tools for the jobs are, or are made, available.

4.4.2 Relationship-oriented behaviours

Managing and coordinating work

Once the project work begins, the project manager's job is to manage the work, and coordinate the efforts of different team members and different bodies within the organisation, in order to achieve the project's objectives.

Managing change

Few projects, if any, work out exactly as they were initially planned. Problems arise that require changes to plans. These may be short term (e.g. delaying a particular task because a necessary material or resource is not available at the right time). They may also be long term (e.g. the users or clients may learn more about the product they will be receiving at the end of the project, or the regulatory, legislative or financial climate in which the project operates may change during the execution of the project). Unless someone – normally the project manager – institutes a formal way of noting, estimating and carrying out approved changes (change control) the project can deteriorate into chaos.

Managing inter-group relationships

No team operates within a vacuum. Teams inevitably have relations with individuals or groups outside the team. The degree to which teams or groups are dependent on each other for achieving their goals has an impact on the potential for competition and conflict. Occasionally, there is no dependency – e.g. where independent branches or subsidiary companies contribute their results to a central pool – and the likelihood of conflict is quite low. The potential for conflict is higher where there is one-way or 'sequential' dependence. Here, one group is dependent on the output of the group which precedes it; without that output, the group cannot move forward. (This is a form of inter-group dependency which is typically found in production processes.) There is an even greater potential for conflict in situations of 'reciprocal' dependence, where all teams are dependent on the others for

successful planning and execution of complex activities. (This is particularly common among management groups and teams.)

Dependence and the potential for conflict in inter-team relationships may well serve to reinforce groupthink, resulting in stereotypes which are stable and resistant to change. Handling such tendencies can be hard for team leaders who, in inter-team situations, find themselves having to manage the interface between their own team and others. As well as all the internal team roles they have to coordinate, they also have to act as external advocate, negotiator and representative. In a sense, they have to look two ways at once – to the interests and concerns of their own team and to those of the other teams. It is not uncommon for team leaders to experience this as a source of role conflict and ambiguity. 'Whose side are you on?' or 'Where do your loyalties really lie?' are the sorts of questions leaders may well encounter in the area of inter-team relationships.

Achieving mutually beneficial and sustainable arrangements between groups often calls for an element of bargaining, compromise or trade-off. To what extent are all the members of our own team obliged to adopt a common front in relationships with other teams? Just as there is a complex pattern of formal and informal relationships and communications within a team, so there are a variety of forms of communication between teams. How do we deal with the fact that the formally-agreed procedures for inter-team working may be at odds with some of the informal relationships between different groups and individuals across team boundaries? Handling such external demands and relationships cannot be divorced from our involvement in internal teambuilding; how we cope with such issues will inevitably impinge on internal team dynamics and processes.

Managing external boundaries

Of course, a team may successfully resolve its own internal conflicts *and* work in relative harmony with other departmental groups, yet still be frustrated in achieving its objectives due to a wider ethos in the organisation or external environment which militates against teamworking. Even the most lively and enterprising teams will eventually wilt if the soil of the wider organisation does not nourish a teamworking approach through its recruitment, induction, development and reward systems.

A team cannot normally control the culture of its organisation, but there remain two important external boundaries that effective teams *can* manage. One is the team's sponsor – the person to whom the team is accountable for its output – and the other is the external environment. An example of what can happen if sponsor expectations are ignored is described in Box 3.1.

Box 3.1 Managing sponsor expectations

If a gap emerges between what the sponsor expects and what the team expects, then problems can arise. The gap can appear for a variety of different reasons, such as the desire of the team to go its own way. It may *emerge*, however, as an accidental by-product of a different set of intentions. In the case of one of our clients, the head office had asked a Project Team to deliver results on an innovative and high profile project, in a very short space of time. In briefing the Project Team, they had also managed to convey to them that they could do pretty much what they liked as long as they produced the results. The Project Team, perhaps alarmed at the seriousness of the directive but also hearing correctly the underlying message about the importance of the project, acted accordingly. It started to borrow resources and spend unauthorised budgets in order to get the job done; both parties ended up bewildered and frustrated. The head office sponsors reacted badly because they claimed that they had never given their express permission for some of the

spending and what they saw as the commandeering of resources. With equal indignation the Project Team claimed that it had responded very responsibly by making every effort to ensure that it delivered the end product.

