

# **The Team Book**


## **A Resource Guide to**

### **Building Effective Teamwork**

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*We need to give each other the  
space to grow, to be ourselves,  
to exercise our diversity.*

*We need to give each other space so  
that we may both give and receive  
such beautiful things as ideas,  
openness, dignity, joy, healing, and  
inclusion.*

**Max DePree**

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# *Lessons in Human Dynamics*

## *Team Learning & Shared Leadership*

### **Some Context**

Many years ago I watched the *Eco-Challenge 2000* on the Discovery Channel. This was my first experience watching such an event, the highlights of which were broadcast over five evenings. I was sceptical at first about what I would get from this broadcast, but my interest in outdoor learning and team dynamics drew me to it.

*Eco-Challenge* was created in 1995, billing itself as the world's premier expedition race. The first event was held in Utah, with subsequent ones being held in different countries. In 1996, for example, British Columbia hosted the event in Pemberton.

*Eco-Challenge 2000* was held in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo. The theme was Malaysia's wildlife. Of particular significance is the very strong conservation ethic that accompanies *Eco-Challenge*. For example, participants who do not adhere to the event's strict environmental rules are forced to withdraw. As the saying goes: *Pack it in, pack it out.*

The event consisted of a brutal 500 kilometre (300 mile) course involving sailing, hiking, biking, swimming, scuba diving, rappelling, and canoeing in indigenous craft. People from around the world participated, for a total of 76 teams. Canada sent four teams. Each team consisted of four people, with at least two females. For a team to have officially completed the race, it must have remained together throughout. If one member withdrew (e.g., injury), the team was disqualified. This set the stage for a high level of teamwork if all of the members were to succeed.

Of the 76 teams, 44 completed the race, but of these some were disqualified for various reasons. However, they were permitted to continue in order that they could experience the 500 kilometre course.

The top finishers completed the course in six days; however, many teams took up to 12 days to reach the finish line, the last of which was a 40 kilometre open-sea canoe paddle. Of special note was the decision to allow for the first time what

could be called non-professional teams to participate. In the past, the participants were individuals who have engaged in extreme sports, and who were “ranked” in terms of the likelihood of their winning an *Eco-Challenge*. Consequently, the mixing of neophyte and experienced teams in this event provided some illuminating contrasts and lessons.

I was amazed at what the human condition can endure in incredibly difficult circumstances. Virtually of the participants suffered from trenchfoot, some horribly. Persistent and aggressive land leeches proved to be one of the most taxing factors contributing to the mental stress of the participants. While physical conditioning and preparation was obviously a critical factor to the success of teams completing the course, perhaps more important was the mental stamina of the participants and how they supported one another.

This leads me to share seven key lessons that I saw emerge from *Eco-Challenge*, lessons that have direct application to the effective functioning of organizations. Here they are:

### 1. Park your differences; focus on what needs to be done.

Those teams that ranked in the top few that completed the course in six days refused to argue among themselves, even when the stress became almost overwhelming. They parked their differences and focused on the task at hand. This contrasted with many teams, some that were new to this type of event and others with some experience. In these cases, differences of opinion or viewpoint emerged, along with interpersonal conflicts. This led to these teams wasting time arguing and bickering. For example, at the check points, the high performing teams spent only a few minutes before moving on. However, other teams sometimes spent up to several hours deciding how to proceed.

### 2. Take time to share in the joy of your experience.

Teams that let themselves get sidetracked through in-fighting not only performed poorly (in some cases dropping out of the race) they also lost the opportunity for sharing the positives of their experience and in learning as a team.

### 3. Don't criticize other team members behind their back.

In some cases, shown through one-on-one interviews with the participants as the race unfolded, team members criticized a particular team member. A case in point is Carlo, who constantly whined about his foot blisters (which were actually mild compared to most participants) while one of his team members became very ill for a few days. This led the three other members to ostracize Carlo and speak negatively about him. But it didn't appear that the three members made a strong effort to bring him into the team and re-orient his behaviour.

These types of incidents contributed to a high level of team disfunctioning and very hard feelings. Whatever joy and team learning that could have occurred was overcome by a high level of negativity. The team members not only had to endure the toughness of the course but also the stress caused by their behaviours.

