

 chapter one

# Do Teams Work?

*There is no hope for creating a better world without a deeper scientific insight in the function of leadership and culture, and of other essentials of group life.*

**Lewin, 1951, p. 169**

 **key learning points:**

- The organizational benefits of team working
- The drawbacks of working in teams – effort, decision making, and creativity
- Teams defined and types of teams
- Tasks for teams
- How to build an effective team
- How to measure team performance

To live, work, and play in human society is to cooperate with others. We express both our collective identity and our individuality in groups and organizations. We have, throughout our history, lived, loved, raised our young, and worked together in groups (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Our common experiences of living and working together bind us with each other and with our predecessors. It is precisely because human beings have learned to work cooperatively together that we have made such astonishing progress as a species. By mapping the human genome we have discovered the underlying biochemical processes that make us what we are. And we have explored the beginnings and the outer limits of our universe. These extraordinary accomplishments have been accomplished largely by teams, and by teams of teams. When we work cooperatively we accomplish infinitely more than if we work individually. This is the principle of group synergy – that the

contribution of the whole group is greater than the sum of its individual members' contributions.

Today we face new demands that make cooperative work in teams more vital and more challenging. To meet the pressures of the global marketplace, organizations are moving away from rigid hierarchical structures to more organic flexible forms. Teams are developing and marketing products, solving production problems, and creating corporate strategy. Managers are experimenting with participation, high-commitment organizations, self-managing work teams, employee-management cooperation, and gainsharing programs. These innovations all involve the explicit use of teams to accomplish central organizational tasks. The team rather than the individual is increasingly considered the basic building block of organizations.

Teamwork is spilling out across organizational and national boundaries. Many manufacturers form teams with suppliers to boost quality, reduce costs, and assure continuous improvement. International alliances are becoming the accepted way to participate in the global marketplace. American and Japanese automakers and other traditional competitors have developed a wide variety of cooperative strategies. Increasingly, people with different organizational and national loyalties from diverse cultural backgrounds and with unequal status are asked to work together. And teams from commercial organizations are linking with those from universities to develop exciting, useful, and radical innovations (West, Tjosvold, & Smith, 2003). Why are they doing this?

In many areas of human activity and endeavor, research has shown how team working can lead to greater efficiency or effectiveness (Weldon & Weingart, 1994). In hard rock mining the introduction of team goals leads to greater quantity of rocks mined. In work safety studies, the introduction of team goals and training sees an increase in safe work behavior. In my work in a coal mining team, I was struck by the fact that it was the team that managed safety by exerting pressure to ensure we all worked in a way that minimized the likelihood of injury. In a study of timber harvesting the introduction of team goals led to a higher output rate; in restaurant services the introduction of team working for staff was associated with higher customer ratings of service quality, comfort, and cleanliness; in an insurance company, increased compliance with a 24-hour reporting standard was found after the introduction of team working; and in truck loading and unloading, truck turnaround time was reduced after the introduction of a team goal (Weldon & Weingart, 1994). Studies in health care have repeatedly shown that better patient care

is provided when health professionals work together in multidisciplinary teams (Borrill, West, Shapiro, & Rees, 2000). And the more team working there is in hospitals, the lower the level of patient mortality (West et al., 2002). There is accumulating evidence that when students work in cooperative groups rather than individually, they work harder, help less able group members, and learn more (Slavin, 1983). And not without good reason. It is by working together and pooling our resources (knowledge, abilities, experience, time, money etc.) that we can most effectively accomplish our shared goals.

## ◆ Why Work in Teams?

Why do people work in teams in modern organizations, and what evidence is there for their value? As organizations have grown in size and become structurally more complex, the need for groups of people to work together in coordinated ways to achieve objectives which contribute to the overall aims of the organization has become increasingly urgent. Trying to coordinate the activities of individuals in large organizations is like building a sandcastle using single grains of sand.