(Chaudhry-Lawton et al., 1992, pp. 290–1)

Chaudhry-Lawton et al. (1992) go on to describe some troubleshooting techniques to avoid problems arising from mismanagement of external boundaries. Team members need to have and use knowledge of changing situations and pressures both inside and outside the team. These may be related to social, environmental, financial or business changes that directly or indirectly affect the team's area of work. This might require the naturally curious 'resource investigators' on the team to be encouraged to scan the environment on behalf of the team. Key skills here are *questioning, networking, connecting seemingly unrelated data, political sensitivity* and the ability to *interpret the strategic intention* of your own and other organisations. In many respects the skills required for managing external boundaries are those of analysis and judgement rather than practical performance. Team development depends on successfully spotting straws in the wind which may signal major shifts and new trends. There is an important role for a judicious mixture of opportunism and informed hunches. Your value to your team will not just rest on your rational capabilities and the sensitivity of your practice; it will be enhanced by an ability to 'read the situation', look afresh at routine information and make creative use of internal and external opportunities and potential. Like many facets of the management role, really effective teambuilding – even the analysis of external trends – is more of an art than a science.

4.5 Conclusions

1 There are many different types of projects; all have specific objectives, constraints (such as budgets and schedules) and a group or team responsible for the completion of the project.

2 Project teams are effective when both task and relationship behaviours are competently handled. The main task-oriented behaviours are:
   - estimating and planning;
   - assembling a team;
   - reporting and liaising;
   - putting tools into place.

3 The main relationship-oriented behaviours are:
   - managing and coordinating work;
   - managing change;
   - managing inter-group relationships;
   - managing external boundaries.

SAQ 8

Consider the following task statements and decide which form of organisation would be most appropriate for managing them. Where possible, briefly state the reason(s) for your choice.

(a) Processing applications for study with the Open University.

(b) Determining an information systems strategy for an organisation.

(c) Changing over the production lines in a pharmaceutical production/packing company each weekend.

(d) Designing and developing a new pharmaceutical production line.

(e) Installing a new production line in a pharmaceutical company.

(f) Improving the methods of course production in the Open University.

(g) Formulating a new suntan cream.

(h) Writing computer programs for a budgetary control system.

(i) Designing and implementing a new budgetary control system.

Answer

(a) Functionally arranged organisational hierarchy: clearly this is a set of routine functions with no project characteristics.

(b) Project (single) team structure: inputs to formulating the strategy would be needed from various user areas, plus professional and technical inputs. (For a relatively small organisation a matrix structure might be used.)

(c) Functional: while change-over work might well be done in teams, the operation is routine. Elements which could be passed from one functional area to another are: production planning; engineering (fitters); engineering (electrical); and manufacturing/production.

(d) Matrix project (possibly project (single) team): clearly this is a project because it is unique, but similar production lines will have been developed in the past. Significant inputs from various different specialists at different stages would be needed, suggesting a matrix project structure is most likely.

(e) Functional, probably with a project manager or coordinator: installing production lines will happen quite often in this industry, but the work will be the responsibility (almost entirely) of one department: engineering. This suggests using the existing functional organisation, but the work will need some coordination. If a new process, as well as new equipment, were involved a project organisation would be more likely.

(f) This could be either a functional or matrix project. Making incremental improvements would be the responsibility of the various line managers for the different functions involved; however, if new systems or radical change were involved a project structure would be needed – probably of a matrix type because of the various different professional interests (academics, editors, TV producers, etc.).

(g) Functional: formulating the suntan cream would, most likely, take place exclusively in the research and development department (with some marketing department input).

(h) Functional, possibly with baton-pass, or with a project manger or coordinator if this is part of a wider project. The question did not mention a new system, so the straightforward computerisation of an existing system with known requirements is implied – hence the choice of a functional approach.

(i) Project (single) team or matrix: a new system is being devised requiring various user and professional inputs (suggesting full project structure) but perhaps at different stages or to different degrees (suggesting a matrix).

SAQ 9

Based on the characteristics of projects, and from your own experience, draw up a table contrasting project management with operations management.

Answer

Project management	**Operations management**
Significant change	Any changes are small and evolutionary
Limited in time and scope	Never-ending
Unique	Repetitive
Resources transient	Resources stable
Goal-oriented management	Role-oriented management
Transient	Stable
Attempt to balance performance, time and budget	Performance, time and budget usually fixed and balanced
Need to balance objectives	Management generally in a state of equilibrium
More exciting (perhaps!)	'Steady as she goes' feel

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5 Reading 4 Leadership

5.1 The leader's role

This reading is concerned with the relationship between the leader and his or her subordinates and the effectiveness of different approaches to this relationship.

First I will examine the leader's role, in an attempt to answer the question of why we need leaders. Then I will examine the issue of authority, and the tensions and potential conflicts that relate to this issue. Next, I will consider some of the theories that have been put forward about leadership. What makes a leader? What makes one leader more effective than another? Are leaders born or made? Can anyone learn how to be a leader? Though there are no simple answers to these questions, the discussion gives some useful insights into the complex nature of leadership.

In the traditional hierarchical organisation, run according to scientific management principles, the leader's role was clear. It was to plan, monitor and control – in general to get people to behave so as to further the organisation's aims. In more democratic organisations the role of the leader changes. Indeed, some people question why groups of well-motivated and knowledgeable people need a leader at all.

