Team Dynamics

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"Coming together is a beginning.
Keeping together is progress.
Working together is success."

-Henry Ford"

1. What is a Team?

A team is a group of individuals, all working together for a common purpose. The individuals comprising a team ideally should have common goals, common objectives and essentially think along the same lines. This does not mean that the individual is no longer important; however, it does mean that effective and efficient teamwork goes beyond individual accomplishments. The most effective teamwork is produced when all the individuals involved harmonize their contributions and work towards a common goal.

Think through this…

Discuss and share with your classmates situations where you have been (or could be) a team member, committee chair, etc. in a class group project, campus club, community, or church group and you used teamwork skills.

1.1 Why is Teamwork important?

Teamwork has become an important part of the working culture and many businesses now look at teamwork skills when evaluating a person for employment. Most companies realize that teamwork is important because either the product is sufficiently complex that it requires a team with multiple skills to produce, and/or a better product will result when a team approach is taken. The benefits of this synergistic relationship in accomplishing goals cannot be overstated.

1.2 When to form a Team

A team should be formed only when a group of individuals have to work together in a coordinated effort to achieve specified outcomes. A team does not need to be formed if the individuals can work separately or if they can do the work equally well in some other form of group. Forming a team for the sake of forming a team is likely to result in disgruntled and frustrated members because there is no "real" reason for the team to exist.

1.3 Benefits of working in a Team

1.3.1 Achieving Goals Efficiently
Collective team activities are very important if the company or a process wants to reach its goal faster. There are some tasks that cannot be done individually, but can be easily accomplished by working in a team.

1.3.2 Increasing Individual Learning
In a group of people, there are many intelligent minds and brains working. When team members work together as a team, they can learn the skills and capabilities of each other and advance their knowledge.

1.3.3 Exploiting different skills
Even the best qualified individual cannot have all of the skills to do everything. Some people excel at coming up with the ideas. Others love the detail while there are those who focus on the big picture. There are others who can be counted on when it comes to implementing and following through a plan.

1.3.4 Generating Innovative Ideas
A group of people can have different skills, knowledge and personal attributes. By utilizing all of these different aspects in a team, more ideas can be generated. As more ideas are generated, more creative solutions are generated, leading to better results.

1.3.5 Providing Support
It is amazing the amount of camaraderie that is created in teams, especially when the going gets tough. People will often go to what seems like extreme lengths when they know that they can rely on the support and encouragement of the team.
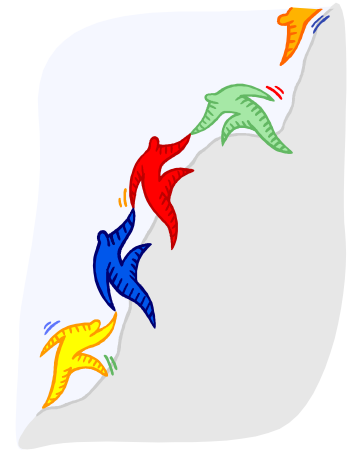
Think through this…

When working on a project would you rather work individually or in a team? Think of some reasons why people may resist working together in a team:

1. Fear losing individual rewards and recognition
2. Fear losing individuality
3. Fear that teams will create more work
4. Fear assuming responsibility
5. Fear conflict

1.4   Characteristics of an Effective Team

Effective teamwork creates its own set of characteristics that makes it possible to see the cohesion in a group. When an efficient team gets to work, the structure that has been put into place helps the group obtain productive results. In order to create a productive team, you first need to be able to identify the characteristics of effective teamwork.

To have an effective team, the following must be considered:

1.4.1 Unified commitment to a goal

Common commitment is the essence of a team. The depth of the commitment of team members to work together effectively to accomplish the goals of the team is a critical factor in team success. The relationships team members develop out of this commitment are key in team building and team success.

1.4.2 Appropriate Size of Teams

For a team to be effective, there should be between 2 to 25 members, with the majority of them having less than 10 members. A large group of more than 10 people would have trouble interacting and communicating constructively. The larger the group, the harder it is to manage. It is more likely that subgroups will emerge within the framework of the main group as people seek out others who agree with their point of view. Larger groups tend to be dominated by a few talkative and aggressive members. This can leave others feeling threatened and dissatisfied.