Here are the reasons for implementing team-based working in organizations:

- Teams are the best way to *enact organizational strategy*, because of the need for consistency between rapidly changing organizational environments, strategy, and structure. Team-based organizations, with their flat structures, can respond quickly and effectively in the fast-changing environments most organizations now encounter (Cohen & Bailey, 1997).
- Teams enable organizations to *develop and deliver products and services* quickly and cost effectively. Teams can work faster and more effectively with members working in parallel and interdependently whereas individuals working serially are much slower.
- Teams *enable organizations to learn* (and retain learning) more effectively. When one team member leaves, the learning of the team is not lost. Team members also learn from each other during the course of team working.
- Cross-functional teams promote *improved quality management*. By combining team members' diverse perspectives, decision making is comprehensive because team members question ideas and decisions about how best to provide products and services to

clients. Diversity, properly processed, leads to high quality decision making and innovation (West, 2002).

- Cross-functional design teams can undertake *radical change*. The breadth of perspective offered by cross-functional teams produces the questioning and integration of diverse perspectives that enables teams to challenge basic assumptions and make radical changes to improve their products, services, and ways of working.
- *Time is saved* if activities, formerly performed sequentially by individuals, can be performed concurrently by people working in teams.
- *Innovation is promoted* within team-based organizations because of cross-fertilization of ideas.
- *Flat organizations can be coordinated* and directed more effectively if the functional unit is the team rather than the individual.
- As organizations have grown more complex, so too have their information-processing requirements; *teams can integrate and link* in ways individuals cannot to ensure that information is processed effectively in the complex structures of modern organizations.
- An analysis of the combined results of 131 studies of organizational change found that interventions with the largest *effects upon financial performance* were team development interventions or the creation of autonomous work groups (see Macy & Izumi, 1993).
- *Change is effective* when multiple elements of change are made simultaneously in technology, human resource management systems, and organizational structure, and team working is already present or a component of the change.
- Applebaum and Batt (1994) reviewed 12 large-scale surveys and 185 case studies of managerial practices. They concluded that team-based working led to improvements in organizational performance on measures both of *efficiency and quality*.
- Staff who work in teams report higher levels of *involvement and commitment*, and studies also show that they have *lower stress* levels than those who do not work in teams.
- *Creativity and innovation* are promoted within team-based organizations through the cross-fertilization of ideas (see West, Tjosvold, & Smith, 2003).

Although team working can be effective for all the reasons listed above, it is not the case that the introduction of team working is inevitably successful. Simply relabeling a department in an organization as a “team” does not lead to team working. It may well lead to

decreased effectiveness, innovation, and satisfaction. We have to learn the skills of working in teams, yet our educational systems emphasize individual working almost to the exclusion of team working. There are also many barriers to effective team working which team members must learn to overcome or avoid if they are to succeed in achieving synergy – the added advantage of working in teams over and above the outputs from individuals working alone (Brown, 2000). What are these barriers and how can we overcome them?

## ◆ Barriers to Effective Teamwork

### *Loss of effort*

In the 1890s, French agricultural engineer Max Ringelmann explored whether individuals working alone were more effective than those working in teams. He instructed agricultural students to pull on a rope attached to a dynamometer and measured the amount of pull. Working alone, the average student could pull a weight of 85 kg. Ringelmann then arranged the students in teams of seven and instructed them to pull on the rope as hard as possible. The average pull for a team of seven was 450 kg. The teams were pulling only 75 percent as hard as the aggregated work of seven individuals pulling alone (for more detail see Kravitz & Martin, 1986).

Further research has involved teams solving cognitive problems such as how to transport sheep and wolves safely across a river in a single boat. It showed that although teams took longer than individuals did, overall they were better at achieving correct solutions. Other tasks involved “20 questions” games. Here a particular object is selected and players have to guess what the object is by asking up to 20 questions, to which they are given only a “yes” or “no” answer. Teams were slightly more effective than individuals in getting the correct solution within their 20 questions, but much less efficient in terms of time use. Individuals took, on average, five person minutes to come up with the correct solution. Teams of two took seven person minutes (i.e. 3.5 minutes in real time) and teams of four, 12 person minutes (three minutes in real time). There were no differences between teams of two and four in the likelihood of them getting correct answers (Shaw, 1932).