Yet, it is a common experience that when a group of people get together in order to perform a task, some form of leadership pattern tends to emerge spontaneously. It may not involve someone being called 'leader', 'manager' or whatever – labels such as: coordinator, facilitator, representative, chairperson, etc. may be used, or there may be no label used at all. It may also involve more than one person, perhaps with different parts of the role being split between different people or moving from person to person. Nevertheless, the leadership function still tends to be filled, whether or not the group formally recognises it. Indeed it is possible to have a group that shows a severe conflict between a conscious denial of the validity of the leadership on ideological grounds, combined with an unconscious need for a leadership function, leading to a high level of insecurity, even paranoia, coupled with a low level of effectiveness.

Leadership roles are, of course, an important issue in gender politics. It is often argued that the hierarchical, leader-oriented structures tend to be emphasised in male-dominated societies, while women tend to prefer flatter, network-based structures.

Certainly, in more democratic organisations, the leader's role tends to retain the functions of integrating, organising, coordinating and representing the group, but changes from supervising to facilitating. It is possible for the role of leader to be shared; indeed it is unlikely that any one individual will have all the necessary skills to meet all of a group's demands all of the time. However, for a group to function effectively, it is necessary for all aspects of the leadership role to be fulfilled. It is also worth emphasising that most leadership roles require the individual involved to serve the group, not to control or dominate it. For example, chairpersons are required to put aside their own interests in meetings and pay full attention to the discussion, so as to be able to pull points together, sense when the discussion is getting bogged down and recognise when a conclusion has been reached: if they were to focus their energies on imposing their own solutions or conclusions, they would be failing in their role as leaders.

Adair (1983) sees the role of the leader as composed of three overlapping areas of responsibility: achieving the task, building and maintaining the team, and developing the individual (see Figure 9). The first responsibility of the leader, according to Adair, is to define the objectives to achieve the task, to focus and coordinate team effort. Building and maintaining the team involves fostering constructive relationships between team members. Developing the individual includes assigning personal goals that suit the

strengths and skills of the individual, and ensuring that each member feels that his or her contribution to the team's overall task is valued.

Figure 9 The leader's role

The tensions involved in a group between the need for the leadership role to be filled and the desire for democracy are well illustrated in Box 4.1. This is an extract from a study of the relationships between members of a particularly intensive and specialised form of work group, the string quartet. The study examined the characteristics that distinguish the more successful from the less successful groups. It concluded that the best groups were those with leaders who accepted their leadership responsibilities but recognised the vital contribution of each member of the group, and led with a light touch. This conclusion supports the point made at the end of the last paragraph but one, that the leader's role is usually to serve rather than dominate the group.

Box 4.1 The string quartet

String quartets are particularly intense work groups. Members are reciprocally inter-dependent using each other's outputs as their own inputs, and vice versa. Their

interdependence is also complete and immediate. Their work is done only as a unit; they cannot perform a string-quartet composition without all of the members working together simultaneously. They are artists who collaborate; they must simultaneously devote their concentration to their own and to each other's playing.

A string quartet is composed of two violinists, a viola player, and a cellist; their collective task is to reach a high level of coordinated sound … The first violinist is the musical leader of the quartet … The first violinists' parts are usually the most difficult … Among the four players, he or she gets the most attention and acclaim; many quartets, for example, are named after their first violinists …

While traditional string-quartet pieces demand that the first violin [dominates] the music, they also require a complementary but nevertheless engaging sound from the second violinist. For a quartet to do well, the second violinist cannot get lost in the background. The viola player teams with the second violinist to form the 'middle' of the quartet … The cellist is literally and figuratively the base of the group, laying the foundation above which the tonally higher strings can shine … The best quartets ask each player to have a soloist's skills but not a soloist's temperament.

All string quartets face two conflicting facts: (1) Quartet music typically gives the lead (i.e. most of the good music) to the first violinist; and (2) the players reported that they joined the quartet to have a voice in how they play. Members of orchestras, for instance, are bound by the conductor's decisions. Each member of a string quartet, however, can theoretically have one-fourth of the input in musical and business decisions. Members share equally in their concert fees and expect to share equally in intragroup influence. At the same time, the first violinist has most of the musical opportunities and responsibilities in traditional compositions. This also extends to the group's everyday business interactions: since first violinists are the most well-known and recognised members of each quartet, they are often pressed to act as the group's primary speaker and public relations person …

Most quartet members used the words 'leader' and 'first violinist' almost interchangeably. All of the top groups recognised that their task demanded a leader and that that person was naturally the first violinist. Many first violinists explicitly recognised the leader-democracy paradox … members of the top groups either acknowledged both sides of the paradox or viewed the situation as being very democratic. One second fiddle said, 'He does dominate; he's an extrovert anyway. He likes central attention. And obviously that's very good for a first fiddle.' A little later in the same interview he said, *'We're* fairly equal as far as decisions.' A cellist described the paradox metaphorically, emphasising democracy: 'I'm sometimes the father and sometimes the son. I think we all are.'

