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1 - What is a Team?

Managers everywhere are being encouraged to use teamwork as a key tool in improving effectiveness but there is much confusion as to what the term "team" actually means. In many organisations, the teams that are created are just groups of people who are called a team and who fail to live up to the promises of improved performance.

A team has a number of definable features which distinguishes it from a group:

- **A definable membership** - everybody knows who is in the team.
- **Group consciousness** - the members think of themselves as a team.
- **Common goals.**
- **Interdependence** - the members need the help of one another to accomplish their goals.
- **Interaction.**
- **Ability to act as a unit.**

Individuals should know that they belong to the team and should share and understand its purposes and values. With a good team, the whole should be greater than the sum of the parts.



2 - Functions of Teams

There are five positive contributions which teams and teamwork can make to an organisation:

- 1 - Co-ordination:** teamwork is needed to co-ordinate complex tasks which involve a number of operations or stages. this is particularly true where a range of knowledge and skills is required.
- 2 - Induction:** the team can introduce new recruits to the style, methods, values and priorities of the organisation.
- 3 - Ideas:** creativity thrives on interaction between people. Different viewpoints and experiences encourage new ideas.
- 4 - Decision Making** there are two advantages in using teams to make collective decisions. First, a range of different suggestions can be considered and debated. Second, people will have more commitment to decisions in which they have been involved.
- 5 - Support:** because teams can give individuals a place and an identity in a larger organisation, they offer a way in which individuals can feel recognised, appreciated and looked after.



3 - The Qualities of a Successful Team

Good teams are effective in a number of ways:

- They carry out their tasks efficiently and well.
- Their members work well together and enjoy a good atmosphere.
- They are satisfying and rewarding for their individuals members.
- They are clear about what they want to achieve.
- They confront issues and resolve them in an open way.
- They have an atmosphere of support and trust.
- Can use both co-operation and conflict to get results.
- Have clear procedures for taking decisions.
- Are led in a way that suits the task, the team and its members.
- Regularly review what they are doing and learn from this.
- Encourage individuals to develop.
- Relate well with other teams.

To a considerable extent, the success of a team depends on the people who belong to it. Having the right people in the team is a vital starting point. Their skills, attitudes and commitment are the keys to the effectiveness of the team.

There are three types of contribution which individuals make:

- a) Skills, knowledge and experience** contribute to the achievement of the team's task.
- b) Ability to resolve conflicts** contributes to how well the team functions.
- c) Expertise, support and encouragement** contribute to what each team member gets out of team membership.

Finding the right people and putting them together does not lead immediately to a fully functioning team. There are a number of recognisable stages, described more fully later, through which teams pass before they become fully functional and show the benefits of team working.



- Forming:** The team members try to find out what the task is, what rules surround it and what methods/strategies can be used to achieve it. There is considerable anxiety as people test the water to discover what behaviour is appropriate and how other members and the leader will react.
- Storming:** The usefulness of the task and its feasibility are questioned. Conflict emerges involving the members, sub-groups and the leader. Opinions polarise and the leader's competence and authority are challenged.
- Norming:** Co-operation begins. Plans are made and standards drawn up. Communication develops. The group starts to work as a unit. Conflicts are resolved and resistance is overcome. Members start to support each other.
- Performing:** The task progresses well as more of the team efforts are effectively applied to it. An appropriate team structure emerges with functional and flexible roles.



4 - Recipe for a Successful Team

No team exists without problems, but some teams - particularly those who have learned to counter the negative team dynamics - seem to be especially good at preventing many typical group problems. How close a team comes to this depends on the following **eight** essential ingredients:

1. CLARITY IN TEAM GOALS

A team works best when everyone understands its purpose and goals. If there is confusion or disagreement, they work to resolve the issues.

Ideally the team...

- Agrees on its mission, or works together to resolve disagreement;
- Sees the mission as workable or, if necessary, narrows the mission to a workable size;
- Has a clear vision and can progress steadily toward its goal;
- Is clear about the larger project goals and about the purpose of individual steps, meetings, discussion, and decisions.

Indicators of potential trouble

- Frequent switches in directions
- Frequent arguments about what the team should do next
- Feelings that the project is too big or inappropriate
- Frustration at lack of progress
- Excessive questioning of each decision or action taken
- Floundering.

2. CLEARLY DEFINED ROLES

Teams operate most efficiently if they tap everyone's talents, and all members understand their duties and know who is responsible for what issues and tasks.

Ideally, the team...

- Has formally designated roles (all members know what is expected of everyone, especially the leader, facilitator).



- Understands which roles belong to one person and which are shared, and how the shared roles are switched (for instance, using an agreed
- Upon procedure to rotate the job of meeting facilitator);
- Uses each member's talents, and involves everyone in team activities so no one feels left out or taken advantage of (for example, not always having women take the notes).