Why do these effects occur? They result from a phenomenon that psychologists call “social loafing” (Rutte, 2003). Individuals

sometimes work less hard when their efforts are combined with those of others than when they are considered individually. Those whose work is difficult to identify and evaluate because of their roles in groups make less effort. This is not to say that all we have to do is single out those who “socially loaf.” Rather, it is a characteristic of human behavior that people may work less hard in teams than if they alone were responsible for task outcomes, especially if the task is not intrinsically motivating or they do not feel a strong sense of team cohesion.

The Ringelmann experiments have been replicated by other researchers. In one example, the person at the front of a rope was instructed to pull on the rope and was told that there were six people behind them also pulling. Each person pulling was blindfolded and so was unable to see what was going on behind them. In some cases the other “pullers” simply stood behind the person at the front and made grunting noises suggesting that they were pulling when they were, in reality, making no effort. When individuals *believed* that they were in groups of seven pulling on the rope, they pulled with only 75 percent of the effort they made when they were working individually (Ingham, Levinger, Graves, & Peckham, 1974). In another devious experiment, the researcher instructed individuals to shout as loud as they could, either alone or, as they were told, in groups. They were blindfolded and given ear defenders to cut out visual and sound cues. When people believed they were shouting with others, they exerted only 74 percent of the effort that they made when they believed they were shouting alone, a phenomenon sometimes called “free-riding” (Latané, Williams, & Harkins, 1979). The problem with free-riding is that when it is discovered, the other team members may feel like “suckers” who are being taken advantage of, and they reduce their effort accordingly. Equality of workload in teams therefore affects how much effort team members exert on behalf of the team.

These difficulties present real problems for those working in teams and they challenge the common assumption that “synergy” is produced when individuals work in groups, that is, the idea that groups are more effective than the sum of the contributions of individual members. In such cases  $1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1$  does not necessarily equal five; in many cases  $1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1$  may equal three or even less!

Steiner (1972) proposed that group effectiveness is understandable if we separate out the potential productivity of groups, their actual productivity, and the gap between them. The gap, he asserted, was due to “process losses” such as coordination and communication problems. Below we identify some of the process losses that interfere with team productivity.

## *Poor problem solving and decision making*

The social loafing explanation of poor group performance is helpful in understanding some of the difficulties faced by teams. However, it does not account for the fact that group decision making is sometimes inexplicably flawed. For example, Maier and Solem (1962) presented groups with mathematical questions. They deliberately formed some groups that had an individual in them who knew how to work out the answers. Surprisingly, they found that many of the groups still failed to come up with the correct solutions. Why should this be?

Although we tend to think of groups as somehow reasonable and logical they are greatly influenced by hierarchical considerations. In most primary health care teams, for example, the opinions of the doctors in a meeting will have much greater influence than the opinions of the receptionists. Because of superior status, the doctor exerts more influence over the thinking of the team. Team leaders tend to have more influence over decisions regardless of whether their views are correct or incorrect. Moreover, dominant personalities within groups exert a disproportionate influence over group outcomes. Studies of jury decision making have shown that it may be the person who talks most who has most influence over the jury verdict (McGrath, 1984).

### **Box 1.1: Baseball or basketball teams?**

In an interesting example of the importance of individual accountability for team work, researchers in the United States attempted to predict the performance of baseball and basketball teams at the end of a season from ratings of the abilities of individual team members. Each team member was given a score from 1 to 10 to denote overall ability within their professional sport. These were then added together and used to predict the eventual performance of a team over a whole season. In one sport the aggregated ratings of the individual abilities of team members predicted team performance with 90 percent accuracy, while in the other sport, they predicted with only 35 percent accuracy.