The more successful British string quartets provided clear evidence that they recognised and managed the inherent paradoxes they faced. All of the groups except one espoused democracy. First violinists in the successful groups, however, recognised the need for a directive leader more than first violinists in the less successful groups. They took active control of many of the group's activities and acknowledged this in their interviews. They did not advertise their leadership, however, within their group. Instead, they advocated democratic action and, it appears, did so sincerely. Thus, they preserved the leader-democracy paradox by acting as a leader while simultaneously advocating democracy.

Other members of more successful quartets attributed more influence to the first violin when they were asked directly about it; they also stressed that their group was democratic. Inconsistent perceptions were adaptive: By ignoring or distorting the objective reality of the first violinist's influence, they felt that they had an equal say. In the less successful groups,

members felt that democracy ruled too much: Everyone but the first violinist looked for more leadership and authoritative action …

If the paradox-management tactics of string quartets are [more generally] applicable, they would include … leading quietly. Espousing democracy may be the philosophical basis for participative decision making; at the same time, groups typically need leaders … Having a member [fulfil] the leadership role while others simultaneously feel that they have an equal say in things effectively satisfied both sides of the leader-democracy paradox.

(Murnighan and Conlan, 1991)

5.2 Leaders and authority

Achieving an appropriate balance between autocratic and democratic leadership is no easy task, as this quote by McGregor illustrates:

> I believed, for example, that a leader could operate successfully as a kind of advisor to his organisation. I thought I could avoid being a 'boss' … I thought that maybe I could operate so that everyone would like me – that 'good human relations' would eliminate all discord and disagreement. I couldn't have been more wrong. It took a couple of years, but I finally began to realise that a leader cannot avoid the exercise of authority any more than he can avoid the responsibility for what happens to his organisation.
>
> (Douglas McGregor, founder of the 'Human Relations' movement; quoted in Handy, 1993)

Much of people's suspicion of the idea of leadership stems from a confusion between 'authority' and 'authoritarian'. What most people seem to want is to reject authoritarian leadership, but not be left in the mess that denying any form of leadership creates. The problem is how to throw away the 'dirty bath water' and keep the 'baby'. This is not a trivial problem because in our culture there has been a long association between leadership and authoritarianism. Tell someone that he or she is the leader and they immediately presume that they have to tell other people what to do or to control others. What is more, if we tell a group of people that this person is going to be their leader then they expect to be told what to do and to be controlled. This reflects one of the strongest sets of expectations that operate in all sorts of organisations. The expectations are largely a result of the way that we are all treated as children, especially at school. With a few exceptions, most schools operate on authoritarian assumptions, and these are the assumptions about all sorts of authority that we carry into adult life. The extract in Box 4.2 reinforces this point.

Box 4.2 Becoming a leader

Becoming a group leader almost inevitably brings about significant changes in our relationships with group members. People who previously reacted to you as a peer or friend suddenly have altered their posture towards you. You're 'up there' and they're now 'below' you; they 'report to you'; you're 'in charge'.

Even if you were brought in from the outside to be made the leader of your group, be prepared to encounter a wide range of unfavourable responses – suspicion, distrust,

hostility, subservience, passive resistance, insecurity. And don't overlook the possibility that someone might even like to see you fall flat on our face in your new job!

People come naturally to these built-in patterns of negative responses: they learned them when they were children. The leader 'inherits' each group member's 'inner child of the past'. For each of us has a past history of being a child, intimately involved in multiple relationships with a variety of adults: parents, grandparents, schoolteachers, coaches, scout leaders, piano teachers, school principals, and of course the infamous assistant principal. All these adults had power and authority over us when we were youngsters, and most of them used it frequently. All children try out different behaviours to cope with these 'authority figures'. Some of their coping mechanisms prove effective, some ineffective. Those that work get used again and again, and so become habitual responses to all other adults who try to control and dominate them.

These coping mechanisms are seldom discarded when children pass into adolescence, or when they enter adulthood. They remain an integral part of the adult personality, to be called upon (or unconsciously triggered) whenever [he or she] enters a relationship with someone holding power or authority. So all adults in a very real sense [harbour] an 'inner child of the past' that will strongly influence how they react to leaders.

When thrust into each new relationship with an authority figure, people naturally employ those same coping mechanisms that were built in by habitual use throughout their lifetime. This is why a leader inherits the inner child of the past of each of his or her group members.