### 4. Commit to the team.

Although some teams were disqualified during the race (e.g., getting lost and then found, injury, and illness), many decided to complete it for both personal reasons and commitment to one another. This was for me the real learning in *Eco-Challenge*. While it was impressive to see, for example, the team from France finish in the top few, it was the novice teams that most impressed me. They refused to let the many hardships and obstacles they faced diminish their spirit. This meant carrying a team member on one's shoulders at times because their trenchfoot had become so severe. And what is remarkable is that these teams were not attempting to rank in the race. Their shared purpose was for the entire team, all four members, to complete the course together, even if it took 12 days.

### 5. Maintain a sense of humour, even when everything seems lost.

The teams that maintained a sense of humour were able to deal with the adverse conditions they faced. Although they suffered from dehydration, diarrhoea, trenchfoot, sprains, hunger, and aggressive leeches, they maintained a sense of humour. Team members found humour in their situations, cracking jokes. Humour helped them to ease the pressure they felt, which was often overwhelming.

## 6. Celebrate your wins, however small.

Teams celebrated their small victories along the way, such as reaching the top of a mountain after a gruelling climb, or after making it through white water rapids without capsizing. Celebrating served to create the necessary energy and resolve for the team to tackle the next challenge.

## 7. Support one another, in both good and bad times.

When a member became ill or was injured, the others on the team supported him or her, both physically (carrying extra gear) or mentally (words of encouragement). Moreover, team members hugged one another when a member was having a particularly bad day. These effective teams did not criticize the sick or injured members. Poorly functioning teams, in contrast, did not provide the necessary support to those members who needed it. The consequence was that it became much more difficult for these teams to regain their spirit, sense of shared purpose, and collective energy.

Of important note was the presence of *shared leadership* in the well functioning teams. Although each team had a designated leader, leadership was indeed shared at the appropriate times. One case in point was when one of the team leaders, a male in his fifties with many years of experience with *Eco-Challenge*, was unable to walk due to severe trenchfoot. The team's members rallied around their leader, sharing the leadership. While the team was eventually forced to withdraw from the race because of the seriousness of the leader's condition, they persevered until the end.

Leadership in a well functioning team is not a dictatorship. Leadership must be shared. And in fact, when placed under pressure it is remarkable from where leadership often emerges from a team's members.

## Final Thoughts

The lessons learned from *Eco-Challenge* have clear applications to organizations: how people learn, collaborate, share leadership, achieve results, and celebrate. The team from France, one of the top finishers in the race, could be called a *high performance team* (from Jon Katzenbach's *The Wisdom of Teams*). The members

of this team were focussed through a shared purpose, well organized and prepared, committed to one another, cared for one another, and enjoyed themselves (although they were intent on winning the race).

For those teams that didn't enter the race to win but rather to have the experience of pushing themselves to their limits and to share in the joy of completing this odyssey together, *Eco-Challenge* proved to be the ultimate challenge.

### Some questions for team reflection

1. What can we do to bring *joy* back into the workplace, where laughter and smiles prevail?
2. What can we do to ingrain a deep sense of *commitment* to one another, not only in the sense of accomplishing our work but also in our learning and the fulfillment of our personal growth and development?
3. Connected to #2 is how do we begin to show a *mutual caring* for one another, especially in times of stress and crisis (a hallmark of high performing teams)?
4. How do we re-establish *what is important* in our work, with respect to value-added to citizens, and get off the treadmill of "doing" and move into the realm of "being?" And from there, how does this contribute to our achieving mastery in work-personal life balance?
5. From the above, how can we begin to translate this into team and organizational learning, and subsequently into the creation of new knowledge that is then diffused throughout our organizations?





## Is Your Team REALLY a Team?

Teamwork is talked about widely in organizations, but often with little understanding of what it means. Organizations want instant results, teams that are formed and ready to go overnight – something like an instant pudding.

This section looks at the six basic elements of teams. But first, here's one definition of a team (from Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith):

*A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.*

There are two key prerequisites to becoming a team. One is that the group of people involved has a **common purpose** and the other is **interdependence** among the members. Without both of these present the group will never become a team.

It's essential that the members of a team be committed fully to their common purpose and performance goals. A common purpose takes time to develop, but it gives the team an identity. Remember this: **team purpose = team performance**. They're inseparable.