*Which do you think was which?*

(The answer to this question is given on page 15 along with an explanation for the finding.)

Overall, research suggests that group decision making in experimental settings is generally superior to that of the average member of the group, but often inferior to that of its most competent individual. In the real world of organizations the situation is rather different but the pitfalls of groups' decision making are not.

### *Low creativity*

Early studies comparing the effectiveness of brainstorming individually or in groups involved creating "statisticized" and "real" groups. Statisticized groups (groups consisting of people who never actually work together, but whose performance is based on the statistical addition of their individual efforts) consisted of five individuals working alone in separate rooms who were given a five-minute period to generate ideas on uses for an object. Their results were aggregated at the end and any redundant ideas due to repetition by different individuals were taken out. Real groups of five individuals worked together for five minutes generating as many ideas as possible and withholding criticism. The statisticized groups produced an average of 68 ideas, while the real groups produced an average of only 37 ideas (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987).

In over 20 studies conducted since 1958, this finding has usually been confirmed. Individuals working alone produce more ideas when they are aggregated than do groups working together. Many managers immediately argue that the quality of ideas produced by groups will be better than the quality of ideas produced by individuals. However, the research does not support this conclusion either. Most measures indicate that individuals working alone produce superior quality ideas (i.e., in numbers of good ideas), and there is no research evidence suggesting that groups produce superior quality. In short, individuals working alone produce a greater quantity of ideas and ideas of at least as good quality as in brainstorming groups (Paulus, 2000).

Why should groups fail to produce the synergistic outcomes that we expect of them in brainstorming groups? The explanation appears to be that when people are speaking in brainstorming groups other individuals are not able to speak and so are less likely to put ideas forward. Moreover, they are busy holding their ideas in their memories, waiting for a chance to speak, and this interferes with their ability to produce other ideas. Furthermore, people may feel inhibited from offering what they see as a relatively ordinary idea after a particularly creative idea has been offered by another group member.

## Baseball or basketball teams?

*The result* (see page 13)

It was possible to predict baseball team scores with 90 percent accuracy since team performance is much more dependent upon individual performance in batting and pitching. Basketball involves passing, coordination, and team strategies for success. Individual accountability is greater in baseball therefore and this makes it easier to predict team performance.

Accepting the fact that production blocking and other factors can inhibit the performance of brainstorming groups, there are three important reasons for working in team settings when proposing new ideas and new ways of doing things. The first is that those who make up teams in “real life” as opposed to laboratory settings, have valuable experience of the particular domains of the team’s work. For example, in a primary health care team, there are people with nursing, medical, and social work backgrounds. Together they bring a broad range of important experience to the team’s deliberations. It is important that team members are involved in the brainstorming process, so that this wide experience is available as a resource. The second reason for brainstorming in teams is the importance of participation. Involving all those affected by organizational change in the process of change is vital in order to gain commitment and reduce resistance (Heller, Pusić, Strauss, & Wilpert, 1998). Working in brainstorming teams, especially where the teams are focusing on ideas for change, encourages commitment to that process. Finally, many team members argue that it is just more fun to brainstorm in teams, and that humor and laughter are outcomes which themselves can spur creativity.

Notwithstanding these arguments, it is clear from the research that we can alter the mechanics of the process to overcome the production blocking effect. Team members should brainstorm individually to generate their own ideas before bringing them to the team. Then each member should have the opportunity to present all of his or her ideas to the team before evaluation and selection takes place.