Indicators of potential trouble

- Roles and duty assignments that result from a pecking order
- Confusion over who is responsible for what
- People getting stuck with the same tedious chores

3. CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Good discussions depend on how well information is passed between team members.

Ideally, team members should...

- Speak with clarity and directness (for example, avoid using questions to disguise statements);
- Be succinct, avoiding long anecdotes and examples;
- Listen actively, explore rather than debate each speaker's ideas;
- Avoid interrupting and talking when others are speaking;
- Share information on many levels, for example:
- Sensing statements ("I don't hear any disagreements with John's point. Do we all agree?")
- Thinking statements ("There seems to be a correlation between the number of errors and the volume of work")
- Feeling statement ("I'm disappointed that no one has taken care of this yet".)
- Statements of intentions ("Let's run a test on the machine using materials of different thickness")



Indicators of potential trouble

- Poor speaking skills (mumbling, rambling, speaking too softly, little eye contact).
- Members are unable to say what they really feel; cautiousness; lots of tentative, conditional statements ("Do you think, maybe, that sometimes it might be that...")
- Everyone senses there is more going on than meets the eye: people's words do not match their tone of voice or mannerisms
- Opinions expressed as facts or phrased as questions
- Plops: statements that receive no acknowledgement or response
- Bullying statements ("What you don't understand is..")
- Discounts ("That's not important. What's worse is...").

4. BENEFICIAL TEAM BEHAVIOURS

Teams should encourage all members to use the skills and practices that make discussions and meetings more effective.

Ideally team members should...

- Initiate discussions;
- Seek information and opinions;
- Suggest procedures for reaching a goal;
- Clarify or elaborate on ideas;
- Summarise;
- Test for consensus;
- Act as gate-keepers: direct conversational traffic, avoid simultaneous conversations, throttle dominant talkers, make room for reserved talkers;
- Keep discussion from digressing;
- Compromise and be creative in resolving differences;
- Try to ease tensions in the group and work through difficult matters;
- Express the group's feeling and ask others to check that impression;
- Get the group to agree on standards ("Do we all agree to discuss this for 15 minutes and no more?")
- Refer to documentation and data;
- Praise and correct others with equal fairness; accept both praise and complaints.



Indicators of potential trouble

- Failure to use discussion skills.
- Reliance on one person (the leader) to manage the discussion; no shared responsibility.
- People repeating points, unsure whether anyone heard them the first time.
- Discussions that are stuck; wheel-spinning; inability to let go of one topic and move onto the next.
- Discussions in the hallway after meeting are freer and more candid than those during the meeting.

5. WELL-DEFINED DECISION PROCEDURES

You can tell a lot about how well a team is run by watching its decision-making process. A team should always be aware of the different ways it reaches decisions.

Ideally the team should

- Discuss how decisions will be made, such as when to take a poll, when to decide by consensus (are there times when a decision by only a few people is acceptable?)
- Explore important issues by polling (each member is asked to vote or state an opinion verbally or in writing);
- Decide important issues by consensus;
- Test for consensus ("This seems to be our agreement. Is there anyone who feels unsure about the choice");
- Use data as the basis of decisions.

Indicators of potential trouble

- Conceding to opinions that are presented as facts with no supporting data.
- Decisions by one or two people in the group, without team members agreeing to defer to their expertise.
- Decision by a minority.
- Too-frequent recourse to "majority rules" or other easy approaches that bypass strong disagreement.
- Decision by default; people do not respond to a statement (the "plop"); silence interpreted as consent.



6. BALANCED PARTICIPATION

Since every team member has a stake in the group's achievements, everyone should participate in discussions and decisions, share commitment to the project's success, and contribute their talents.

Ideally, the team should...

- Have reasonably balanced participation with all members contributing to most discussions;
- Build on members' natural style of participation.

Indicators of potential trouble

- Some team members have too much influence, others, too little.
- Participation depends on the subject being discussed (for example, only those who know the most about a subject are actively involved; others do not even ask questions).
- Members too often contribute only at certain times in a conversation or meeting
- Some members speak only about a certain topic ("hot buttons"- participation only when the subject touches, for example, money or training).

Think of a team in which you are involved and consider the following:

- Does each member feel able to contribute an opinion on a subject the team is discussing?
- Are all contributions listened to carefully and are they valued?
- Are differences of opinion raised without developing into personal arguments?
- Are team members able to be themselves, real people, outside their role in the team?
- Will team members express the same views in front of you that they share with other team members or with the leader?
- Is there a positive feeling in the team that secrecy should be avoided?
- Is each member fully aware of any decisions or information that directly affects him or her?

Any question to which you answered no may indicate an area where openness could be improved.



7. ESTABLISHED GROUND RULES

Groups invariably establish ground rules (or "norms") for what will and will not be tolerated in the group.

Ideally, the team should...

- Have open discussions regarding ground rules, where the group discusses what behaviours are acceptable and unacceptable;
- Openly state or acknowledge norms ("We all agreed to decide the issue this way").

