
On problems that can be associated with working in teams, practical recommendations to overcome them and whether team working is appropriate in organisations today.

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Introduction

In early history, the norm for labour in organisations was individual work. It all changed in the 20th century, when Henry Ford introduced the conveyor belt based assembly line. This caused them to increase their productivity exponentially, totalling 1 million vehicles a year (via about.com). The realisation of this effective method provoked many to consider how their productivity can be increased if they were to work together as opposed to individually.

Subsequently, closer groups of people would work together to tackle a common task. This revolutionary increase in teamwork has resulted in new organisation structures that implement small groups as their main force for solving problems.

Despite this, problems and conflicts within small groups are extremely common. In order for a team to continue working effectively, one must overcome these problems. Common areas of conflict can be categorised in mainly three areas:

- Structural Inadequacies
- Clashes of Personality
- Insufficient Communication

These are the three main areas focused on in this essay. Both the problems within and their potential respective solutions and practical recommendations are discussed. As a result, whether the application of teams is appropriate in organisations today can be deduced.

Leadership within Teams

There are many ways that one can fail as a leader in a small group environment. A leader has to be able to motivate and organise. But there are other things a leader has to take into consideration like what their leadership style will be. Will they be autocratic, make every decision themselves; completely ignoring what could very well be valid advice? Or do they take a slight back seat and introduce a democratic style, where the decisions are reached by a group consensus? Another leadership style could be a delegative style, where team members make the decisions, but everything is ultimately your responsibility. This places a lot more trust in your members, and therefore motivates them more because they have more say in what they do, but they also have a fall-back position if they make a mistake.

The autocratic style tends to be a style that is appropriate only when the leader has all of the information and is most suited to make the decisions required. A good example of this is an army commander, who has all the army intelligence, reporting on enemy positions, while the grunt on the front line's knowledge is limited to the extent of what he can see with his eyes. Who is in the best position to make the decision? The commander of course; unfortunately for many leaders who employ this style this scenario is not the case and a lot of the time those who you are leading may have at least as much, if not more, and better quality information about a particular topic. In that case, a decision can be made without the team members and if they feel that they can contribute to the decision, and are not even asked their opinion, it can lead to resentment and a lack of work-based focus. They could feel that what they know is unappreciated and so just contribute the bare minimum to the tasks they are told to do.

One clear and easy way to overcome this particular difficulty, as a leader, is to listen to what your members have to say. The leader may keep overall responsibility on the decisions they make, or even keep all the decisions to themselves, but if the team members feel like they are being listened to and their opinions are valid, they may feel more satisfaction.

Another way to overcome this particular problem, if you are so set in your ways and refuse to change how you lead your team, would be to give one of them the responsibility of listening to the ideas of the group and for him to report to you. You may choose not to act on the results of this, but

it still gives the team the idea that they are contributing and their ideas are being considered in your decision making process even if they aren't. This would give a simple motivation boost.

The delegative style is arguably the most effective leadership style for small groups. It gives the team members maximum motivation, while also giving the maximum freedom to do their work how they want, as long as results are achieved. The leader shows that he trusts his members enough that they can make the decisions according to their ability. The team members understand that it is the leaders' responsibility if anything they do goes wrong and appreciate the trust he places in them.

Most teams cannot function without an effective leader to guide and motivate. Without a leader, or some leadership process a team will fail at its task before it has started.

Roles within Teams

As with any successful team, the productivity can often be strongly influenced, by the structure and the compatibility of the individuals within, with regard to each other. Similarly, depending on their personalities, the roles these individuals take can be very significant on how they complement, or indeed hinder each other.

Although initially the status and character of individuals decides the roles they take, other factors must be taken into consideration. The social role, or range of expectations that others hold of another member of the team, naturally affects the behaviour of that individual. Within a group, individuals will undeniably differentiate in roles (Bales, 1956). Group members will begin to "specialise", according to Bales, as is often observed. The question remains whether these social roles that certain members take up, based on their oral contributions, are useful or damaging to a group.

The fact that certain individuals will prefer integration over differentiation is self-evident; however it may not necessarily boost performance. Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) define integration as "the process of achieving unity of effort amongst the various subsystems in the accomplishment of the organization's task". Although it may seem counter-intuitive, it can be very substantial when it comes to structure in small groups (Slater, 1955). It is imperative to take the structure into account and pay particular attention to status and role to avoid conflict. When a person distinguishes between each role, they can be harnessed in a way that takes the group's performance to a maximum.