Is the picture of less effort, poor decision making, and low creativity as bleak in teams as we have seen it here? An answer to this question emerges from an analysis of 78 studies of individual versus group performance undertaken by Karau and Williams (1993). They found

the social loafing effect in 80 percent of the studies but, intriguingly, they found the opposite effect in some. In a small number of studies, group productivity was *greater* than would have been predicted based on knowledge of individual group members' capabilities. This phenomenon, in contrast to "social loafing" is called "social laboring." Instead of experiencing process losses, these groups experienced "process gains." Further analysis reveals that if the team's task is important to them and team members feel the group is significant to them, then the group displays the social laboring effect, demonstrating productivity beyond their calculated potential productivity. Other research suggests that evaluations of the group's performance and the culture of those involved in the research both play a significant role too.

What Karau and Williams's analysis revealed is that most research studies had used trivial team tasks such as clapping, shouting, or finding creative uses for a brick. There was little true teamwork involved since group members did not have to coordinate or build on each other's work. Consequently, participants probably had low task motivation. More complex team tasks that required coordination or integration of members' contributions seemed to produce higher levels of team member motivation and process gains. In one study, teams had simple or complex crossword puzzles to solve. On simple puzzles, there was no difference between the observed and predicted performance of groups based on a knowledge of how well individuals in the groups could do these puzzles. But on the complex puzzles the groups reliably exceeded their predicted performance. Further research showed that the ability of partners in teams may affect performance also and produce process gains. When team members were told they were working with a relatively low ability partner on a brainstorming test (for example), they often worked hard to "make up for" the weaker member. There is evidence too that the less able may raise their performance to a level close to that of the highest performing team member when the discrepancy between their abilities is not too large (Stroebe, Diehl, & Abakoumkin, 1996). One implication for education is that if learning is set up as a cooperative process (with students working together toward a group goal) then a mix of abilities in student groups may raise the level of performance of both the group and of the less able individuals.

The review also showed that in groups with a strong identity, social laboring and process gains were usual. Worchel, Rothgerber, Day, Hart, and Butemeyer (1998) conducted an experiment in which groups had to make paper chains with either another group present or alone. Worchel and colleagues had first checked the facility on the task of

the individuals involved so they could predict the potential productivity of the groups. Half of the groups were kitted out with identical colored coats and given a team name to increase the sense of group identity. In this case (strong identity) and in the presence of another competing group, they far exceeded their potential productivity.

The role of culture is also hugely significant, since most of the studies were carried out in the individualistic cultures of the USA and Western Europe. In Eastern cultures, which tend to be more collectivist (people strive more to achieve group rather than their individual goals), the social loafing effect is less marked. Earley (1993) had Israeli (also a collectivist culture) and Chinese trainee managers do an office simulation task in groups and found that they worked harder in groups than they did alone, in contrast to the typical social loafing phenomenon seen in Western research.

It is clear therefore that the motivational value of the team task, the sense of identity in the team, and the national culture can all influence dramatically whether working in teams leads to productivity gains or losses.

## ◆ The Paradox of Teamwork

So far on this journey into teamwork, we have seen that there is clear evidence of the value of team working for organizational performance, but we have also seen that in relation to the critical areas of effort, decision-making quality, and creativity, teams may be worse than the aggregate of individuals (especially in experimental research) or considerably better. This book offers to explain this paradox and to show how we can harvest the benefits of team work and avoid the drawbacks. To begin to do this we must first understand what we mean by “team,” what teams do, and how to build an effective team. It is to these three questions that we now turn.

### *What is a team?*

Many terms describe groups of people working within organizations (e.g., project groups, work groups, quality improvement teams) and the way they work (self-managing, self-directed, self-regulating, semiautonomous, autonomous, self-governing, or empowered teams). This can lead to confusion within organizations when team-based

working is being discussed and implemented. So what is a work team? Work teams are groups of people embedded in organizations, performing tasks that contribute to achieving the organization's goals. They share overall work objectives. They have the necessary authority, autonomy, and resources to achieve these objectives.

Their work significantly affects others within or outside the organization. Team members are dependent on each other in the performance of their work to a significant extent; and they are recognized as a group by themselves and by others. They have to work closely, interdependently, and supportively to achieve the team's goals. They have well-defined and unique roles. They are rarely more than 10 members in total (though, as we shall see, size is a big issue in understanding the success and failures of teams). And they are recognized by others in the organization as a team.

