

The essence of teamwork is the shared obligation and the combining of efforts that binds individuals with various harmonious abilities to achieve a sole purpose. In times of crisis teamwork, enabling the sharing of knowledge and skills, is what ultimately leads to overall success, as opposed to individual feats. On 23 June 2018, a soccer team consisting of twelve boys between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, along with their assistant coach, 25, ventured 2.4 kilometres into the Tham Luang cave in Thailand's Chiang Rai province. With the monsoon season underway, they ended up trapped as floods of water started entering the cave. Their rescue highlighted the strength of international teamwork, with individuals and organisations from other nations combining skills, experience and expertise to rescue the individuals.

From close observation, it is strongly evident that teamwork undoubtedly had an imperative function in times of predicament, as without the unification of efforts and expertise, it is probable this operation may not have succeeded in the manner that it did. With thirteen individuals reported as missing, the duty and means of successfully rescuing them was well beyond the capacity of Thailand's knowledge and resources, as they did not have the wide range of resources or skills needed to execute an operation such as this in an effective and efficient manner. The large capacity of labour required for this complex operation called for over 10,000 individuals from differing backgrounds, involving divers, engineers, police officers, soldiers, government officials, rescue workers and volunteers, combining their skills to save lives. Maha Vajiralongkorn, Thailand's King, stated "Thais have not been able to unite behind anything...but in this case...it provided a breather from divisions and polarization..." (Reed, 2018) The need for teamwork was perpetuated by its most valuable member, the media, which amassed an almost instantaneous worldwide response. The gravity of such a situation necessitated different social, psychological and physiological requirements to be met. Thus, the employment of a team, particularly a sizeable team, allowed the distribution of labour, as smaller teams were formed within the much larger unit, each focusing on a specific requirement. This in turn enabled increased efficiency and greater overall productivity as collective skills and knowledge proved to be a much stronger weapon. It is this feature that characterised the Tham Luang cave rescue from previous operations alike, as they were able to execute the rescue in a period of only seventeen days. Teamwork brought different areas of expertise under one single command to achieve one common purpose, which solely contributed to improving the overall quality of the operation.

The effectiveness of international teamwork in the Tham Luang cave rescue is measured by its integration of cooperation, trust and cohesiveness. The overall success of the operation owes to the capacity for individuals around the world to make collective decisions and strategise action simply by combining knowledge, skills and effort, not to international competition and individual successes. The Tham Luang operation saw the remarkable cooperation between approximately eighteen countries, some which had never worked with each other before. Their ability to methodically integrate their labours and the unique skills they bring with them from their nation, ultimately led to its success. Jessica Tait, a US Air Force captain involved in the rescue, acknowledged “...when militaries rain together, its for this – it’s for the real world..” (Flitton, 2018), confirming that cooperation is what made international teamwork effective. Also contributing to the efficacy of international teamwork is a strong sense of trust. The Thai government’s request for aid demonstrated the acceptance of their vulnerability, in the midst of a situation that confronted and challenged their abilities, and their willingness to have joint faith in the hands of other nations. This is what allowed the formation of an inextricable international understanding and connection that relied on a sense of mutual faith in each other. Similarly, the success of international teamwork is based on a high level of cohesiveness. With twelve out of the thirteen individuals being minors and their lives all in jeopardy, it is part of the human condition that the greatest sympathies from people around the world, most who had never met them, provided a sense of unity and a collective feeling of hope (Birmingham, 2018). It is what drove individuals to share their purpose, to surge productivity and to remain as a team then more than ever. It is the core value of humanity that formed the glue that bound nations from all over the world together with individuals and organisations volunteering to help on humanitarian grounds. These various elements of international teamwork allowed a sole purpose to be achieved at a time of crisis.

The performance of the rescue operation irrefutably proves the substantial role team learning played, as the blend of a growing collective set of skills, experience and expertise contributed to its success more than individual achievements may have. Team learning is the process of obtaining, sharing, improving and uniting ideas, values and knowledge through collaboration. The seriousness of the rescue operation called for a greater team discussion, one that was based on convergent thinking (Senge, 1994), as time was a limiting factor and the operation needed to be executed swiftly. Having individuals and communities from various nations put aside their cultural, linguistic and religious differences to work towards a single objective

with people they had never worked with before, allowed for the greater expansion of knowledge and collective intelligence. Narongsak Osotthanakorn, the mission commander, stated “Team Thailand, team government officials, private industry team and the media team that helped us including the support from around the world, we did something nobody thought possible.” (ABC, 2018) With the Thai government realising their constraints and limitations, they were able to obtain the skills, expertise and experience of foreign players to remedy their shortcomings and assemble a team that was highly capable in every aspect. These team members came with prior experience and knowledge, allowing the overall team to take synergistic and innovative approaches and face continual growth. The opportunities provided for the team to embrace differing ideas was what made their collective understanding even more fruitful and valuable. Thus, effective management of the team was possible, making it easier coordinating decisions and actions regarding the rescue.

The Tham Luang cave rescue proves that in times of crisis particularly, the unification and blend of skills, experiences and expertise and the ability to embrace team learning is solely what achieves a greater outcome over internal rivalry and individual successes. This is echoed in the Tham Luang cave rescue, instantly garnering over 10,000 individuals and eighteen countries to collaborate and work towards a shared purpose.

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### **Reflection on Teamwork**

#### **What did you learn from your teamwork experience in this course?**

The most valuable thing I learnt from teamwork is its role in one's personal growth and development. This personal growth from working in a team has proved to have a more profound effect on me than any other educational gain I made during this experience.

Before I began this experience begrudgingly, I let my assumptions – that I would be better off doing the work alone and that I would not learn anything from the incompetency of other members – cloud my judgement. Although I knew I could fulfil my responsibilities, I underestimated the capabilities of other members and hesitated being fully open to appreciating the different strengths they each held. With more time spent doing groupwork however, the reliance I had on my team members turned to trust and a sense of confidence that I had everything to learn from a gifted and diverse group that were accustomed to different ideas, values and approaches from my own. I realised the value of having

constructive discourse, incongruity and even conflict in the team, as it allowed me to go against my own values and continually question, debate and reexamine my own perception of the truth. It forced me to ask, “What if I am wrong?”

The notion that I also had a world of ideas of my own to contribute felt empowering and provided me a sense of meaning and purpose in life. I knew my individual strengths were contributing to a greater blend of strengths and that collectively, we were achieving a purpose that was greater than anything I could ever produce myself. The sense of meaning I found in this experience confronted me as I had only felt it in familial relationships.

### **How would these lessons assist you in your current or future career?**

This experience highlighted the necessity of teamwork in everyday life, as I saw my own experience of teamwork being mirrored in all aspects of life. Whether it’s a group of first-year university students striving to understand a concept of management, a family working together to put food on the table each night, or a swarm of bees individually contributing to construct the hive they will all eventually live in to raise their young, teamwork is about individuals from differing backgrounds coming together to achieve a common purpose.

The lessons I have learnt from my teamwork experience in BBA 102 prove to be highly valuable and constructive as I know it has given me the confidence to seek constant examination, discussion and expansion, rather than perfection, in my future career.

This experience provided me with the confronting realisation that I will not always have all the information, nor will I always be correct. The ability to embrace the diversity of ideas other people have to offer is an important skill in the workplace, to evolving and progressing forward, not just in my area of expertise, but also in my self-development and role as a colleague.