Task	Building and maintenance	Individual (self-interested)
Initiator-contributor	Encourager	Aggressor
Information seeker	Harmonizer	Blocker
Opinion seeker	Compromiser	Recognition seeker
Information giver	Gatekeeper and expeditor	Self-confessor
Opinion giver	Standard setter	Playboy
Evaluator-critic	Observer and commentator	Dominator
Energizer	Follower	Help seeker
Procedural technician		Special interest pleader
Recorder		

Fig.1 From Benne and Sheats (1948).

According to Kenneth Benne and Paul Sheats (1948) these roles can be put under three main headings as seen in fig. 1. In order for a group to work efficiently like a well-oiled machine, all these factors must be considered; behaviours of the respective role will typically be manifested within a variety of teams (Parker 1990; Spencer and Pruss, 1992). What these roles are can be debateable; there are ideas, such as Belbin's team role theory (1981/93/96), that are distinguishable, yet the core foundation remains the same.

Furthermore, the Social and Expert Status will most likely sway the role structure within a team to a great extent, *ceteris paribus*. While perceived expertise does not cause the individual in question to further emphasise their own specialised knowledge, perceived experts were the most likely to emphasise shared knowledge and the contributions of others (Thomas-Hunt, Ogden and Neal, 2003).

This ties in closely with the commonly encountered problem of social loafing and/or risky shift. It is rare to find a team that does not encounter these problems at some point or another. There are a number of ways one can solve social loafing, though in essence it comes down to involvement. Rothwell (2009) writes of the “three C’s of motivation”:

- Collaboration
- Content
- Choice

In essence, Rothwell suggests, that by making an individual who is a social loafer collaborate and receive substantial responsibility, they will feel the need to give a higher return. Likewise, allowing them to use that responsibility to decide how they want to proceed about doing an important task, chances are they will contribute the most.

As for risky shift, members often see shared risk as being less than individual risk and as a result make riskier decisions; this phenomenon is prevalent anywhere from companies to sports teams (Stoner, 1961). It can easily happen when the responsibility is too dilute, the group is generally imbalanced or the members are victims of irrational compliance (e.g. Milgram’s experiment; see section on personality).

The simplest way of dealing with this is by avoiding the sources in the first place. One should not let senior people act as a chair to avoid compliance or let a biased person pick the whole team but instead an outsider. Only when these fundamental hurdles are overcome can a group really begin to flourish.

Personality

Individuals play crucial role in group performance; however it can cause some conflicts within teams. Many factors control efficiency of a group such as liking, conformity and compliance.

The concept of liking can increase the productivity of an organization as the members find a comfortable environment to discuss the issue and difficulties they face when working in teams. Attraction plays an important role in working in team," Furthermore, the path from interpersonal attraction to productivity appeared to be indirect: interpersonal attraction lead to the recognition of a shared social identity, which then –fostered by shared cognition and productivity norms- lead to increased workgroup productivity"(Swaab, Roderick., Postmes, Tom. and Spears, Russell, online).

Nevertheless some members take advantage of this aspect and start on relying on others. Socialisation would have a good impact on team members, which basically came from the liking aspect. Individuals function like a family where they share the same objective and aim, possibly allowing to employees who are more like friends.

Conformity is the second part, Asch (1951,online) investigated the behaviour of a person in group through an experiment where a participant joined a group and believes that the other participants were real as him/her-self, the experimenter start to ask the other participants and all of them always gave the same answer, the person been tested would realise that the others answer was wrong but real participant would conform to the group decision.

Not to forget to mention compliance. Milgram (1974, pg. 5) defined it as obedience to authority, he investigated this behaviour in many adults through making a “teacher” subject a “learner” (in reality an actor) to an electrical 30 shock that ranged from 0V to 415V. According to him, “Many subjects will obey the experimenter no matter how vehement the pleading of the person being shocked, no matter how painful the shocks seems to be”.