To determine if your group is a team, or has the potential, answer these questions.

### 1) How large is your group?

- Is communication frequent?
- Do you meet often, and are discussions constructive?
- Do people understand their roles?

### 2) Are their sufficient, or potential, skills to achieve your goals?

- Are the three types of skills present: interpersonal, technical, and problem-solving?
- What skills are missing?
- Are people willing to learn new skills and to help one another?

3) Is there a clear and meaningful purpose to which people will strive to reach?

- Is it a team or organizational purpose?
- Does everyone understand it the same way?
- Do people think it's important and inspiring?

4) Are there specific performance goals that everyone agrees on?

- Are they organizational, team, or the leader's goals?
- Can they be measured easily?
- Do they allow for small wins along the way?

5) Is there a commonly accepted approach to work?

- Does it maximize the contributions of people?
- Does it allow open interaction among people to solve problems?
- Are new ideas encouraged?

6) Is there mutual accountability among people?

- Is there individual and mutual accountability for the group's performance and results?
- Are people clear on what they're accountable for, individually and mutually?
- Is there the view that only the team can fail?



## The Five Levels of Teams

In the previous section, we looked at the six basic elements of what constitutes a team. Now we'll move into understanding the five levels of teams.

Using the questions in the first section will help a group determine if it is a team or has the potential to become one. The next step is to understand the degree of teamwork to which a group of people can aspire.

The five levels of teamwork can be plotted on an X-Y axis to form what Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith call the team performance curve. It's essentially a J-shaped curve, starting on the Y (vertical) axis, then sloping down to touch the X (horizontal) axis, and then bending back upwards to the right. The five levels of teams are located along the curve. (See the diagram at the end of this article).

### *1) The Working Group*

The members interact mainly to share information and best practices and to make decisions. There are no common purpose or performance goals that require mutual accountability. The purpose of this group is only to specify the roles of its members and to delegate tasks.

Its members only take responsibility for their own results. Therefore, the focus is on *individual* performance. The key here is there is no significant, incremental performance need or opportunity that requires the group to become a team. Working groups are found throughout organizations, whether in business or government.

### *2) Pseudo Team*

There's a potential for significant, incremental gain here. The team has not, however, focused on collective performance. The members don't want to take the risks necessary to become a potential team. They are not interested in creating a *common purpose* or setting performance goals.

The pseudo team resides at the bottom of the performance curve and is the weakest of the five levels. What is especially dangerous about the pseudo team is that the members believe that they are a real team, yet they produce inferior results.

### *3) The Potential Team*

There is a significant, incremental gain in performance with this type of team. The members are working hard to achieve a higher level of performance. However, the members must work on developing a clear purpose, goals, and common approach. The members must also agree on mutual accountability. This form of teamwork is very common in organizations. This is also where the greatest gain in performance comes, from being a potential team to a real team.

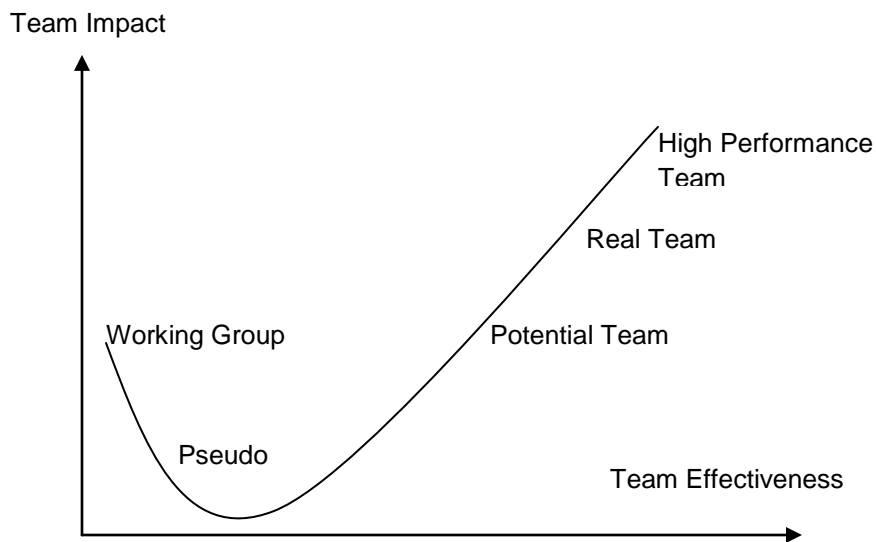
### *4) The Real Team*

This consists of a small group of people who *share a common purpose, goals, and approach to work*. The members have complementary skills. They hold themselves mutually accountable for their results. The performance impact and results of the real team are much greater than the potential team and working group.

