

Building, Supporting and Developing Teams

In the current economic climate, organisational structures are rapidly changing to accommodate economic necessity. Teams are disbanding and re-forming with new members and new leadership. As many of us can personally attest, this often occurs with little support, reflection or encouragement for team members, especially new team leaders. The following is an “aid memoire” for those who want to get a new team off to a good start, and introduces the opportunity to beta-test a new tool (TeamBuilder™) from Psych Press which may support this process.

“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organisational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.” – Andrew Carnegie

What is a team?

A team is seen as more than just a group. Katzenbach & Smith (1993) have defined a team as a small number of people, with a commitment to a common purpose, an approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable, a set of performance goals, as well as the rewards and responsibilities for achieving these goals. It is this idea of being jointly accountable for actions and outcomes that makes a team more than just a group (Stott and Walker, 1995).

Why do we use teams?

Previous research has consistently suggested that teams have the ability to outperform individuals within organisations, especially when the skills, judgments and experiences of team members are diverse yet complementary. Such diversity enables teams to respond to most challenges thrown their way (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Furthermore, teams are believed to be a fundamental component of an organisation’s ability to transform into a more highly effective and greater performing entity (Sundstrom, 1990).

Seeking both quality and efficiency, leading companies such as Volvo and Toyota swept away the highly formalised, centralised and departmentalised structures and demonstrated the effectiveness of team-based structures in manufacturing environments a quarter of a century ago. Since then, the use of teams to achieve organisational objectives has spread rapidly, and today,

modern organisations rely on teams in order to increase organisational effectiveness and productivity (Robbins, 1998).

As has become the case with Toyota, the inter-relationship and functioning of teams has become an institutionalised part of the company's competitive advantage, as their ability to compete internationally is based largely on the effectiveness of their teamwork. This realisation is enshrined in the common usage of the phrase 'the management team', a term often used in connection with company performance.

Teams bring with them a sustainable capacity to perform, a collective capability, and the ability to cover for individual weaknesses. Teams have the resilience, range of skills, abilities, and experience to ensure that creative ideas are put into innovative practice. The sporting saying of: "A champion team will always defeat a team of champions" is based on these premises.

The realisation of the value of teams in achieving organisational objectives has demanded resources and a research-based understanding of both how teams work and how their ability to accomplish outcomes can be improved.

"Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work." – Vince Lombardi

Why are teams popular?

Research suggests that teams are replacing established bureaucracies and hierarchical management systems. This is due to the commercial need for customer intimacy and product development for niche markets which require unique products and services that provide higher margins and are difficult for other companies to replicate. In addition to maximising innovation, teams can provide a number of other attractions for the organisations in which they operate. For instance, teams can bring increased autonomy, increased participation, and ownership regarding decisions. Employees are no longer told what to do. Instead, they are assigned goals, or develop goals with their team leader, and are then free to decide how best to achieve these goals.

Why are teams powerful?

Organisations have become increasingly complex in response to social, political,

and economic environments. It is now more common for teams to manage the response rather than the actions of individuals within organisations. Thus, teams now change organisations more so than individuals.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead

The TeamBuilder™ 360 questionnaire

This questionnaire is intended to assist with the development of teams in organisations. This is an important issue in the current business climate as organisations continue to look to team-based structures to stimulate further improvements to productivity, profitability and service quality.

The questionnaire is based upon current research which defines what aspects of team functioning are crucial for success. Through completing the questionnaire, team leaders and team members can gain a clearer insight into how their functioning on research-based team attributes is viewed by the group as a whole, as well as how it compares with other similar groups.

If you would like to participate in a (free) pilot testing of this questionnaire, and have a team of more than six people, please contact us at info@psychpress.com.

We hope you find it useful and supportive!