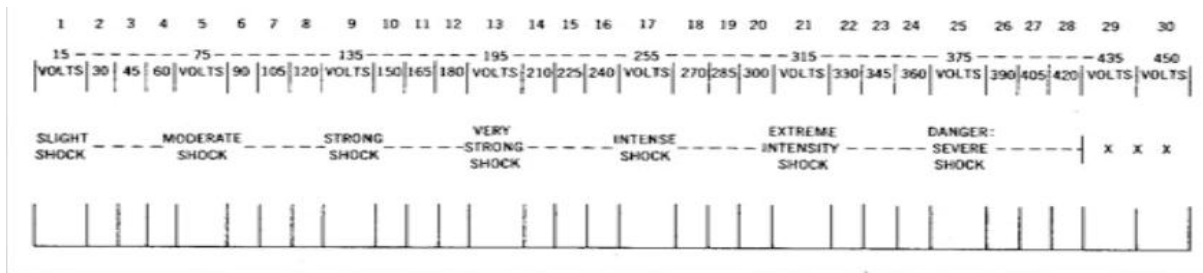


Figure 2 from obedience to authority, Milgram.

Manning, Nukui and O'Cain(2007, pg. 9) state "the ability of individuals will be improved in contribution to a team when emphasizing on the benefits of working in teams." Teamwork, and the impact of personality of the members on it, can enhance the quality of performance. Brainstorming results in an abundance of ideas as well as a high level of communication. This benefits self-development and group-development since the members learn from each other and share experiences, which in turn improves the personal relationship of members in the group.

Teamwork also has certain disadvantages. According to Lake (1998), "The team leader always asks individuals to take on roles to which they are not naturally suited or because certain personalities clash"(74). A battle for dominance may be held by few members while a huge number of ideas and thoughts are neglected by some individuals who find it hard to in the group.

Tuckman & Jensen (1977) suggest the team would improve the proficiency of work if the members get an environment with greater involvement, but members will have to go through 4 stages of development, forming, storming, norming and performing which happens over time.

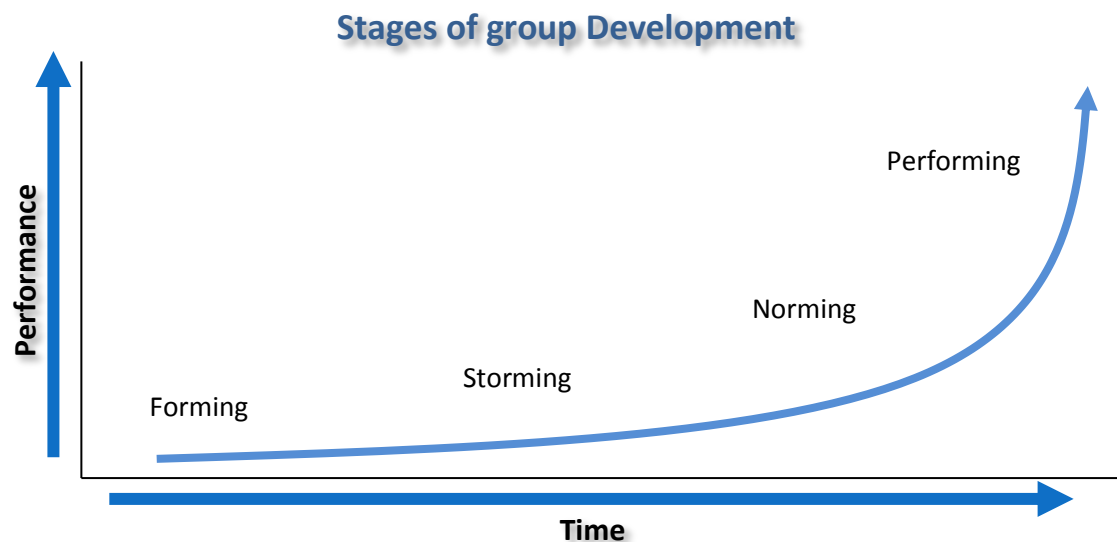


Figure 3 from Slides

The impact of relative personality within teams can be a major contributor to the success or downfall of an effective team. Therefore groups that are made up of different individuals with a diverse set of skills, knowledge and a balance of personality types is best suited for a successful team than groups that are formed from members with similar abilities.