### *5) The High Performance Team*

This has all the characteristics of a real team, but the members are *deeply committed* to one another's personal growth and development. They far outperform all other teams. The members form powerful relationships. Moving from a real team to a high performance team requires a very strong personal commitment. In effect, what is needed is a leap of faith.

## Team Performance Curve



### How to Build Team Performance

There's no ideal approach to building a team. A team must learn as it is developing a preferred approach. What's important to remember is that *performance* is at the core of building a strong team. Performance serves, in effect, as the compass to moving a team up the performance curve (see *The Five Levels of Teams*).

Here's an eight point framework for moving a team up the performance curve (adapted from Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*).

#### 1. Create a sense of urgency

Everyone on the team must believe that the team has urgent and worthwhile purposes. The greater the urgency and purpose, the more likely that a *real team* will emerge.

## *2. Select members by skills, not by personalities*

Effective teams need complementary skills. The three broad types of skills are: *technical, problem-solving, and interpersonal.*

What's critical for the potential team is to achieve the *right balance* in skills. But it's not necessary for members to have all the technical skills immediately. Instead, the key is to have the needed skills at the team's start-up and the ability for members to acquire additional skills later on. Key skills that should be learned at the start-up include interpersonal, problem-solving, and team skills.

## *3. Give sufficient time to initial meetings*

This is a vital time in a team's development. The first few meetings involve members getting to know one another. Assumptions are either confirmed or destroyed. Members watch the leader to determine if his or her actions are consistent with what is said. Is the leader control-oriented or flexible? Is the leader sensitive to how members react to his or her style? Can the leader change behaviour?

## *4. Establish rules of behaviour*

A real team has a set of rules to guide it – a code of conduct. Without rules, it's impossible for a group or potential team to transcend to a real team. At the early stage, rules include: attendance, confidentiality, open discussion, constructive disagreement, and fair workload. These rules encourage participation, openness, commitment, and trust.

## *5. Set some short-term goals*

Doing this helps create some momentum to propel the team forward. It ensures that the goals are reasonable and can be reached fairly and quickly. And it acts as a great motivator.

## *6. Shake them up with new information*

This is especially important for intact teams because they tend to block out new information. An example is a management team that's given new information on employee attitudes and perceptions from a survey. The team reacts in surprise. Giving a team new information serves as a catalyst to the members to help them refocus on the team's performance. It's also dangerous for members to assume that they hold all the necessary information collectively.

## *7. Interact at work and outside*

A team must not just spend a lot of time together at work but also time together outside of work. This is especially important during its early stage of development. Members need to have fun, both at work and outside. This promotes a bonding element. Potential teams are weakest here and must make conscious efforts to include socializing.

## *8. Recognize team performance*

Achieving a high level of performance is a team's ultimate reward. But before that's reached, it's vital to recognize the team for its progress and achievements. Doing this keeps the team's members focused and motivated.



## **What Kind of Team Player Are You?**

An effective team needs diversity in its membership, a combination of work and personality styles. The following four team player styles are not intended to be absolutes but rather preferences that people have towards how they work with others. Each style has a brief description of its strengths and weaknesses.

1. The **Doer** is very task-oriented and action-focused. Give him a job and he's happy. The *Doer* is good at research, reliable, meets deadlines, and produces good quality work. He operates by priorities and pushes the team towards higher performance. He can be effective at teaching technical skills.

The *Doer* dislikes uncertainty and ambiguity; is impatient; wants results immediately; can be too focused on data; is impulsive; strives for perfection; and tends to avoid risk. If the *Doer* is the leader, he must be especially careful of these weaknesses. One major problem can be a lack of trust in the team's members. Moreover, he must be aware of others' feelings and work at interpersonal and communication skills.