What does this mean in practice? First, members of the group have shared objectives in relation to their work. Second, they have genuine autonomy and control so that they can make the necessary decisions about how to achieve their objectives without having to seek permission from senior management. They have both responsibility and accountability. This usually means budgetary control as well. Necessarily, they are dependent upon and must interact with each other in order to achieve those shared objectives. They have an organizational identity as a work group with a defined organizational function (e.g., a primary healthcare team: doctors, nurses, and receptionists). Finally, they are not so large that they would be defined more appropriately as an organization, which has an internal structure of vertical and horizontal relationships characterized by subgroupings. In practice, this is likely to mean that a team is smaller than 15 members (and ideally should be no bigger than six to eight members) and larger than two people.

There are multiple types of teams in organizations:

- *Advice and involvement teams*, e.g., management decision-making committees, quality control (QC) circles, staff involvement groups;
- *Production and service teams*, e.g., assembly teams; maintenance, construction, mining, and commercial airline teams; departmental teams; sales and health-care teams;
- *Project and development teams*, e.g., research teams, new product development teams, software development teams;
- *Action and negotiation teams*, e.g., military combat units, surgical teams, and trade union negotiating teams

Key dimensions on which they differ include:

- degree of permanence – project teams have a defined lifetime that can vary from weeks to years, cockpit “teams” are together for only hours;
- emphasis on skill/competence development – breast cancer care teams must develop their skills over time to a high level, whereas decision-making committees usually have little emphasis on skill development;
- genuine autonomy and influence – manufacturing assembly teams may have little autonomy and influence whereas top management teams are powerful (Flood, MacCurtain, & West, 2001);
- level of task from routine through to strategic – short-haul flights involve crews in routine tasks whereas a government cabinet may be determining penal strategy for a 10-year period.

### *What do teams do?*

The only point of having a team is to get a job done, a task completed, a set of objectives met, whether it is catching a wildebeest for meat, performing surgery on a patient with heart disease, or pushing a large boulder up a hill. Building teams simply to have teams, and without specifying the team task, is like setting the table for guests but not cooking any dinner. It is also likely to damage organizational functioning and encourage conflict, chronic anger, and disruption in the organization.

The tasks that teams perform should be tasks that are best performed by a team. Painting the hull of a super-tanker does not require painters to work interdependently and in close communication over decisions. Each of those involved in the painting simply needs to know which is their section of hull. Navigating the tanker out of a port is likely to require teamwork, as does doing a refit on the engines. Similarly, football and hockey teams are called teams since they have to work interdependently, to communicate constantly, to understand each other’s roles, and to collectively implement a strategy in order to achieve their goals (literally).

What tasks are best performed by teams rather than individuals? The following dimensions can be used to analyze the appropriateness of tasks in organizations for teamwork:

*Completeness* – i.e., whole tasks, not simply putting the studs on the car wheels but assembling the whole transmission system plus wheels.

*Varied demands* – the task requires a range of skills that are held or best developed by a number of different individuals.

*Requirements for interdependence and interaction* – the task requires people to work together in interdependent ways, communicating, sharing information, and debating decisions about the best way to do the job.

*Task significance* – the importance of the task in contributing to organizational goals or to the wider society. A lifeboat team in a rural coastal area with busy shipping lanes, and a health and safety team in a high-risk industry are likely to be highly intrinsically motivated by the significance of their tasks.

*Opportunities for learning* – providing team members with chances to develop and stretch their skills and knowledge.

*Developmental possibilities for the task* – the task can be developed to offer more challenges to the team members, requiring them to take on more responsibility and learn new skills over time. The manufacturing team in a factory might develop responsibility for direct interaction with customers over product lead time (the time from ordering to delivery of products) as well as pricing of products.