(Gordon, 1977)

5.2.1 Providing evaluative feedback

One of the roles of a leader is to provide group members with feedback on their performance. This is often an uncomfortable process for both the leader and the recipient. The main reason for this is a failure by both parties adequately to distinguish between the individual and what is being evaluated. When criticism is carelessly given, it is easy for the recipient to take it as an attack on his or her self-esteem. The result is that the recipient resists the feedback and responds in a defensive manner. The leader expects a defensive reaction (after all that's what has happened on all previous occasions) and so expresses his or her criticisms strongly so as to get through the layer of defensiveness. It's an example of the 'self-sealing' process in which one assumes something about others and then collects evidence to confirm it. The way out is for the leader to adopt the attitude that it is his or her responsibility to enable group members to do their job as effectively as possible and to enter the conversation with the attitude of wanting to help rather than wanting to criticise. Similarly, the individual group member can enter the conversation expecting to learn how to do his or her job more effectively, which is potentially a way of enhancing, not diminishing, self-esteem.

5.2.2 Owning problems

Problem ownership is a tricky issue. It's also an issue that good leaders get right instinctively, and poor leaders get wrong consistently. The point is that there are two distinct classes of problems faced by leaders. The first consists of problems which are owned by the group members. Examples include when some additional resources are required, when instructions are not understood or when members complain that something is wrong. Under these conditions the leader's function is to provide problem-

solving skills or to represent the members' interests in some other forum. The leader is clearly serving the needs of the members. The second consists of problems which are owned by the leader. This is the set that is usually mishandled, because many leaders, acting on the authoritarian principle, use their position to blame subordinates for their own problems. Examples of a leader's problem include when the leader fails to meet a production target, when the leader regards the behaviour of a group member as unacceptable or when someone in another department won't give the leader the extra resources he or she wants. The key to the ownership of problems is 'who is it that is bothered?' or 'who is it who says that there's a problem?'.

Where a problem is clearly owned by the leader, then any attempt on the part of the leader to force group members to change their behaviour so as to solve the problem will be accurately perceived by the group as authoritarian. (A good definition of authoritarian behaviour is that it occurs whenever a person tries to solve one of his or her problems by trying to change someone else, or what someone else does.) This means that it will meet opposition and provoke the sort of parent–child transactions which prevent effective working. Effective leaders avoid this situation by using a very simple device: they accept responsibility for their problems. What this means is that when they set about tackling their problems, they do not attribute them to someone else. For example, where an authoritarian leader might say, 'Things have got to change in this department because you didn't meet the production standards last quarter!', the effective leader might say, 'I have a problem. I was hauled over the coals this morning because the production figures weren't up to the target I agreed to meet last quarter'. The effective leader makes the ownership of the problem clear and invites group members to cooperate and contribute to its solution. It is a strong characteristic of this sort of statement that it begins with 'I' and continues to refer to 'I', whereas the authoritarian statements are usually focused on 'you'.

5.3 Leadership theories

Many theories about leadership tend to focus on the question 'What is it that makes one leader more effective than another?' The hope is that by observing carefully enough how successful leaders operate, it will be possible to arrive at a theory which will either enable others to be more effective leaders, or at least enable organisations to select better leaders. These theories of leadership fall into three broad categories: trait theories, style theories and contingency theories. I'll examine each of these in turn.

5.3.1 Trait theories

Trait theories are based on the assumption that the determining factor in an effective leader is a set of personal characteristics. It is also assumed that the way to discover these characteristics is to study successful leaders and determine which characteristics they have in common. However, despite innumerable studies, only about 5 per cent of the characteristics identified in successful leaders have been found to be widely shared. Of these, three stand out as significant:

- above average intelligence, but not at the level of a genius;
- initiative – a combination of independence, inventiveness and an urge to get things done;
- self-assurance – a blend of self-confidence, self-esteem and high personal expectations.

Clearly, while these are important characteristics, they do not provide the clear-cut distinction between good and bad leaders sought by the theory. (Such a distinction may, in fact, be unattainable.) There are also significant exceptions: some individuals with all three characteristics are ineffective leaders, and some who lack these characteristics are very effective leaders. Despite these criticisms, trait theories continue to influence, albeit implicitly, many organisational procedures for selecting leaders.

5.3.2 Style theories

Style theories are based on the assumption that it is the style of leadership that matters. The alternative styles are generally phrased in terms of 'task centred' or 'person centred'; these have also been called 'structuring' and 'supporting' styles, corresponding roughly to the 'scientific' and 'social relations' styles of management.

The leadership styles are not mutually exclusive and can be represented in the form of a grid, as in Figure 10. Thus it is possible for an individual to be strongly person centred or strongly task centred or both, or neither of these. Although leaders may change from one style to another, they tend to adopt a preferred style.