2. The **Visionary** sees the big picture and likes ideas and concepts. She lets the team's vision and mission be the driver. She doesn't like getting bogged down in details, leaving these to the *Doer*. She believes strongly in teamwork and is good at helping others understand where they fit in to the larger picture.

The *Visionary* is a creative thinker and stimulates others in thinking about the future. She takes a cooperative and flexible approach to working with others. However, she must pay attention to her weaknesses. She has a tendency to ignore work in favour of conceptualizing and dreaming about the future. She can get hung up on process instead of results. And she may over-commit the team to setting too many objectives

If she is the leader, the *Visionary* has a lot to offer the team, especially in the area of long-term strategic thinking. But she must be aware of her weaknesses.

3. The **Feeler** is a very strong context person, making sure that everyone is on board before proceeding with a task or project. He's very aware of how others feel and is an excellent listener and facilitator. He's skilled at resolving conflicts and won't let stronger members dominate team discussions.

The *Feeler* must be careful not to push the soft stuff too hard (i.e., listening and feedback skills) if the team gets bogged down. He believes that interpersonal skills



will solve all problems. And he can become a process fanatic, driving the others to distraction.

If he is the leader, the *Feeler* creates a participative atmosphere. But his people approach can be over-bearing and he must not lose sight that disputes are normal and healthy for teams.

4. The **Boat Rocker** is open and direct with the other members of the team. She regularly challenges the team on such issues as methods used, goals, and team values. She won't hesitate to disagree with the team's leader or with management. She likes to take calculated risks. However, the *Boat Rocker* must be careful not to use her style for non-productive use. It's necessary at times to let an issue drop. Moreover, she shouldn't push the team to take unnecessary risks.

As the team's leader, she's good at promoting an atmosphere of trust and openness; innovation; and continuous learning. However, she needs to watch out for being too argumentative.

### *The Challenge*

Each of us has a personality preference to how we approach work, establish relationships with co-workers, and engage in collaborative learning. In the context of team players, the challenge is for each of us to understand our preferred style and to use it effectively. This means being constantly aware of the shadow (weak) aspects of our preferred style. Moreover, we must strive for balance by using all four styles in the appropriate settings.



## The Four Stages of Team Development

This section looks at the four stages of team development (B.W. Tuckman) and incorporates the four team player styles that were presented earlier.

### 1. Forming

This occurs when people are first brought together to form a team. They begin to get to know one another and set out to establish the appropriate rules and behaviors that will govern the team. The members look to the team leader for direction. Interactions among the members are somewhat formal and polite during this phase.

During forming, the *Doer* wants to know where he fits in and his specific role. He can be helpful by being a catalyst to action and getting the team to move ahead. The *Visionary* helps by encouraging the members to share their visions and to set goals. The *Feeler* wants to be accepted by the others and to help people to get to know one another. Moreover, she wants the team to understand its diversity. The *Boat Rocker* wants openness and the team to have a clear purpose and direction.

### 2. Storming

The members are getting comfortable with one another. They start disagreeing and challenging each other. If this stage is missed, the team won't be as strong because it hasn't yet learned how to deal with conflict.

The *Doer* is getting impatient because he wants results. He can help the team by urging it to move ahead. The *Visionary* worries that the team is getting distracted from its goals. She can assist by promoting the common good and being open to ideas. The *Feeler* functions best during this stage. He wants to help his teammates be productive by using effective listening skills. And the *Boat Rocker* thrives here because it involves high energy. She can help by showing the proper way to challenge people and when to put an issue to rest.

### 3. Norming

The members know each other and have developed rules of conduct. They want the team to be successful. Trust is being established, and the members are having fun.

The *Doer* in this stage is excited because the team is getting down to real work. He plays a key role here. He can help the leader set standards (e.g., quality) and promote accountability and the effective use of resources. The *Visionary* wants to be reassured that the team is moving towards its goal. She may be concerned with camaraderie. The *Feeler* is happy that the team has reached this stage, but wonders if all the baggage has been discarded. He encourages the team to do some reflection. And the *Boat Rocker* becomes concerned that members are getting complacent and not challenging one another.

### 4. Performing

In this final stage, the team has a clear, common purpose and direction. The members appreciate their diversity and are building on it. Synergy is taking hold.