Indicators of potential trouble

- Certain important topics are avoided; too many subjects are taboo;
- conversations recur that are irrelevant to the task and harmful to the group.
- No one acknowledges the norms; everyone acts as they think the group wants them to act; no one is able to say exactly what ground rules the team follows (for example, no cracks jokes even though it was never stated that jokes would be out of place).
- Recurring differences about what is or is not acceptable behaviour.
- Behaviour that signifies irritation; for example, repeated disregard for starting and ending times.
- Conflict over assumed norms or conflicting expectation.

Some of the key areas for ground rules are:

- **Attendance and interruptions** - Team time belongs to the team.
- **Problems belong to the team not to individuals.** The whole team takes the credit (and the blame).
- **Participation.** Every member is on the team because they have something contribute. Some rule might be necessary to ensure that everyone gets the chance to contribute. An example would be taking turns to give inputs.
- **Value everyone's contribution.** This means listening carefully to what each person says; not interruptions; and giving due consideration to the opinions and ideas expressed. Don't put down other members or their ideas. Ask questions instead.
- **Deal with one issue at a time.** Otherwise the result is confusion.
- **Team roles.** Who will chair meetings? Who will take the minutes? What other roles must be filled?



Ground rules like these cannot be imposed. They must evolve and be agreed by the team before they can be effective.

8. AWARENESS OF THE GROUP PROCESS

Ideally, all team members should be aware of the group process - how the team works together - along with paying attention to the content of the meeting.

Ideally team members should...

- Be sensitive to non-verbal communication, for example, be aware that silence may indicate disagreement, or knowing that physical signs of agitation might indicate someone is uncomfortable with a discussion;
- See, hear, and feel group dynamics;
- Comment and intervene to correct a group process problem
- Contribute equally to group process and meeting content.
- Choose work on group process issues and occasionally designate a team member or outsider to officially observe and report on group interactions at a meeting.

Indicators of potential trouble

- Lack of reference to undercurrent issues, particularly when the group is having difficulty.
- Pushing ahead on the task when there are non-verbal signs of resistance, confusion, or disappointment.
- Inattention to obvious non-verbal clues and shifts in the group mood.
- Members attributing motives to non-verbal behaviour ("You've been quiet during the last 30 minutes. You must not be interested in what's been said").
- Remarks that discount someone's behaviour or contribution, or group process issues ("Let's get on with the task and stop talking about that stuff").



5 - Undercurrents in Team Dynamics

To outside observers, the only obvious team efforts are associated with the task: having meetings, gathering data, planning improvements, making changes, writing reports, and so forth.

If, indeed, these were the team's only concerns, progress would be very fast. But when people form into groups, something always seems to get in the way of efficient progress. The problem is that there are hidden concerns that, like undercurrents, pull team members away from their obvious tasks.

When they walk through the door into a meeting, team members are beset by conflicting emotion: excitement and anxiety about being on the team, loyalty to their divisions or departments, nervous anticipation about the project's success.

If left unattended these undercurrents can inhibit a group's chances of becoming an effective team.

Every group must therefore spend time on activities not directly related to a task, activities that build understanding and support in the group. You need to resolve issues that fall into what one author, William Schutz, calls the "**interpersonal underworld**."

These are issues not often spoken about, but common to us all, and they fall into three categories:

1. **Personal Identity in the Team.**

It is natural for team members to wonder how they will fit into the team. The most common worries are those associated with:

- *Membership, Inclusion*: "Do I feel like an insider or an outsider? Do I belong? Do I want to belong? What can I do to fit in?"
- *Influence, Control, Mutual Trust*: "Who's calling the shots here? Who will have the most influence? Will I have influence? Will I be listened to? Will I be able to contribute? Will I be allowed to contribute?"
- *Getting Along, Mutual Loyalty*: "How will I get along with other team members? Will we be able to develop any co-operative spirit?"



2. Relationships Between Team Members.

With few exceptions, team members want the team to succeed, to make improvements, and to work co-operatively with each other. They extend personal concerns to the team: "What kind of relationships will characterise this team? How will members of different ranks interact? Will we be friendly and informal or will it be strictly business? Will we be open or guarded in what we say? Will we be able to work together, or will we argue and disagree all the time? Will people like or dislike me? Will I like or dislike them?"

3. Identify With The Organisation

Team members usually identify strongly with their departments or divisions, and they will need to know how membership in the team will affect those roles and responsibilities. "Will my loyalty to the team conflict with loyalty to my co-workers? Will my responsibilities as a team member conflict with my everyday duties?" Usually it is the project that suffers if the two compete.

Just as team members must reach outside the group to maintain ties with their departments, so must the team as a whole build relationships throughout the organisation. Political astuteness is crucial. Finding influential people to champion the team and its project can make a big difference in the support your team receives from the organisation. The more people you convince that projects are worthwhile, the better off your team and the entire organisation will be.



