Throughout “The Story of K2 and the Brotherhood of the Rope”, there were many different team dynamics that formed. There were teams from different countries, each tight knit groups of people that were very similar, and at some points different countries came together to accomplish a common goal, which created a bigger team. This bigger team sometimes was an improvement, and sometimes did not work so well because of the lack of synergy between them. This is an analysis of some of the positives and some problems that arose from these teams.

I am a firm believer in hearing the bad news first, so let’s start with some problems. I ordered my examples first into positives and negatives, and then in chronological order:

NEGATIVES:

1. On June 7th, the team faced their first real failure. While climbing toward their eventual ABC, they had a tough time and had to turn back. One of the teammate’s contracted a repertory infection, and combined with the bad weather, it forced them to turn around. This is an example of how one weak link on a team can really bring a whole team down. This set them back nearly a week.
2. On June 24th, the American team started to try to work with the Korean team. They had to use one of the Korean routes to the summit, but both teams had their own traditions of climbing, and “the question of how to collaborate and work together smoothly was significant”. This is an example of how poor synergy of a team can make it hard to work together smoothly.
3. On July 20th, there was a clear cut plan about how the teams from the different countries wanted to tackle the last, difficult leg of the mountain. This plan was not executed properly, and that caused serious issues in terms of teams having to wait for slower teams to move forward in front of them. This caused a large inefficiency for many climbers.
4. On July 21st most teams had already summited, but the climb down was becoming treacherously deadly. One of the Italians was missing, and people were leaving without him. The people with the greatest capacity to help the missing climber was the Russians, due to the fact that they were climbing with oxygen and were the strongest climbers of the group. They left without even knowing that the Italian was missing, and the climber eventually died. This is a tragic example of how miscommunication, or general lack of communication can be devastating to a team.
5. Another example on July 21st, was the situation of where Warner had to take care of one of the sick climbers (Uher). Warner had to literally guide Uher down the mountain because he was so sick. This is an example of one team member not doing as much work as another member, and another member having to pull his slack. This is not to say that I don’t commend Warner’s decision to help Uher. If I were in the same situation I would hope that I would have the physical capacity to help Uher as Warner does.
6. When Bowie reached camp two he needed shelter. There was supposed to be a tent set aside for him by his team and the Portuguese climber. This tent was occupied by three Italians and an Iranian. Even with torn ligaments in his leg, the Italians would not give him his sleeping bag. This could have been extremely detrimental to him as he was supposed to have shelter set up when he arrived. He was forced to find his own shelter. This is an example of the woes of selfishness in a team.

POSITIVES:

While there were many poor examples of teamwork in this climb to the top of K2, there were many more positive examples of the ways that teams can come together to overcome a lofty goal:

1. Delegation is key. This is something that the Americans had mastered almost when they showed up. On June 2, Bowie and Normand were doing some reconnoitering while the rest of the group stayed and set up equipment. One person would be unable to do this on their own, so a team is a key aspect here.
2. On June 3, while Warner and Normand were walking across snow bridges, both fell into hidden crevasses, and Warner fell luckily enough to save Normand’s life. If Normand had been alone, he would have fallen into the crevasse and never been found. Without the team here, Normand would have died.
3. On June 21st, the Americans realized that their initial planned route would not work. This meant that they had to take a different route, and that they would have to work with the Koreans. They were able to develop a symbiotic relationship at this point. The Koreans saw the experience the Americans had on the other side of the mountain, and had seen that the Americans had climbed higher than they had in that season, while the Koreans had ropes already set that the Americans could use. At this point they both had diverse skills, and could help each other out.
4. On June 27th, the Americans and Koreans were both climbing to camp 3. They were able to set two tents between the teams, rather than 3, which cut down on the resources that were needed by both teams. Optimizing resources between teams can be an incredibly valuable resource, and is a great way to reduce work for everyone
5. On July 8th, plans were being made for a push to the summit. There were many strong teams making a push to the summit, including the Russians, Italians, Portuguese, and Americans. There was a lot of rope to be laid, and responsibilities could be split between the teams. This is another great example of sharing resources, and it helped in the long run in that there were record number of summits on that attempt. 18 people summiting K2 was enough for reporters to call in.
6. Uher was a climber that Warner found on the slope and decided to try to rescue. They had to literally throw him over their shoulders to get him to the relative safety of camp 4. Without the help of the Americans, Uher would have almost certainly died. One great aspect of a team is trust in your teammates. Probably the best quote of the story is Uher saying, “Maximum trust … Maximum trust”. This is an important thing to have in a team, and eventually, Uher was saved.
7. At camp 3 Warner had a close call with death himself. He was melting water with his carbon dioxide, and he accidentally almost gave himself carbon monoxide poisoning. This time, Uher was able to save him by getting him to stick his head out of the tent and breathing in some oxygen. This is great karma for Warner, and beautiful poetic justice. During their adventures, both had saved the life of the other. This is another example of the trust that Uher and Warner were able to gain in each other, and that trust is life-saving.