The *Doer* is worried about the team not being aware of external changes. He can be a catalyst to setting new standards. The *Visionary* becomes bored and wants the team to seek out new challenges. She can help by encouraging the generation of new ideas. The *Feeler* is happy with the team's progress and wants to celebrate. But he's concerned with the potential for regression. He can help by encouraging the team to celebrate and to air problems. The *Boat Rocker* thinks that the members are not challenging each other enough. She can help the leader by raising external changes that may affect the team.

What's important to remember is that a team will typically move back and forth between certain stages as it develops. This is normal and should be expected.



## Turning People On to Teamwork

The previous sections explored what it means to be a team, the five levels of teamwork, how to build performance, the four major team player types, and the four stages of team development.

It's important that leaders set the proper context—the atmosphere—for teamwork. Remember, team work is not an end to itself. It's built around the need to accomplish something. A common purpose, mutual accountability, interdependence and trust serve as the foundation to effective teamwork.

In building a strong team, it's vital that in the early stage that people learn about themselves. They need to understand their own strengths and weaknesses and what they need to do to respond to the latter. They must develop their own personal visions of what they want to achieve in their lives and how they're going to realize this. And a key component of this is people taking responsibility for their personal growth and development. This is achieved best by adopting a lifelong learning philosophy, one in which the team member strives to continually improve himself or herself.

Following this approach will enable a team's members to transcend to *team learning*. In essence, this is not just about sharing information. More importantly, it's about the existing boundaries among team members. Interpersonal learning takes place when the members must depend on one another for their own rewards. Of course, this raises such issues as resolving conflict effectively, solving problems collaboratively, and running productive meetings.

Turning people on to teamwork means creating those conditions that allow people to meet their personal needs by performing the work themselves. Instead of motivation, what drives people forward is *commitment*, in which their energy is directed towards a goal. To build commitment is less a matter of changing the person as it is creating the right conditions.

The team leader requires special skills if he or she is to be successful in fostering team learning and in setting boundaries for the team. These essential skills include: leading the team towards creating a common vision and team goals,

communicating clearly and concisely, running productive meetings, and solving problems quickly, as well as anticipating them.

A great deal has been written on leadership, to the point where it is used loosely without a clear understanding. The distinction between a leader and a manager can be explained this way: One is *given* management responsibilities – power and control over people and things. Leadership, on the other hand, must be *earned*.

In a team setting, this requirement to *earn* the privilege of being the team leader cannot be overstated. The leader's purpose is to *inspire* and *mobilize* the team to higher levels of performance. The leader achieves this by *enabling* the team's members. And this can only be done if the leader gives up *control*. This is one of the most difficult challenges many managers will experience in their careers. Yet it is essential if the members of a team are to assume greater responsibility and ownership for their work.

Abraham Maslow made this poignant comment on control and authority and one that should be heeded: *When the only tool I have is a hammer, I tend to treat everyone like a nail.*

Don't forget that an effective team isn't just concerned with getting work done but also with *how* it gets done. *Process* (how decisions are made) is critical. Strong teams with solid leaders don't compromise or vote. They operate by consensus, guided by their common vision and purpose.



## Some questions for team reflection

- 1) What can we do to bring *joy* back into the workplace, where laughter and smiles prevail?
- 2) What can we do to ingrain a deep sense of *commitment* to one another, not only in the sense of accomplishing our work but also in our learning and the fulfillment of our personal growth and development?
- 3) Connected to #2 is how do we begin to show a *mutual caring* for one another, especially in times of stress and crisis (a hallmark of high performing teams)?
- 4) How do we re-establish *what is important* in our work, with respect to value-added to citizens, and get off the treadmill of “doing” and move into the realm of “being?” And from there, how does this contribute to our achieving mastery in work-personal life balance?
- 5) From the above, how can we begin to translate this into team and organizational learning, and subsequently into the creation of new knowledge that is then diffused throughout our organizations?



## Rethinking Teams: Getting Over the Guilt Complex

Teams, teams, teams!