6 - Stages of Team growth

As the team matures, members gradually learn to cope with the emotional and group pressures they face. As a result, the team goes through fairly predictable stages:

Stage 1: Forming

When a team is forming, members cautiously explore the boundaries of acceptable group behaviour. Like hesitant swimmers, they stand by the pool, dabbling their toes in the water. This is a stage of transition from individual to member status, and of testing the leader's guidance both formally and informally.

Forming includes these feelings

- Excitement, anticipation, and optimism.
- Pride in being chosen for the project.
- Initial, tentative attachment to the team.
- Suspicion, fear, and anxiety about the job ahead.

... and these behaviours

- Attempts to define the task and decide how it will be accomplished.
- Attempts to determine acceptable group behaviour and how to deal with group problems.
- Decisions on what information needs to be gathered.
- Lofty, abstract discussions of concepts and issues, or, for some members, impatience with these discussions.
- Discussion of symptoms or problems not relevant to the task; difficulty identifying relevant problems.
- Complaints about the organisation and barriers to the task.

Because there is so much going on to distract members' attention in the beginning, the team accomplishes little, if anything, that concerns its project goals. This is perfectly normal.



Stage 2: Storming

Storming is probably the most difficult stage for the team. It is as if the team members jump in the water, and thinking they are about to drown, start thrashing about. They begin to realise the task is different and more difficult than they imagined, becoming testy, blameful or overzealous. Impatient about the lack of progress, but still too inexperienced to know much about decision making or the scientific approach, members argue about just what actions the team should take. They try to rely solely on their personal and professional experience, resisting any need for collaborating with other team members.

Storming includes these feelings...

- Resistance to the task and to approaches different from what each individual member is comfortable using.
- Sharp fluctuations in attitude about the team and the project's chance of success.

...and these behaviours

- Arguing among members even when they agree on the real issue.
- Defensiveness and competition, factions and "choosing sides".
- Questioning the wisdom of those who selected this project and appointed the other members of the team.
- Establishing unrealistic goals; concern about excessive work.
- A perceived "pecking order"; disunity, increased tension and jealousy.

Again, these many pressures mean team members have little energy to spend in progressing towards the team's goal. But they are beginning to understand one another.

Stage 3: Norming

During this stage, members reconcile competing loyalties and responsibilities. They accept the team, team ground rules (or "norms"), their roles in the teams, and the individuality of fellow members. Emotional conflict is reduced as previously competitive relationships become more co-operative. In other words, as team members realise they are not going to drown they stop thrashing about and start helping each other stay afloat.



Norming includes these feelings...

- A new ability to express criticism constructively.
- Acceptance of membership in the team.
- Relief that it seems everything is going to work out.

... and these behaviours

- An attempt to achieve harmony by avoiding conflict.

Stage 4 : Performing

By this stage, the team has settled its relationship and expectations. They can begin performing - diagnosing and solving problems, and choosing and implementing changes. At last team members have discovered and accepted each other's strengths and weaknesses, and learned what their roles are. Now they can swim in concert.

Performing included these feelings

- Members having insights into personal and group processes, and better understanding of each other's strengths and weaknesses.
- Satisfaction at the team's progress.

... and these behaviours

- Constructive self-change.
- Ability to prevent or work through group problems.
- Close attachment to the team.

The team is now an effective, cohesive unit. You can tell when your team has reached this stage because you start getting a lot of work done. The duration and intensity of these stages vary from team to team. Sometimes Stage 4, performing, is achieved in a meeting or two; other times it may take months.

Use the descriptions here to compare your team with the normal pattern for maturing groups. Understanding these stages of growth will keep you from overreacting to normal problems and setting unrealistic expectation that only add to frustration. Don't panic. With patience and effort this assembly of independent individuals will grow into a team.



Knowing about the typical stages a team passes through - forming, storming, Norming, and performing - should relieve much of the fear team members have about the project's success. It is also helpful to be aware of the roller coaster of highs and lows every team experiences. The pattern is different for each team .

Team members' attitudes depend on both the speed and progress and the resistance or encouragement they receive. Eventually, everyone will better understand how projects unfold, and will be able to set a realistic pace for the project.



7 - Working Through Group Problems

General Guidelines

It would be nice to say that if you follow the advice in this handbook, you will never run into problems. But we all know that simply isn't true. Though severe problems are rare, occasionally an individual's behaviour disrupts the group. You should be prepared to deal with disruptive situations.

Generally, your best strategy is to

- **Anticipate and prevent group problems whenever possible**

As noted previously, most problems can be anticipated or prevented if a group spends time developing itself into a team: getting to know each other, establishing ground rules, discussing norms for group behaviour, agreeing to an improvement plan. If you do this when your team starts, you will save time, and prevent hassles, frustrations, and animosities.