*Autonomy* – the amount of freedom teams have over how to do their work, from something as mundane as when to take breaks, through to making decisions about new products or new staff. We will examine the issue of autonomy in depth because it is an area of common failure in the introduction of team working.

Creating teams and then failing to give them the freedom and authority to make the decisions that allow them to accomplish their tasks in the most effective way is a little like teaching someone to ride a bicycle, giving them a fancy road racing bike, and then telling them they can only ride it in their bedroom. Yet in many organizations I see precisely this – teams are created but they are not given the power to make decisions, implement them, and bring about radical change. Moreover, the number of layers in the organizational hierarchy barely changes. Consequently, expectations are not met and team members lose faith in the concept of teamwork other than as a comfortable idea to do with how we can all be supportive to each other. The degree of autonomy of the team reflects the team's influence over:

- the formulation of goals – what and how much it is expected to produce,
- where to work and number of hours (when to work overtime and when to leave),
- choice about further activities beyond the given task,
- selection of production methods,
- internal distribution of task responsibilities within the team,
- membership of the team (who and how many people will work in the team),
- how to carry out individual tasks.

A lifeboat team charged with responsibility for saving people in stricken vessels is likely to rate each of the dimensions (completeness, varied demands, requirements for interdependence, task significance, opportunities for learning, task development, and autonomy) very highly. A group of people responsible for typing the correct zip codes onto wrongly addressed envelopes in the postal service is likely to rate them all very low.

### *How can we build effective teams?*

How can teams at work overcome some of the problems that have been identified so far, such as social loafing and poor decision making or not having an appropriate task? Here are some clear guidelines suggested by research for building an effective team (see Guzzo, 1996; Cohen & Bailey, 1997).

#### *1 Teams should have intrinsically interesting tasks to perform*

People will work harder if the tasks they are asked to perform are intrinsically interesting, motivating, challenging, and enjoyable. Where people are required to fit the same nut on the same bolt hour after hour, day after day, they are unlikely to be motivated and committed to their work. Where teams have an inherently interesting task to perform there is generally high commitment, higher motivation, and more cooperative working. This therefore calls for very careful design of the objectives and tasks of work teams (see Chapter 2).

#### *2 Individuals should feel they are important to the fate of the team*

Social loafing effects are most likely to occur when people believe that their contributions to the team are dispensable. For example, in working with primary health care teams, my colleagues and I have

found that some nurses and receptionists feel their work is not highly valued. One way that individuals can come to feel that their work is important to the fate of the team is by using techniques of *role clarification* and *negotiation*. These are described more fully in Chapter 4. By careful exploration of the roles of each team member, together with the identification of team and individual objectives, team members can experience and demonstrate to other team members the importance of their work to the success of the team overall.

3 *Individuals should have intrinsically interesting tasks to perform*

Individual tasks should be meaningful and inherently rewarding. Just as it is important for a team to have an intrinsically interesting task to perform, so too will individuals work harder, be more committed and creative if the tasks they are performing are engaging and challenging. For example, a researcher sitting in on team meetings and observing team processes is more motivated, and has a more creative orientation toward the task, than the researcher who is required to input the data from questionnaires onto a computer.

4 *Individual contributions should be indispensable, unique, and evaluated against a standard*

Research on social loafing indicates that the effect is considerably reduced where people perceive their work to be indispensable to the performance of the team as a whole. Equally important, however, is that individual work should be subject to evaluation. People have to feel that not only is their work indispensable, but also that their performance is *visible* to other members of the team. In laboratory settings, where team members know that the products of their performance will be observed by other members of the team, they are much more likely to maintain effort to the level which they would achieve normally in individual performance. For example, when individuals are told that each team member's shouting will be measured to assess individual contribution to the overall loudness of the team, the classic social loafing effect does not occur. We could measure a doctor's performance by such things as: the number of patients seen; the quality of clinical interactions with patients; patient satisfaction with the general practitioner; the number of home visits completed; the quality of clinical interactions during home visits; prescribing practices; and the quantity and quality of communications with other team members.