An effective team should contain a balance of extroverts and introverts. Extroverts are the better communicators and are thrilled by talking and interacting with people however the downfall with this is that too many of these types can result in confusion within the group as they interrupt each

other to express their own view which can be distracting for the introverts. On the other hand, introverts like to keep to themselves, finding intra-team communication the most difficult.

The other type are sensing versus intuition. The sensing types like to perceive the facts and develop a single idea in depth, the intuitive prefer to build up many alternative and complex ideas which can lead to confusion if the ideas that are given seem unrealistic to the sensing types.

How a person decides can also influence personalities in teams. For example the thinking types make quick judgments and communicate and express their thoughts to other team members and usually do not take into account other team members feelings, whereas the feeling members will take into account other member and groups feelings and foresee whether they will be affected by the decision or not; they tend to make decisions based on personal values and may not even express their true thought as they may think it would hurt someone's feelings.

The final two types of personality are judging and perceiving and are concerned with the individuals relationship with the outside world and the life-style he/she adopts. The judging types are quite straightforward types of people and live in a planned and well thought way, while the perceiving type tend to understand life and try to adapt and adjust to it. They are also open for new experiences and interested in a wide range of issues. (MBTI - Myers and Briggs, 1980)

Organizations need to take all these into account in a positive way help team members understand each other and take advantage of each type of personality instead of exploiting them to achieve a maximal successful team.

Communication Boundaries

One of the most vital characteristics required by teams in order to be successful is to have good communication. There are many factors that may affect the way in which members communicate within a team. Many organisations today operate through the use of virtual teams for instance. This, in many cases, means that they face far more problems with their communication compared to a normal team. Virtual teams usually include a team of people working at different geographic sites and this can lead to communication barriers due to cultural differences. A communication specialist by the name of Stella Ting-Toomey has outlined three cultural barriers that may affect communication. These include cognitive constraints which focuses on the way in which people view the world based on their culture, religion and even on the school that they have attended. This may mean that people interpret a message wrong and so this can affect the communication between the two members.

A barrier to effective communication also involves behaviour constraints, where the way in which people behave from different cultures has an effect on communication. This may be based on something as simple as how close you should be to somebody, which differs from culture to culture. The third barrier is emotional constraints where the focus is on how people from different cultures deal with a certain situation and also what emotions that they may show regarding that situation. There may be barriers between cultures where people are more open about their emotions in comparison to the sort that may be more reserved and keep their emotions close. This clash of cultures may mean that certain people find others rude with their open emotions and in contrast they may find some people uptight. It can be an on-going effort to make the communication effective between members from different cultures but it can be resolved to a degree by learning the culture traits of each team member as well as adapting to them, this will help build the teams trust and intimacy.

The advances in technology have pushed the communication boundaries which allow team members to communicate in a number of ways but, this may not be so useful if the team members have poor communicational skills. This may occur if different members of the team do not speak the same language and so will not be able to communicate effectively. To solve this problem and ensure that communication is properly maintained within the team a team leader must be assigned. It is most important to form a team of members who speak the same language to eliminate the factor of any misunderstandings between members due to language differences. This issue may also be solved

if the team has a multilingual leader who can communicate well with all members of the team but, this may restrict effective communication horizontally between members who do not speak the same language.

Conflicts/Ineffectivity in Communication

Communication problems are not limited to the aforementioned barriers however. Managers may need to communicate with each other to make the right decisions and team members may need to communicate with each other to get feedbacks on their own work; however managers also need to give a clear objective to their staffs. Similarly, team members also need to communicate with the manager to report their works.

This vertical communication holds many potential problems. Firstly, misunderstandings may occur when communicating with each other, which might make things inefficient. A company can become more efficient by improving their communication. According to Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven (1990) communication efficiency is to give the right information, at the right time, through the right medium.

There are several ways to increase the communication efficiency. For example, speakers must make a concise point while listeners must try to understand that very point of the conversation and both must try to avoid turning the conversation into an endless argument.

The team leader, or the person with the most organisatory influence, needs to know what the purpose is and what kind of information they would give to the team, meaning people need to have a target in a conversation. A conversation without a certain target is just a chatting and ineffective. After deciding on a target, they can choose different ways to communicate.