- **Think of each problem as a group problem.**

A natural tendency is to blame individuals for causing problems. Remember, the 85/15 Rule: most problems are attributable to the system, not the individual. The truth is that many problems arise because the group lets them happen or even encourages them in some way. Examine each problem in light of what the group does to encourage or allow the behaviour and what the group can do differently to encourage more constructive behaviour. Assume the problem continues to exist because it somehow benefits the group: What could that hidden benefit be? How have group members contributed to the continuation of the problem?

Neither over-react nor under-react

Some behaviours are only fleeting disruptions in the group's progress. These are usually not a problem and sometimes even give a needed break in the activity. Other behaviours are very disruptive and impede, halt, or reverse the team's progress towards its goals. Some behaviours are chronic, occurring over and over again. The team leader should respond appropriately to the seriousness of the problems, ignoring fleeting disruptions, confronting chronic or serious disruptions directly.



Experienced leaders develop a range of responses to typical problems, each more direct than the previous one.

A leader's range of responses typically includes

- **Do nothing (non-intervention)**

Ignore the offensive behaviour, particularly if it is not a chronic problem or doesn't seem to inhibit the group. Sometimes, the leader need not intervene because other group members will deal with the offending behaviour. In such cases the leader is available to facilitate the discussion provoked when one member confronts another.

- **Off-line conversation (minimal intervention)**

Talk to the disruptive members outside the group meeting, asking them what would increase their satisfaction with the group. Give constructive feedback.

- **Impersonal group time (low intervention)**

At the start of a meeting, talk about general group process concerns without pointing out individuals, perhaps by going through a list previously written on a flipchart. Include the disruptive behaviour on the list. During the critique at the end of the meeting, the group evaluates itself on each item on the list. It is usually difficult to deal with problems without referring to the offenders. Sometimes not referring to the specific offenders is awkward and phoney. One way to get around this is to describe the context of the problem (such as, "Every time we talk about subject X, we get side-tracked"). Focus attention on how the group encourages the problem and what the group can do to discourage it. This approach treats all problems as group process problems rather than offences by individuals.

- **Off-line confrontation (medium intervention)**

Off-line confrontation is the same as off-line conversation except the leader is more assertive. Use it when other attempts have failed, especially when the disruptive behaviour continues even when the group has tried to change. Sometimes this confrontation may lead to an informal "contract" regarding agreed-upon changes in the leader's and member's behaviour. (For example, "I know you don't get along with Joe and I will do everything I can to avoid pairing you up on assignments. For your part I want you to stop being critical of him during team meetings.")



- **In-group confrontation (high intervention)**

As a last resort, after other approaches have failed, the leader may deal with the offending behaviour in the presence of the group. This disrupts the group's other business and exposes an individual's behaviour to open critique in the group. This tactic can be effective; it can also be a disaster. The leader must prepare carefully for this intervention: how to word the confrontation, what reaction to anticipate, how to avoid defensiveness or hostility in the offending member. Use constructive feedback techniques, expressing feelings as "I statements". The purpose of high intervention is to change the offensive behaviour, not to punish the offending member.

- **Expulsion from the group (do not use this option)**

We believe that you should never kick anyone off a project team and recommend against expulsion for the following reasons: It can create a stigma that remains with the group and with the expelled member for a long time. The costs of expelling a member are ill will, creating an adversary, and creating an unfavourable impression of the group among others in the organisation.

What can a team leader do when highly disruptive behaviour continues? One of the best strategies is to talk privately with the offending team member, and point out that disruptive behaviour seems inconsistent with a commitment to help the team succeed. If the person would rather not attend meetings, find other ways to allow his or her input into the project.



8 - Guidelines for Constructive Feedback

No matter what pressures a team encounters, a fundamental message of this handbook is that it can work hard at its task and support member's needs. The single most important skills to have in working through any problem is the ability to give **constructive feedback**.

Why? Because most often problems are expressed as criticism of someone's action. When you are criticised by someone, it is difficult to know what to do. A common reaction is to feel critical to them: "What right do they have to criticise me?" Suppose it is you reacting negatively to behaviour that truly disrupts the group's progress. Do you sit on your negative feelings for the sake of group harmony? Is there a way to express dissatisfaction without provoking a confrontation that might disrupt the group even more?

There are proven methods for giving and receiving criticism, methods that work equally well for giving and receiving praise. The goals are to give constructive feedback, whether positive or negative, and to make sure that any feedback you receive is constructive. While there is no guarantee, following the guidelines below will minimise the possibility of provoking a bad scene. Use them to help you decide when to give feedback, how to tell a person or group what you think, and how to listen to their feedback.

- **Acknowledge the need for feedback**
- **Give both positive and negative feedback**
- **Understand the context**
- **Know when to give feedback**
- **Know how to give feedback**
 - Be descriptive
 - Don't use labels
 - Don't exaggerate
 - Don't be judgmental
 - Speak for yourself
 - Talk first about yourself, not about the other person
 - Phrase the issue as a statement, not a question.
 - Restrict your feedback to things you know for certain.
 - Help people hear and accept your compliments when giving positive feedback.



