

# Teams

## Contents

Introduction .....	2
Understanding teams.....	2
Understanding issues.....	2
Advantages of individuals working in teams .....	3
Distinguishing groups from teams .....	4
Stages of team development (Tuckman, 1965).....	4
Team members .....	5
Possible problems with teams and how to overcome them.....	6
Teams and 'quality' decision making .....	6
The Ringelman effect .....	6
Social loafing .....	7
Group norms .....	7
Risky shift phenomenon .....	9
Groupthink.....	9
The need for teams.....	10
Making your teams more effective.....	10
Arriving at Consensus .....	10
Team Goals and Objectives.....	11
Task and Maintenance Activities .....	11
Ground Rules.....	12
Developing Trust .....	12
Developing Individual Contributions .....	12
Allocating Tasks.....	13
Some tips on leading teams.....	13
References .....	15

## Introduction

At the end of this topic, you will be able to:

- Understand the importance of effective team working, and how to improve team work;
- Explain the stages of team development, and know how to be more effective in a team;
- Describe some of the problems of team working and know how to overcome these.

## Understanding teams

Mixing with other people brings its rewards and its challenges. In a working environment, teams are very common-place but not always fully understood.

This topic will show you why teams are important and why they may experience problems and how you can overcome them to make your working life more comfortable. It will also improve overall performance which can lead to an increase in productivity which will be good for the business.

### Team role

Complete the [questionnaire](https://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/teamwork.htm) <<https://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/teamwork.htm>> to find out what sort of team member role you play and keep a note of it.

## Understanding issues

This activity is designed to help you to consider the range of issues that you need to be aware of in order to understand and successfully manage group and team work. This will help to prepare you for this topic, which takes a holistic approach to the team-work process. First, consider a team or group in which you have participated. You can choose a work group or team, or a group or team from another area of your life, for example, a voluntary action group or team.

1. What was the purpose of the group or team?
2. How well did it achieve its goals and aims?
3. Who was involved in it?
4. How were members selected?
5. Did they have different skills and experience?
6. If so, were they complementary?

## Teams

7. What processes and activities worked well and what did not work so well?
8. What are the positive features you can remember?
9. What are the negative features you can remember?
10. Other thoughts

## Advantages of individuals working in teams

A good team produces numerous benefits to the organisation and to team members. The organisational benefits of teams are, according to Huczynski and Buchanan (2004):

**Complex** - Working on complex tasks not easily undertaken by individuals

**Stimulating** - A means of stimulating creativity and generating new ideas

**Liaison** - To act as a liaison/co-ordination mechanism which integrates the different parts of the organisation

**Problem-solving** - For problem-solving, where multiple viewpoints are important

**Implement** - To implement decisions, i.e. so that a common objective or goal can be set for a number of people

**Socialising** - As socialising devices, so that a common message, i.e. organisational culture, can be communicated and reinforced - subversive control?

**What are some of the advantages for you of working within a team? What is useful, enjoyable or productive about working in a team?**

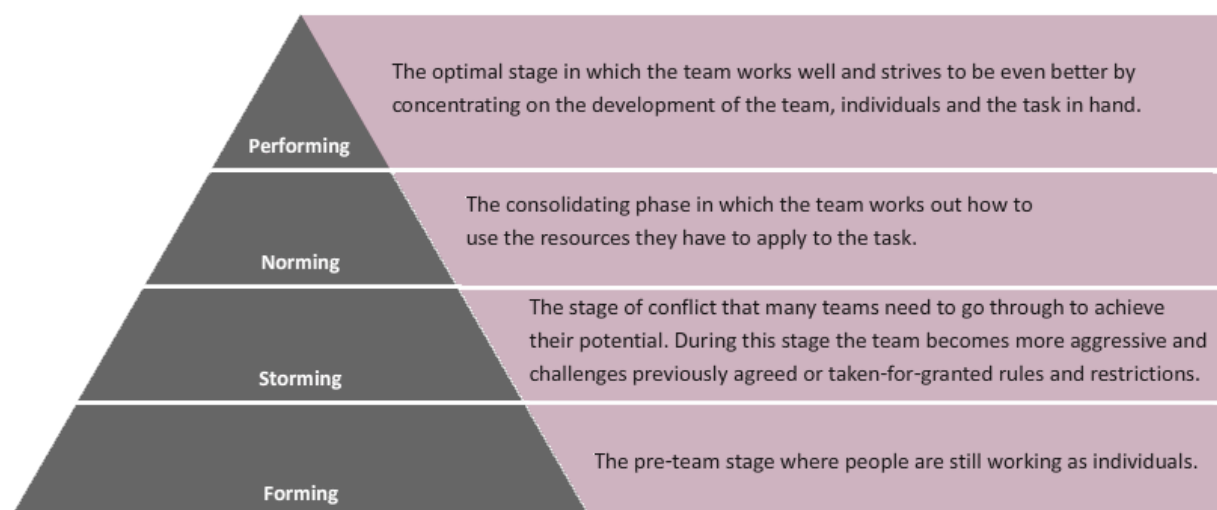
- Fulfil social needs: it is nice to mix with people at work and gives a sense of belonging.
- So much of what we know about ourselves is constructed from the way in which others treat us. So being in a team gives our own perception of our self-worth and place.
- Reduce feelings of insecurity, anxiety and powerlessness which we can get from being on our own. Being in a team gives us confidence.
- Working in a team allows us to develop an agreed set of goals and objectives which is important in any business otherwise people feel they don't know what they are working towards.
- Team working actually polices people in that they will conform to the team's way of doing things. This can be a force for good or evil but it does help people feel they belong.