1.4.3 The Right Mix of Skills

Team effectiveness depends in part on bringing together people who have different skills that somehow complement each other. This can mean different technical abilities or communication skills. The qualifications, skills and attitudes of the members of a team will be central to how well the team performs. If a team has members who are under-qualified, uninterested or over-concerned with their own objectives, then discussions and actions will be less productive.

1.4.4 Clear roles and task distribution

There are clear expectations about the roles played by each team member. When action is taken, clear assignments are made, accepted and carried out. Work is also fairly distributed among team members.

1.4.5   Mutual Accountability

In order for a team to act as a team everyone must be participating in the creation of a solution. Each member of a team is essential to and accountable for the team's success. When the group is given a task, each member knows what their job is and sets out to put in their fair share of the effort.
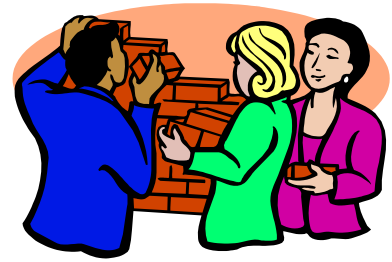
1.4.6   Open Communication

A team is able to communicate effectively and there is a feeling of open communication between all members of the group. Issues within a team are handled by face-to-face communication. Team members do not talk behind each other's back as there is a respect developed among team members that necessitates direct and open communication on all issues.

1.4.7   Effective Decision-Making Methods

A team has a hierarchy and a built-in decision-making system that helps it to react quickly and effectively to all situations. The members of the group are respected for their various areas of expertise, and the leader of the group has developed the ability to obtain the group members' opinions to formulate the group's response. This applies to decisions made within the group ranging from resolving internal conflict to a potential change in group leadership.

2.   ROLES WITHIN A TEAM

A role is a set of expected behaviours associated with a position. Work teams have a set of expectations about how members in the team should behave in the team. For example, some of the roles played by the leader are different from the roles played by the members. A leader is expected to behave differently from the members.

An understanding of the different roles helps to explain some of the interactions which take place within a team. Some roles are constructive whereas others are destructive. A number of roles are played by any one or all of the members at different times in the team's life cycle.

2.1 Bales' Interaction Process Analysis

Derived from Bales' interaction process analysis, four general roles operating within a team are can be identified. Such classifications aid understanding of task and socio-emotional behavioural processes in a group that members must be able to cope with:-

- Task-related roles
- Maintenance-related roles
- Defensive roles
- Dysfunctional roles

2.1.1 Task-related Roles

Task-related behaviours focus on moving the job along, planning, organising, informing, completing and controlling.

Examples:
- Initiator – suggests new ideas, ways of doing things.
- Information giver – offers relevant facts, information
- Co-ordinator – brings together ideas, suggestions
- Evaluator- measures progress, acts as time keeper.

2.1.2 Maintenance-related Roles

Members who assume maintenance-related roles are concerned about group morale and sound, supportive working relationships. These roles facilitate the group process by keeping the team together so the task can be completed.

Examples:
- Encourager – praises and supports contributions of others.
- Gate keeper – opens channel of communication, ensuring that quiet members who want to contribute can do so and close-down over-talkative members.
- Harmoniser - helps to maintain the relationships between members by working to avoid conflict and reduce tension.
- Group Co-ordinator – calls attention to group processes and offers suggestions about problems the group may have in functioning.

Think through this…

Some statements by a team leader are task-related to help focus on the task. Other statements are maintenance-related to encourage participation and team unity. Read the statements below and indicate whether the statement is task-related (T) or maintenance-related (M).

1. "That's a good idea, Jenny."   => (M)
2. "Tom, I think Marion would like to make a point."   => (M)
3. "Are we agreed on the proposal?"   => (M)
4. "Let's move on then."   => (T)
5. "Are you saying that storage is a problem?"   => (T)
6. "Should we discuss the production issue first?"   => (T)
7. "You sound disappointed with the suggestion."   => (M)

2.1.3   Defensive Roles

Defensive roles are behaviours intended to protect the group from anxiety.