This has become the refrain since the early nineties when the literature on teams and teamwork exploded. Everyone needed to be part of a team, however small the organization. To most people working in organizations, private and public, the reflex is to refer to one's 'team' when discussing co-workers and work issues. What has happened over time is that the use of the word 'team' has greatly diluted what teams and teamwork are really about. And along the way, the cult of teamwork has created scepticism and mistrust—and even guilt—among employees.

Before one concludes that I am anti-teamwork, I should point out that in addition to spending many years being part of a variety of teams I also designed and delivered dozens of teambuilding workshops. The purpose of this concluding section, therefore, is to rock the teamwork boat a little and challenge the conventional wisdom that has emerged during the past two decades. My ultimate aim is to widen the perspective on what constitutes teamwork, that it's okay to enjoy working independently, and that "teamwork" in reality encompasses a broad range of ways in which people come together to accomplish specific objectives.

My own experiences in being a part of teams and various assortments of work groups extends back 32 years when I first entered the labour market in the late 1970s. When teams became the method of choice for how work should be organized in the early nineties, it was nothing particularly new to me since that was how I had been working for several years in a service branch. But I recall quite clearly the stress that some of my co-workers in other parts of my office underwent. Ostensibly they were all for teams, the message they wished to be heard saying publicly. But one-on-one, their true feelings were candidly expressed. These were people who preferred working independently, and whose

jobs really did not demand the rigours of a team setting. And I confess, too, that as much as I enjoy working with others, especially initiating projects and bringing people together, I also like working on my own when the right circumstances prevail.

So what am I talking about—working independently in the face of the omnipresent need for teamwork? It's essential that one understand what teamwork entails before defaulting to the mantra of teams, teams, teams! As much as a long list of writers has enunciated the characteristics and traits of what constitutes teamwork, at its core are two necessary conditions:

- 1. Shared common purpose for the team**
- 2. Interdependency of work among the members**

Unless both these conditions are present, one cannot have a team. Yes, there are a number of important features of teamwork, including:

- Size of the team,
- Effective communication,
- Performance goals,
- Respect for one another,
- Mutual accountability,
- Socializing and having fun.

As organizations continue to evolve as a consequence of socio-economic changes, technology, demographics, markets, etc., so too must their internal structures change. Work still needs to get done, regardless of external and internal changes, and sometimes this is by using formal (intact) teams or some other forms of bringing people together.



Most of us have probably been part of working groups at some point in our careers. I've spent a significant amount of time working in this manner. They can be very effective at addressing specific problems and issues with prescribed time durations. But it's important to remember that working groups exist to share information, delegate tasks and make decisions. The members of the working group take responsibility for their own results. The focus, therefore, is on *individual* performance. Consequently, the output of the working group is the sum of the individual members' contributions. The so-called synergistic effect of teamwork doesn't take hold in this setting.

When it is necessary to form a team because the conditions call for this type of work arrangement, the challenge to create effective teamwork can be quite daunting. It's important, therefore, to understand that teams typically go through four main stages:

### **1. Forming**

This occurs when people are first brought together to form a team. They begin to get to know one another and set out to establish the appropriate rules and behaviors that will govern the team. The members look to the team leader for direction. Interactions among the members are somewhat formal and polite during this phase.

### **2. Storming**

The members are getting comfortable with one another. They start disagreeing and challenging each other. If this stage is missed, the team won't be as strong because it hasn't yet learned how to deal with conflict.

### **3. Norming**

The members know each other and have developed rules of conduct. They want the team to be successful. Trust is being established, and the members are having fun.

#### **4. Performing**

In this final stage, the team has a clear, common purpose and direction. The members appreciate their diversity and are building on it. Synergy is taking hold.

The lengths to which a team remains at a certain stage vary, depending on the ability of the members to address and resolve issues and to move forward. But the members must work on developing a clear purpose, goals and common approach. They must also agree on mutual accountability.

Given the amount of time, effort and nurturing that the creation of a truly effective team requires, it's not surprising when one hears cynical comments about teams. Publicly in organizations employees will say what management wants to hear. But with co-workers in private, another conversation is being held.

One expert on teams who rocks the boat is J. Richard Hackman, who has been consulted by numerous organizations over the years on work design, leadership development, and team and group performance. His research runs counter to the popular press, finding that work teams are found clustered at both ends of the organizational effectiveness continuum. While some teams succeed well, others flounder. Underlying this is how management approaches work group design. Here are some key points to retain for consideration when thinking about forming teams.