- **Know how to receive feedback**
 - Breathe
 - Listen carefully
 - Ask questions for clarity
 - Acknowledge the feedback
 - Acknowledge valid points
 - Take time to sort out what you heard.



9 - Ten Common Problems and What to Do About Them.

One way to deal with group problems, particularly those arising from unspoken issues, such as competing loyalties to the team and work groups, is to talk about them. Most problems, though, require a more structured solution. The following examples show how to use the guidelines for constructive feedback and working through common team problems.

1. Floundering

Teams commonly have trouble starting and ending a project or even different project stages. They flounder, wondering what actions to take next. At the beginning, they sometimes suffer through false starts and directionless discussions and activities. As the group progresses, team members sometimes resist moving from one phase or step to the next. At the end, teams may delay unnecessarily, postponing decisions or conclusions because "We need something else. We're not ready to finish this yet." Problems at the beginning suggest the team is unclear or overwhelmed by its task. Start-up problems may also indicate group members are not yet comfortable enough with each other to engage in real discussion and decision making.

Floundering when trying to make decisions may indicate that the group's work is not the product of consensus, but some members are reluctant to say they don't support the group's conclusions. Floundering after completing one phase of a project could mean the group does not have a clear plan and does not know what steps to take next. Floundering at the end of a project usually indicates that the team members have developed a bond and are reluctant to separate. Or, perhaps, they are reluctant to expose their work to review and possible criticism from outsiders.

How a team leader can deal with floundering

- Get the group to look critically at how the project is being run.
- "Let's review our mission and make sure it's clear to everyone".
- Are we getting stuck because we have previous business that is unfinished? Does anyone feel we have missed something or left something incomplete?"
- "Let's reserve time at the next meeting to discuss how we will proceed. Meanwhile, I suggest that each of us write down what we think is needed to move to the next stage".



2. Overbearing Participants.

Some members wield a disproportionate amount of influence in a group. These people usually have a position of authority or an area of expertise on which they base their authority. Teams need authorities and experts because these are important resources. Most teams benefit from their participation. But the presence of an authority or an expert is detrimental when the person:

- Discourages or forbids discussion encroaching into his or her authority or expertise. ("You need not get involved in those technicalities. We are taking care of that. Let's move on to something else.")
- Signals the "untouchability" of an area by using technical jargon or referring to present specifications, standards, regulations, or policies as the ultimate determinants of future actions. ("What you don't understand is that PP8271 requires a bimordial interface between the crag stop and any abutting AC135.")
- Regularly discounts any proposed activity by declaring that it won't work, or citing instances when it was tried unsuccessfully here or in the past. Other members soon get the message that their suggestions will be seen as trite or naive. ("We tried that in Johnstown in 1968. It was a disaster! Steer clear of that solution").

How a team leader can deal overbearing participants

- Reinforce the agreement that no area is sacred; team members have the right to explore any area that pertains to the project.
- Get the authority to agree (before the project starts, if possible) that it is important for the group to make its own way, for all members to understand the process and operation. The expert may occasionally be asked to instruct the group, to share knowledge or a broader perspective.
- Talk to the authority off-line, and ask for co-operation and patience.
- Enforce the primacy of data and the scientific approach. ("In God we trust. All others must have data!").



3. Dominating Participants

Some members, with or without authority or expertise, consume a disproportionate amount of "air time." They talk too much. Instead of concise statements, they tell overlong anecdotes and dominate the meeting. Normal moments of silence that occasionally occur are an invitation for the dominator to talk. Their talk inhibits the group from building a sense of team accomplishment or momentum. Other members get discouraged and find excuses for missing meetings.

How a team leader can deal with overbearing participants

- Structure discussion on key issues to encourage equal participation. For example, have members write down their thoughts and share them around the table.
- List "balance of participation" as a general concern to critique during the meeting evaluation.
- Practice gate-keeping: "We've heard from you on this, Joe. I'd like to hear what others have to say."
- Get the team to agree on the need for limits and focus in discussions, and the value of balanced participation.

4. Reluctant Participants.

Many groups have one or two members who rarely speak. They are the opposites of the dominators. When invited to speak, these "underbearing" members commonly say "I am participating; I listen to everything that's said. When I have something to say, I'll say it. Each of us has a different threshold of need to be part of a group ("tribal" instincts veers "loner" instincts) and a different level of comfort with speaking in a group (extrovert versus introvert). There is nothing right or wrong about being tribal or a loner, extroverted or introverted; these are just differences between people. Problems develop in a group when there are no build-in activities that encourage the introverts to participate and the extroverts to listen.

How a team leader can deal with reluctant participants

- Structure participation the same way as for dominating participants.
- When possible, divide the project task into individual assignments and reports.
- Act as a gatekeeper: "Does anyone else have ideas about this?" (done while looking at the reluctant participant); more directly, "Sam, what is your experience with this area?"