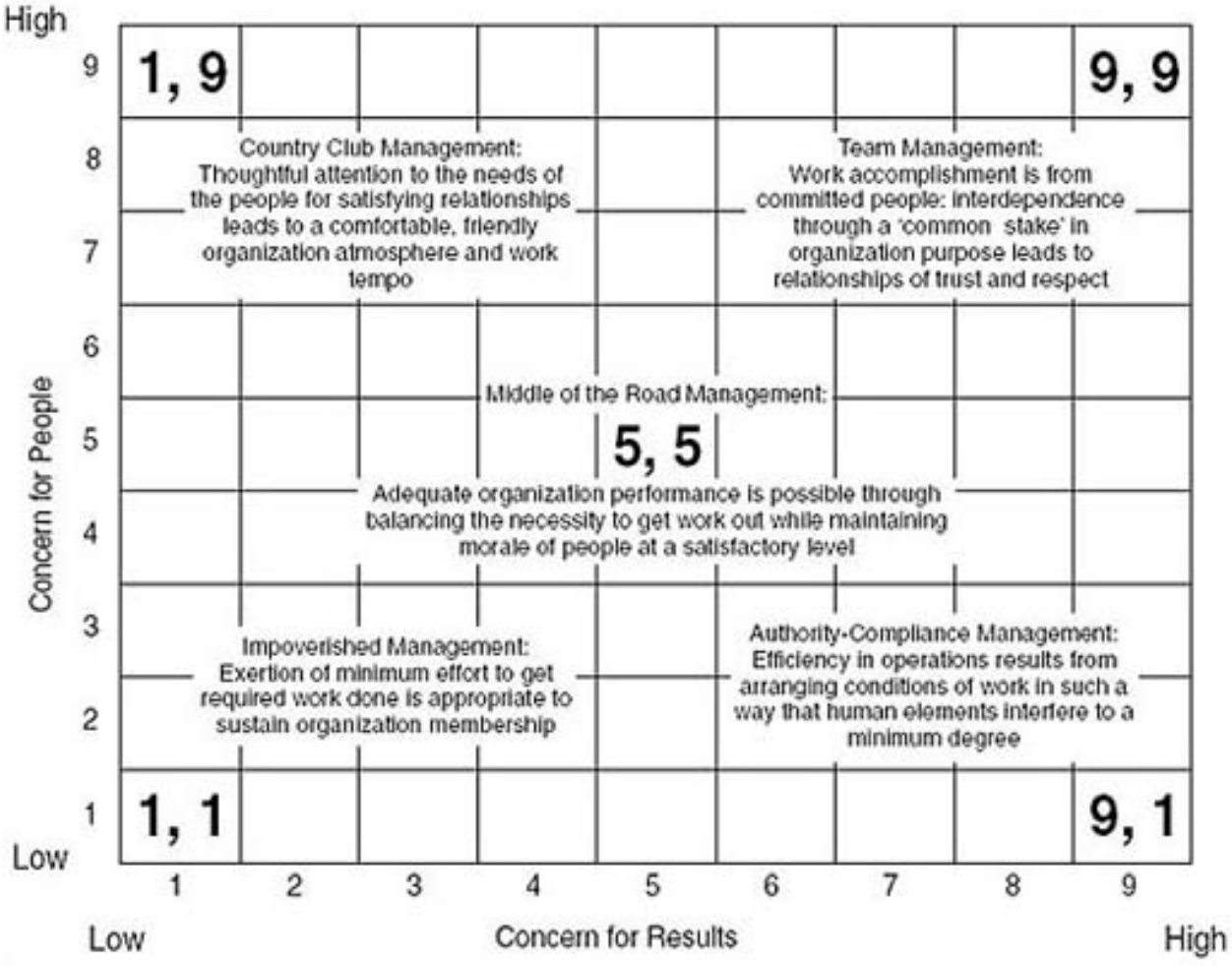

Figure 10 The dimensions of leadership style (from Blake and Mouton, 1964)

Leaders high on task orientation are generally perceived as more efficient, while those high on person orientation are seen as providing a more pleasant and satisfying work environment. It has been argued that the person-centred style is more effective because it

enables people to meet their self-actualising and esteem needs. However, it has been found that whilst the supportive style of leadership leads to greater subordinate satisfaction, lower grievance rates and less conflict, the gain in productivity is not substantial.

This finding begs the question of what the criteria for assessing effective leadership should be. This is a question that is rarely discussed. The most widely used criterion, although it is usually implied rather than explicitly stated, is whether or not there is a significant increase in productive output, or efficiency, of the group that the leader is responsible for. Naturally this is a very important outcome, but it is certainly not the only one.

Indeed, to place great emphasis on productive efficiency as the criterion for success means that the evaluation of the theories is being done from a task-oriented perspective. This clearly undervalues the person-oriented approach, which by its own criteria values the satisfaction of the workers as much as, or more than, the productive output.

5.3.3 Contingency theories

Contingency theories are based on the idea that there is no single best style of leadership but that the most effective style depends upon the circumstances. The aspects of the circumstances identified as significant are:

- the leader's characteristics and style (thus absorbing the two earlier theories).
- the subordinates' expectations and experience.
- the nature of the task and the organisational environment.