5 *There should be clear team goals with in-built performance feedback*

For the same reasons that it is important for individuals to have clear

goals and performance feedback, so too is it important for the team as a whole to have clear team goals with performance feedback. Research evidence shows very consistently that where people are set clear targets to aim at, their performance is generally improved (Locke & Latham, 1991). However, goals can only function as a motivator of team performance if accurate performance feedback is available. For example, in the case of primary health care teams, there should be performance feedback at least annually on all or some of the following indices:

- patient satisfaction with the quality of care given,
- effectiveness of innovations and changes introduced by the team in improving patient care,
- quality of clinical care given in the team,
- improvement in community health,
- the effectiveness with which they have achieved their own objectives as a team,
- quality of team climate and how well team members feel they have worked together,
- quality of intrateam communication,
- quality of relationships with other agencies such as social services, local authority, and hospitals,
- financial effectiveness of the practice,
- efficiency of the practice in reducing patient waiting times,
- improvement in patient access to health care and health promotion.

The more precise the indicators of team performance, the more likely a team is to improve its performance and inhibit the effects of social loafing.

### Exercise 1.1: Measuring the effectiveness of your team's performance

- 1 Identify all those teams or important individuals who have an interest or “stake” in your team’s work: These might include
  - management,
  - customers,

## Exercise 1.1: (*cont'd*)

- service receivers,
  - other teams/departments in your organization,
  - those in other organizations,
  - the general public,
  - you and your team colleagues.
- 2 Identify the criteria of effectiveness each of these “stakeholders” might use to evaluate your team’s effectiveness. Taking those listed under 1 above, these might include:
- meeting the organization’s objectives;
  - providing quality goods on time and giving good “after sales service”;
  - providing a helpful, timely, excellent, and considerate service;
  - giving useful information;
  - cooperating effectively;
  - producing goods or services of value to society, in an ethical way;
  - having a good quality of working life and experiencing a sense of growth and development.
- (These criteria can be made much more detailed for your team and each stakeholder will probably have a number of other criteria.)
- 3 Give a rating from 1 (*not at all important*) to 7 (*of great importance*) to each criterion. If possible ask other team members to do the same. This can be useful for identifying areas of agreement and disagreement. Customers’ criteria should be highly rated.
- 4 Give a rating from 1 (*not at all effective*) to 7 (*highly effective*) on each criterion in terms of how well you feel the team is achieving on each criterion. Again, if possible, your colleagues should go through a similar rating process. This exercise will give a simple but clear indication of how well you feel the team is achieving in each area. By subtracting the “effectiveness” score from the “importance” score you will also get a good indication of areas where action appears most urgently needed to improve performance. Best of all is to ask the stakeholders themselves to rate the importance and effectiveness of the team’s performance on these measures.

## ◆ Conclusions

The effectiveness of teams is dependent upon a number of psychological factors that can inhibit or improve performance.

- Subtle processes such as social loafing, hierarchical effects, and personality differences can dramatically inhibit team performance.
- Within organizational settings, teams are usually put together and allowed to function without attempts being made to ensure effective functioning.
- The most important elements of team management are specifying individual and team goals and the design of the team task.
- At the same time there must be regular clear and accurate feedback to the team on its performance over time in order to promote team effectiveness.

Team performance is complex and we need practical guidelines based on scientific and applied understanding of team processes to ensure optimum team functioning. These guidelines are to be found in the remaining chapters of this book.

### key revision points:

- What are the main benefits of working in teams?
- What are the main drawbacks of working in teams?
- What are the defining characteristics of a team?
- Describe the types of teams in organizations.
- How do they differ?
- Which kinds of tasks are appropriate for teams and which are not?
- How can we build effective teams?

**FURTHER READING**

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