5. Unquestioned Acceptance of Opinions as Facts

Some team members express personal beliefs and assumptions with such confidence that listeners assume they are hearing a presentation of facts. This can be dangerous, leading to an unstable acceptance of various "earth-is-flat" assertions.

Most team members are reluctant to question self-assured statements from other members. Besides not wanting to be impolite, they think they need not have evidence to respond with scepticism.

How a team leader can deal with unquestioned acceptance of opinions as facts.

- "Is what you said an opinion or a fact? Do you have data?"
- "How do you know that is true?"
- Let's accept what you say as possible, but let's also get some data to test it."
- Have the group agree on the primacy of the scientific approach.

6. Rush to Accomplishment

Many teams will have at least one "do something" member who is either impatient or sensitive to pressure from managers or other influential people or groups. This type of person typically reaches an individual decision about a problem and its solution before the group has had time to consider different options. They urge the team to make hasty decisions and discourage any further efforts to analyse or discuss the matter. Their non-verbal behaviour, direct statements, and "throw away" expressions constantly communicate impatience.

Too much of this pressure can lead a group in a series of random, unsystematic efforts to make improvements. Like hunters shooting blindly at silent birds in a heavy fog, they are satisfied that they're "doing something" and pray that at least one shot will hit the target.

How a team leader can deal with a rush to accomplishment

- Remind team members of their prior agreement that the scientific approach will be compromised or circumvented.
- Make sure he or she is not among those exerting the pressure.
- Confront the rusher, using the techniques of constructive feedback.
- Have examples of rushing and describe the effect of this impatience on the team's work.



7. Attribution

As individuals and groups, we tend to attribute motives to people when we disagree with or don't understand their opinion or behaviour. Through attribution we try to bring order and meaning into apparent disorder and confusion.

However, attribution is a substitute for the hard work of seeking real explanations. It also creates resentment: it is perfectly normal to bristle when someone else tells you they know what makes you tick or tries to explain your motives.

Within a team, attribution can lead to hostility when aimed at another team member ("What you don't understand is..." or "He's just trying to take the easy way out.") When aimed at individuals or groups outside of the team ("They won't want to get involved. They're just waiting 'til they can collect their pension.") it can lead to misguided efforts based on erroneous attributions.

How a team leader can deal with attribution

- Reaffirm prior agreement on the primacy of the scientific approach.
- "That may well explain why they behave the way they do. But how do we know? What has any seen or heard that indicates this? Can we confirm that with data?"
- If the attribution is from one member to another, don't let it go by without checking it out. "Jim, I heard Sally describe your approach as catering to the other side.' How would you describe it?"

8. Discounts and "Plops"

We all have certain values or perspectives that are - consciously or unconsciously - important to us. When someone else ignores or ridicules these values, we feel discounted. This discounting can also cause hostility in a team, especially if it happens frequently.

For instance, there will be times in every team when someone makes a statement that "plops". No one acknowledges it, and the discussion picks up on a subject totally irrelevant to the statement, leaving the speaker to wonder why there was no response. Discounts happen for many reasons. Perhaps the discounted member said something irrelevant to the team's discussion, or did not clearly state the idea.



Perhaps the rest of the team missed the meaning in the statements. No matter what the reason, every member deserves the respect and attention from the team. Teams must help discounted members identify and articulate what is important to them.

How a team leader can deal with discounts and plops

- Include training in active listening and other constructive behaviours early in the team's life.
- Support the discounted person. "Nancy, it sounds like that is important to you and we aren't giving it enough consideration"; "I think what Jerry said is worthwhile and we should spend time on it before we move on"; "Bill, before we move on, is there some part of what you said that you would like the group to discuss?"
- Talk off-line with anyone who frequently discounts, puts down, or ignores previous speakers' statements. Use the guidelines for constructive feedback.

9. Wanderlust: Digression and Tangents

The following scenario will probably sound familiar to anyone who has sat in on meetings: A group describing breakdowns in a work process is told of how one worker solved the problem. This reminds someone of how that same worker solved a problem in another process, which reminds someone else of an incident between that worker and his supervisor, which leads to a discussion of whatever happened to that supervisor, which leads to a discussion of retirement condominiums in Florida, and on and on. When the meeting ends, the team wonders where the time went.

Such wide-ranging, unfocused conversations are an example of wanderlust, our natural tendency to stray from the subject. Sometimes these digressions are innocent tangents from the conversation. But they also happen when the team wants to avoid a subject that it needs to address. In either case, the meeting facilitator is responsible for bringing the conversation back to the meeting agenda.

How a team leader can deal with wanderlust

- Use a written agenda with time estimates for each item; refer to the topic and time when the discussion strays too far.
- Write topics or items on a flipchart and post the pages on the wall.
- Direct the conversation back on track: "We've strayed from the topic, which was ----. The last few comments before we digressed were -----"
- "We've had trouble sticking to the point. Is there something about it that make it so easy to avoid?"