For example, Fiedler's contingency theory (Fiedler, 1967) focuses on the degree of structuring in the task and the leader's organisational power (i.e. the power to reward and punish). He finds that where the task is highly structured, and the leader liked, trusted and powerful, then the most effective leadership style is a directive, task-oriented style. Similarly, where the task is ambiguous and the leader is in a weak position, then the same directive, task-oriented style is most effective. In intermediate situations where the task is ambiguous and the leader liked and respected, then a participative, person-centred style is found to be most effective. These findings are summarised in Figure 11.

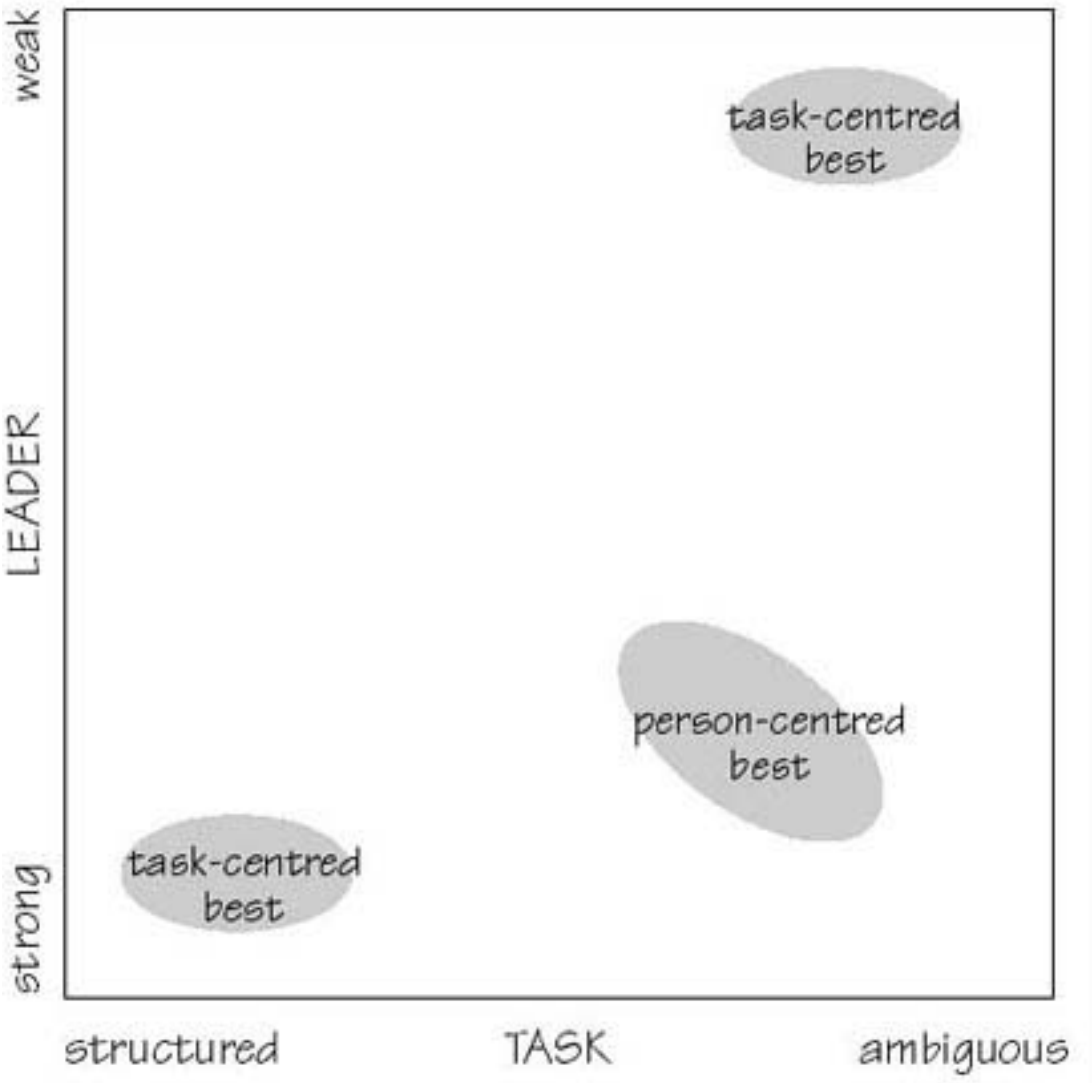

Figure 11 A summary of Fiedler's results on which leadership style is most effective

Other theories in this category focus on other aspects of the context; however, they have the same sort of structure, namely recommending different styles of leadership in different contexts.