Examples:
- Scapegoat - a member who tries to deflect the group's feelings of failure or incompetency from the group to himself. The member adopting the role of the scapegoat may do so either consciously or unconsciously.
- Tension reliever - jokes, fills long silences with chatter or suggests breaks. Such a role helps the team when the tension is increasing and needs to be broken.

2.1.4   Dysfunctional Roles

Dysfunctional roles are behaviours intended to distract the team from its purpose or to inhibit the team's progress towards its goals.

Examples:
- Blocker – raises irrelevancies or argues a point for too long, interfering with the team's progress.
- Pessimist – negative about task and/or group; expresses gloom and failure.
- Aggressor - criticises or blames others in a hostile manner.
- Rebel - breaks team norms and attacks authority.
- Show-off -draws attention away from the team's purpose.
- Lobbyist- tries to achieve personal goals ahead of the team's goals
- Recognition seeker - calls attention to themselves ahead of the needs of the team.

2.2 Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team

Patrick Lencioni, president of management consulting firm, The Table Group, wrote about the Five Dysfunctions of a Team after observing and coaching thousands of CEOs and Fortune 500 management teams.

The five dysfunctions are:

2.2.1 Absence of Trust

Without trust, productive work and growth are almost impossible. Team members spend time and energy protecting themselves or undermining each other, instead of focusing on the work and goals of the team.

Team members show a lack of trust when they:
- Hold grudges.
- Don't ask for help, or don't give feedback.
- Hide their mistakes or weaknesses.
- Find ways to avoid spending time together.

How to overcome?

It takes time to build trust in a team, and it's important to realize that trust has to begin with you. This means keeping your word, being honest, and being a good role model. You need to show your people that you're willing to work just as hard as they are, and that you'll support them when they need help.

2.2.2 Fear of Conflict

Conflict can be productive when it happens with a solid sense of trust on both sides. With this type of conflict, people challenge and improve one-another's ideas, and even better ideas result. Productive conflict avoids personal attacks, politics, and destructive fighting.

Team members who fear conflict spend time and energy being nice to everyone, and hold back their true opinions. This means that they may not share conflicting information, and the team loses the opportunity to confront awkward truths.

Signs that your team might fear conflict include the following:

- Everyone agreeing with everyone else, or avoiding the real issues during meetings.
- Team members talking about other people behind their backs.

How to overcome?

If your members are avoiding conflict, then start by explaining to them that conflict can be productive when it's not personal. Encourage them to challenge one another's ideas when they disagree, and to engage in healthy, spirited debate.

2.2.3 Lack of Commitment

Teams that lack commitment delay making important decisions and miss opportunities. Members may want to gather more data to make a decision, or may prefer to wait to simple support the winning side.

Your members may be suffering from a lack of commitment if they:

- Don't support decisions made in the team or organization.
- Miss opportunities, because they spend too much time analyzing data and options.
- Go over discussions again and again without taking firm action.

How to overcome?

To get support for decisions, involve members in the decision-making process where appropriate. Everyone won't always agree on the best course of action, but you can make sure that people have a say in decisions by organizing team decision-making effectively. Make sure that everyone has had a chance to voice their opinion, including the less vocal members of your team.

2.2.4. Avoidance of Team Accountability

Members who avoid team accountability don't challenge one another about actions or mistakes that could hurt the entire group. They don't pressure other team members to improve, they don't question others' ideas or actions, and they don't hold one another to high standards.

More than this, they don't cover for failing team members, meaning that the team can miss its goals.