Communication is not only to speaking, it included both speaking and listening and especially body language. A good listener can not only understand what the speaker said, but also what the speaker wants to say. One must concentrate on and remain perceptive towards what the speaker says, both verbally and non-verbally, and get the idea of the speech and then the listener can find a way to refute the speaker's points or back them up. In other words, to be a good listener can be more powerful than being a good speaker. It's natural for humans to like being understood by others. When speakers feel listeners are interested in the topic, they fell more prepared to elaborate on it, as well as like the speaker more, which in turn improves the productivity, as proven earlier. A good listener could repeat what the speaker says, in their own words, in order to make the speaker believe they have heard and understood what the speaker said, even if they haven't.

Conclusion

Based on the points discussed above it is possible to deduce whether or not teams are appropriate in organisations today. On one hand, communication, personality and structure are formidable hurdles to overcome, yet on the other, if they are overcome, the productivity in a company reaches previously unseen heights.

It is important to realise however, that whether or not the implementation of teams in organisations is applicable, greatly depends on what sector the organisation is focused on, for instance the primary sector (agriculture, raw materials) as opposed to the tertiary sector (services), or even which section within an organisation, for example marketing/HR vs. accounting.

Nonetheless, groups are prolific throughout all social structures, which in itself is testament to its effectiveness in a myriad of areas in organisations. It can be safely said that, generally, organisations will continue to endorse teams as a means of work units. Moreover with the increasing mechanisation of industry, organisations will need to focus on the innovative and creative aspects in order to compete and, since teams draw attention to these qualities, they will certainly be utilised for a long time to come.

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Appendices

Contribution

Yousef Amar

- Topic: Roles, Status and Structure.
- Organisation/Management.
- Editing, Essay structure.
- Introduction, Conclusion, Appendices.

Mark Sandberg

- Topic: Leadership within teams.
- Introduction, Conclusion.

Humaid Al-Suwaiddi

- Topic: Personality, up to the graph.
- Introduction, Conclusion.

Sarvar Mirza

- Topic: Personality after the graph.

Harsahib Chada

- Topic: Communication boundaries.

Zhao Liu

- Topic: Communication ineffectively and conflict.

Review on Teamwork and Group Reflection

It was a rocky path until we had something presentable but ultimately we persevered. Our journey was not without problems, even elementary ones. Some of these included:

- Time management
 - Team meetings
 - People not attending
 - Different timetables
 - Intermediate due dates
 - Incrementally shifting delay
- Contrast
 - Writing styles/experience in writing essays
 - Extend of research
 - Levels of ambition

Initially, we got off to a chaotic start. Our group was not formed based on question choice, timetable compatibility, background similarities or perceived work ethic; we joined after the group exercise on surviving on a desolate island. Our group just grew as person after person joined Mark and me (Yousef) until we reached the group maximum. We couldn't choose members based on any specifications since we barely knew each other. We exchanged contact details and stepped into a dormant phase.

Using the group sessions on Friday to our advantage, we decided on a question and a vague structure. Mark created a Facebook group and signed our group up, while I discussed some points with Mr. Foss and posted a more elaborate plan.

Meanwhile, there was not a single meeting where everybody was present and the deadlines we set were delayed week after week after week after week. Some members disappeared off the radar completely eventually, leaving behind incomplete or inadequately referenced work. Even after receiving explicit feedback from Mr. Foss and otherwise further instructions, some members simply couldn't be bothered. Even after their place in the group was threatened, some still remained incognito.

This brings us to the social loafing within our group. Being the minor in “major-minor course”, this essay was given less priority than the major. Even the suggested solutions to social loafing are futile in this scenario due to the apathy. Subconsciously, we’re all practically strangers to one another and feel no obligation to aim above the minimum for the sake of each other, let alone oneself. Members probably couldn’t care less about each other’s personalities as long as they get another dreaded assignment off their back and no matter what a person’s personality is, from a more philosophical perspective, we all take a hedonistic approach to writing this essay as opposed to a more utilitarian one. Members would rather spend the night out than try to get just a few more marks. Some members actually try, yet ultimately just want to get it over and done with.

Eventually, we ended up with something that would pass for an essay. Our delusional hopes of getting over 80 were shattered and our futile attempts, to salvage whatever we can, end in shame. If there is one thing we managed to agree on, it was that working alone blows working in groups clean out of the water for a task like this.

End.