5.3.4 Leadership theory summary

This brief review of leadership theories has indicated that there are no simple answers to what it is that makes some leaders more effective than others, and no single best leadership style or approach. What matters is that the style adopted should fit with the expectations of those being led and be consistent with the task at hand (that is, it should not ignore the specific characteristics of the task itself).

There are no simple answers, which is perhaps why this continues to be the subject of lively debate.

5.4 Conclusions

5.4.1 Leadership roles

- The classic 'scientific' view of the leader is as the central 'controller' – planning, monitoring and regulating.
- The more 'democratic' view sees the role as facilitator, or coordinator.
- The more 'educational' view sees it as that of adviser, teacher, source of expertise, etc.
- Adair identified three overlapping areas: achieving the task, building and maintaining the team, and developing individuals.

5.4.2 Leadership expectations

- Largely because of expectations created in childhood (our 'inner child of the past'), we have many unconscious expectations of leaders, and may well harbour resentments, anxieties, suspicions, subservience, passive resistances and attitudes to leadership that have little relationship to current adult realities.
- The leader needs to be able to manage these feelings and his or her own responses to them.
- Leaders will tend to emerge in any group or team situation, and denial of this need can often create problems.

5.4.3 Two key leadership activities

- Providing feedback: giving evaluative feedback so that it is experienced as helpful rather than destructive.
- Problem ownership: the importance of accepting responsibility for our own problems, rather than blaming others.

5.4.4 Theories of leadership

- Trait theories see leadership as requiring certain personal characteristics.
- Style theories see leadership as the adoption of certain styles of interaction: e.g. task-centred (or structuring) leadership and person-centred (or supporting) leadership.
- Contingency theories argue that different circumstances demand different modes of leadership.

SAQ 10

For each of the following situations identify the owner of the problem (either the leader, or the subordinate, or others).

(a) Jane works too slowly and holds up the work of the department.

(b) Howard finds it difficult to do his job because his boss doesn't tell him things he needs to know.

(c) Mary is always late for meetings.

(d) You are dismayed because John is curt and often impolite in handling telephone calls with clients.

(e) The department is unable to meet its production targets because the purchasing department does not order components early enough.

Answer

(a) The leader's problem.

(b) The subordinate's, i.e. Howard's, problem.

(c) It depends on who is bothered by it. Lateness is usually the leader's problem.

(d) Your problem. (The clients may not notice.)

(e) The whole department's problem.

If you got some of these wrong, remember that the owner of a problem is the person (or group) who wants the problem solved; (c) was ambiguous: Is it Mary? her boss? or the group members who want the lateness to be solved?

The difficulty with learning this distinction is that we were all taught the opposite in situations where we were subject to authoritarian leadership. The authoritarian leader makes others change to solve his or her problems (and may also claim ownership of others' problems in return).

SAQ 11

For each of the situations described in SAQ 10construct an appropriate statement of the problem by its owner, phrased so that the ownership is clearly acknowledged in it.

Answer

Appropriate responses are those which show that the person who feels there is a problem accepts responsibility for the problem. For example:

(a) I have a problem with your rate of work since it appears to me that it is affecting departmental output.

(b) I haven't been given the information I need to know how to do this job.

(c) If it is the leader's (or other group members') problem: I would like to discuss the timing of meetings since I dislike waiting for others to arrive after the agreed time. If it is Mary's problem: I find it difficult to keep appointments and to arrive punctually.

(d) I am dismayed at the way you (John) talk to our customers since I fear you will put them off.

(e) We cannot meet our targets because the components aren't here on time.

SAQ 4.3

For each of the following situations indicate which leadership style you consider to be the most appropriate. Also make notes on the reasons for your choice.

(a) Chair of an Open University course team. The team has eight members who will work closely together for a period of at least three years on the development of a new course. A lot of the business of meetings involves commenting on each other's drafts of course units, but there is also pressure for the team to meet publishing deadlines.

(b) The manager of an 'instant' print shop which employs three other people. The success of the business depends upon being able to complete each job in the shortest possible time.

(c) The manager of a department store who has just moved to a branch which has been making a loss for several years. Unless the branch can be made profitable, it will be closed down.

Answer

(a) Chair of an Open University course team: the ideal chair would be someone who combined person-centred and task-centred approaches. A person-centred style is important because of the high *degree* of collaboration between creative individuals which is required. Also commenting on each other's work requires some sort of personal support in order to avoid defensiveness. But a task-centred approach is also necessary because there is a succession of deadlines to be met.

(b) Manager of an 'instant' print shop: here the success of the business hinges on getting the task done quickly, so a task-centred style is most appropriate.

(c) Manager of a branch of a department store: it largely depends on why the branch has been making a loss. If the problems are to do with people and relationships, or the quality of service, a person-centred approach will probably be the best. But if the problems are mainly to do with marketing or the lack of it, or branch layout or stock then a task-centred approach may be more appropriate.

References for Reading 4

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