First, management should not push teamwork when certain tasks can be done more effectively by individuals. One good example is preparing reports, which Hackman suggests is better done by one person on behalf of the group. My experience in report writing is aligned with this view. Trying to employ a team to

write a report is both inefficient and frustrating, with the result being an inferior product. A second example, but in the area of executive leadership, is the creation of mission and vision statements. While a democratic approach may appear appropriate, creating a vision statement with a team of managers can be hugely time consuming. I've been there, done that, and finally learned that having the CEO, president or the principal leader of the organization write a draft of a vision is much preferred.

Second, when a group of employees needs to be brought together to address an organizational issue, it's important to define it for what it is (e.g., working group, planning committee) and manage it accordingly. If teamwork is required (remember the two features of interdependency and shared purpose), then management needs to ensure that the necessary resources are available to help the team develop.

Third, when teamwork is determined as the appropriate route the level of authority for the team must be decided. And tied tightly to this are participative management and clearly defined objectives and timeframes. During my career, I've seen teams flounder or go off the rails because management did not clearly express its expectations at the outset. In the face of uncertainty and weak managerial oversight teams run the risk of going renegade, producing unnecessary grief for everyone.

Fourth, depending on the maturity of the team and its members (i.e., past experience) the structure supporting it will need varying attention. For example, what should be the size of the team? What are the training needs? Are special physical resources required, as well as budgets? How is leadership within the team to be shared? And how should team learning and knowledge generation be managed?

Fifth, few writers on teamwork address the interdependency among teams. This is a critical aspect of using teams within organizations, but one that is often overlooked. And the issue gains even more significance when self-directed teams are used. Some of my past work in delivering teambuilding workshops included self-directed teams. Without adequate managerial oversight, the danger exists of teams forming their own exclusive walls around themselves, driven by such motives as unique identity and controlling information. When this occurs teamwork at the organizational level begins to break down. Product and service may suffer as the guiding light of organizational mission and vision becomes dimmer in the eyes of employees.

The relationship between managerial leadership and the leadership practiced by individuals and within teams, as well as with other assortments of employee groupings, is constantly in flux and being challenged. In effect, there's a necessary tension between the two. This keeps organizations in the state of constantly learning and evolving. In the absence of this creativity and innovation will suffer, with the consequence being the onset of organizational sclerosis. In a globalized economy characterized by market turbulence and rapidly changing technology, compounded by the entrance of emerging economies, organizations have increasingly narrow windows within which to make corrections.

As organizations in the public and private sectors adapt to the pressures and dynamics of globalization and technological change, one key aspect will be how they approach work design. When teams are determined to be the most effective way to accomplish certain objectives, they will increasingly be virtual in nature. The use of telework, while being applied currently with varied success in the workforce, will add new challenges for managers. And of particular significance is the growing use of contingent workers who have no specific affinity for organizations: they move in and out based on organizational needs.

Finally, a rapidly emerging issue that's beginning to shake organizations is Generation Y (also referred to as Millennials). Gen Y is especially technologically savvy and possesses a high level of self-confidence. Their approach to work is more fluid, much less hierarchical and virtual-oriented through the use of technology. A major challenge for those in senior managerial positions will be how to organize work efficiently. Teamwork will undoubtedly continue to be an integral part of how organizations function, but the conventional mental model of what constitutes teamwork will increasingly be challenged.

My suggestion to those who are feeling stressed or threatened as a result of the turbulence we're witnessing in organizations is to follow these simple words: "Be open to outcome, not attached to it." Maintaining an open mind will enable people to see the opportunities that are resident in change and to adapt much faster and more easily.

Good luck!

**JT**

## About the author



Jim Taggart is a leadership and organizational learning consultant, offering services to executives and managers who wish to enhance their effectiveness as leaders.

Jim worked for three decades with the Government of Canada. His career spanned labor market forecasting and analysis, innovation and competitiveness policy development, and leadership development and organizational learning project management. A recognized thought leader, Jim maintains a website and blog on leadership and management issues. He holds a Master's degree in economics from the University of New Brunswick and a Masters degree in Leadership and Organizational Learning from Royal Roads University.

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