Team members may be avoiding accountability if they:

- Resent each other for having different standards of performance.
- Rely on the team leader to call out mistakes, give feedback, or manage performance.
- Avoid direct conversations about performance and behavior with colleagues, opting instead to highlight issues with the team leader.
- Allow the team to fail without making a determined effort to avoid this.
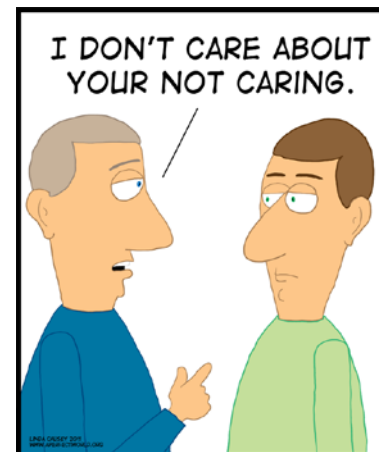
How to overcome?

Start by making sure that everyone is taking responsibility for their own work and actions. Write down people's roles and responsibilities within the team, as well as team objectives. This makes it clear who is responsible for what, so that people are less likely to shy away from what they're accountable for.

Also, encourage team members to give one another regular mutual feedback on their work, behavior, and achievements. This is especially important when people are performing badly, or not taking responsibility for their work.

2.2.5 Inattention to Team Objectives

This happens when people are working towards objectives that don't actually help the team meet its overall goals.

For instance, some team members might be interested in improving their on grades or furthering their own careers, instead of helping the team succeed.

You may have issues with this dysfunction when:

- Members focus on their own goals instead of those of the team.
- Members don't pull together to succeed.
- You regularly lose out to competitors.
- You lose talented, "achievement-oriented" team members.


How to overcome?

To overcome this dysfunction, make sure that your team members are focusing on the real goals of the team and organization. Mission statements and written records are helpful for highlighting your team's goals in a clear and obvious way. Once everyone knows what the team is working towards, it's harder for people to misunderstand or ignore those goals in a self-interested way.

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3. SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION IN TEAMS

Because the team process is interactive, skills in speaking, questioning, listening, empathy and openness are also clearly important to team performance.

An open supportive team encourages people to offer suggestions and solutions and to be part of the team process. All members need the opportunity to speak and to share their ideas and knowledge. No one person should monopolise the discussion or control the team interaction as this impedes the exchange of knowledge and ideas.

Supportive communication is genuine, spontaneous and non-evaluative. It creates a climate of trust, respect and cohesiveness within the team. Members speak out on issues and test ideas in a way that criticise the ideas, not the speaker. Members can also express their opinions without interruptions
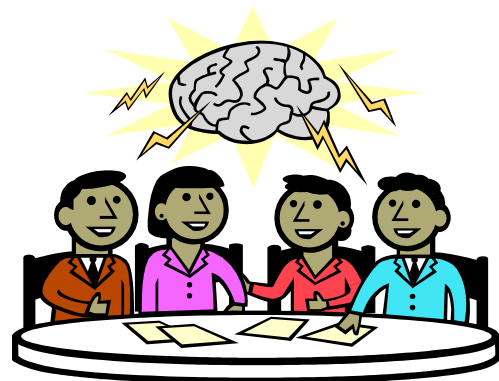
4.   GROUP DECISION-MAKING

4.1   Decision-Making Methods

Different methods that are used to reach decisions have different effects on group members' attitudes and other outcomes. There are three main methods of decision-making.

- **Majority rule**

This method is often considered 'fair' and is implemented as the simplest way to reach a decision regarding a problem. However, this method ends in a win-lose situation. In circumstances where there are different 'camps' with one 'camp' being larger, frequent 'losses' by the minority over issues voted will invariably lead to frustration and a loss of commitment.

- **Compromise**

This method is often described as a lose-lose situation in which each party gives up part of its objectives to obtain an outcome that is reluctantly accepted by both sides. The parties end up with a decision they do not really believe to be the beset outcome.

- **Consensus**

This method leads to a win-win situation. Consensus is normally achieved after a great deal of time is spent trying to resolve differences of opinion. However, decisions reached through consensus are often adhered to by all, as members feel that the final outcome was reached through a serious and sincere attempt to take everyone's views into account.

Think through this…

What do you think are the different outcomes from the following decision-making methods:-

a.	Majority rule:	Outcome:	<u>Win-lose</u>
b.	Compromise:	Outcome:	<u>Lose-lose</u>
c.	Consensus:	Outcome:	<u>Win-Win</u>