10. Feuding Team Members

Sometimes a group becomes a field of combat for members who are vying with each other. Usually, the issue is not the subject they are arguing about but rather the contest itself. Other members feel like spectators at a sporting match, and fear that if they participate in any disagreement between the pair, they will be swept into the contest on one side or the other. Usually these feuds predate the team, and in all likelihood will outlast it, too. The best way to deal with this situation is to prevent it by carefully selecting team members so that adversaries are together before the first meeting to work out some agreement about their behaviour.

How a team leader can deal with feuding team members

- When confrontations occur during a meeting, get the adversaries to discuss the issues off-line. Offer to facilitate the discussion.
- Push them to some contract about their behaviour (if you agree to X. I will agree to Y) or ground rules for managing their differences without disrupting the group.



10 - Leadership

Leadership has been a contentious subject ever since the military started looking for effective officers to command the troops. The simplest approach is to define a list of personal characteristics which an ideal leader would have.

Unfortunately, many of these are impossible to measure and, anyway, perfect people are in very short supply. As we can only modify personal characteristics to a very limited extent, another approach is to come up with a perfect method of leadership; the one best way. At least we could train people to do these things and, thus, we could produce many good leaders. Again, this has met with very limited success in practice as the method that worked perfectly in one organisation, or in one situation, failed miserably when tried under different circumstances. Clearly different styles of leadership were effective under different circumstances.

Effective leadership is about achieving results and the leader has three key areas of responsibility which are closely interconnected.

- **Achieving the task of the team**
- **Building and maintaining the team**
- **Developing the individuals in the team**

Your preferred leadership style will reflect the relative importance you give to each area and such other factors as the values and beliefs you hold about what constitutes a good organisation, a good manager and a good member of an organisation.

If your preferred style is **task oriented**, this indicates that you like lines of responsibility to be clearly defined. You are meticulous in following agreed procedures and expect team members to do the same. You tend to approach things in a logical and analytical fashion and you value knowledge and skill rather than intuition.

A **team oriented** style means that you believe in the group focusing on a common task or problem. You value the ability to work co-operatively with others and respect team members who are able to facilitate the work of the team as a whole. You see the people in your team as resourceful human beings rather than human resources.



You tend to negotiate and agree the roles and responsibilities of each team member and you support self development in team members.

An **individual oriented** style means that you tend to interact individually with other team members on a one to one basis, calling meetings only for dissemination of new ideas or to ask for ideas on a subject or problem. You value personal freedom and encourage team members to take opportunities to develop themselves and their ways of working. You listen carefully to what your team members say and you value and respect their views. You look for tasks and responsibilities in the team which can provide development opportunities for individuals.

You almost certainly have a preference for one of the above styles, but it is important that you are able to use all three appropriately as each is applicable in certain circumstances. Each style also has drawbacks.

Task orientation may be vital in times of crisis or where there are tight deadlines to be met. Used in the longer term, it will sap people's motivation and goodwill, eventually leading to passive compliance rather than active co-operation. This is a style for the short term as it neglects the longer term team and individual development needs.

Team orientation is especially important when the work is on a long term project or when the team leader may be absent at important times. Concern for team development should help to ensure that the task is achieved, but this cannot be left to chance. The team (and the task) still have to be monitored; achievement of the task cannot be left to chance.

Individual orientation is especially important if team members need to work apart for long periods or where rapid personal development needs to take place. The challenge is to make sure that individuals still contribute to the team and that a sense of teamwork still exists.



11 - Leadership Functions

There are certain leadership functions which must be carried out in order to ensure that a team achieves its purpose and goals and that individuals are able to contribute to the team:

- Initiating:** Getting the work of the team going and keeping it moving. Very important in the early stages of a team's work.
- Regulating:** Influencing the direction and pace of the team's work.
- Informing:** Bringing information or ideas to the team. Becomes increasingly important (with regulating) as the team carries out the tasks.
- Supporting:** Creating an emotional climate which makes it easy for members to contribute and which holds the team together. This is needed throughout the team process.
- Evaluating:** Helping the team to evaluate its decisions, goals, processes and performance. Especially needed as the team comes to the end of its work, or of one phase.



12 - How To Be A Good Leader

Challenge the Process

- Never accept the status quo
- Innovate and explore new ways of improvement
- Listen to ideas from the people involved
- Convert mistakes into learning opportunities

Inspire a Shared Vision

- Have and share a positive vision of the future
- Are genuine
- Do not deceive

Enable Others to Act

- Know their success is through enabling others
- Are persuasive and involve people in teams
- Develop responsibility in others by delegation

Show the Way

- Have clear values, beliefs and standards
- Stand up for them
- Are consistent in word and deed
- Identify priorities and break them into achievable steps
- Set an example

Encourage the Heart

- Encourage people to do the impossible
- Always give recognition and feedback
- Celebrate small successes
- Always find a way to say thank you
- Promote a team philosophy