## Distinguishing groups from teams

So what are some of the difference between groups and teams? Have a go at testing your knowledge. Please complete this task in the online version of this resource.

## Stages of team development (Tuckman, 1965)

According to **Tuckman**, all groups go through a series of stages of development before performing in a fully mature and effective manner and a team develops from individuals through a series of stages in accordance with the shared experiences of its members. **Tuckman** identified four stages of team development, to which he added a fifth stage, adjourning, with **Jensen** in the late 70s (**Tuckman & Jensen, 1977**).



The fifth stage: 'Adjourning' (sometimes also referred to as 'mourning'): the stage when the team disbands and individuals move on to other responsibilities.

### Bruce W. Tuckman – forming, storming norming and performing in groups

For detailed information on [Tuckman's model](http://www.infed.org/thinkers/tuckman.htm)

<<http://www.infed.org/thinkers/tuckman.htm>> and the research which led to its development.

## Team members

A team is more than a set of individuals with the appropriate skills. People bring to the team not only their knowledge and skills but also their personal attributes and the ways in which they behave, contribute and relate to others. A popular idea is that these individual characteristics should be taken account of in constructing teams. While we may not be in a position to select team members, according to **Belbin**, we need to consider these behaviours when selecting a team. A person who is known to be confident and enthusiastic is likely to behave in the same way when he or she joins a team. If all team members behave in the same way, then not only is conflict likely but the quality of the task is likely to suffer.

By ensuring a balance of behaviours or 'roles' there is a greater likelihood that the team will perform well. **Belbin's** research (1981; 2003) (developed and slightly amended over the years) identifies nine clusters of behaviours, or roles. He suggests that individuals will be more effective if they are allowed to play the roles they are most skilled in or most inclined to play, although they can adopt roles other than their preferred ones, if necessary.

### Belbin's roles

Each role has both positive and negative aspects. The nine roles are detailed on [Belbin's website](http://www.belbin.com/about/belbin-team-roles/) <<http://www.belbin.com/about/belbin-team-roles/>>.

The weaknesses of Belbin's framework are that people's behaviour and interpersonal styles are influenced by context: that is, the other people in the team, the relationship with them and by the task to be performed. Moreover, research into the validity of Belbin's nine roles has shown that some are not easily distinguishable from one another and that the roles fit more easily into the more conventional framework of personality traits (Fisher et al., 2001).

However, Belbin's framework has been very influential on organisational and managerial thinking about team building and development (although it is not the only one). Such frameworks are helpful in guiding the composition of a balanced team. When, as a manager, you have no control over the composition of a team it is important to discuss with team members their strengths and weaknesses and preferred working styles.

Research into the differences between successful and unsuccessful teams highlights the importance of having a mix of people with different ways of behaving. It is the combination of different roles within a team that seems a crucial factor in its success. A team benefits from the differences rather than the similarities between people.

A successful team blends these different roles together so that the strengths of one compensate for the weaknesses of the other.

What emerges is that teams do have a vital role to play within organisations, however the problems associated with team working should not be underestimated. And we will look at this next.

## Possible problems with teams and how to overcome them

As we have already spoken about - teams are not always necessary within an organisation, and sometimes the task just does not require it. We have also looked at the fact that teams go through stages of development and this can be very unproductive too. Here are some other reasons why teams are not always the solution to all organisational problems.

### Teams and 'quality' decision making

**Miner (1984)** argues that teams make average but not better decisions than individuals, and further research has indicated that the quality of work group decisions is consistently below that made by the most capable individual members (**Rogelberg et al, 1992**); whilst **Michaelson et al (1989)** argue that team results are often more accurate, but take far longer for decisions to be reached (**Vroom & Yetton, 1973**).

Audio transcript: **Decision making in teams**

"Basically this means that often a team tends to 'norm' effort. So that the weaker members of the team are pulled up and the stronger ones pulled down and they meet in the middle. This is good for the weaker ones, but not so for the stronger ones. Also team decision making can take far longer and when a business needs a decision made fast then a team may be too slow."

### The Ringelman effect

According to Ringelman (1913), individual effort tends to decrease as the group size increases. This has become known as the Ringelman Effect or Social Loafing.

Research has revealed that social loafing is most likely to occur when:

- the task is perceived as boring, unimportant, or simple;
- team members perceive that their individual effort will not be identifiable;
- the nature of each person's contribution was similar to others;
- team members actually expected their colleagues to loaf.

### Audio transcript: **Ringelman effect**

The main reasons **Ringelman** identifies for this behaviour are:

- The perceived equity of effort - the notion of fairness - and if other team members feel that individuals are not putting in as much effort, they too will withdraw;
- The dispersion of responsibility allows people to feel that they are hidden within the crowd/team and so their contribution, or lack of it, will go unnoticed;
- There can be a negative impact of group reward which causes team members to not wish to put in extra effort as the reward will be dispersed equally amongst all members and no one will be singled out for personal praise or reward;
- When there are problems of co-ordination, people get in each other's way when performing tasks and they become unclear as to who should be doing what. This causes individuals to become de-motivated and withdraw their effort.

## Social loafing

In order to avoid social loafing, Greenberg and Baron (1997) suggest:

- making the work more involving;
- if people are interested then they are more likely to remain engaged;
- identifying individual workers;
- if individual work can be identified, it stops people from being able to hide in generic task results;
- rewarding contributions to the team;
- rewarding an individual's ability to help other team members meet their goal, not just their own contribution;
- threatened punishment;
- that fear of being punished generally results in improved performance.

## Group norms

When individuals are assigned to work together, for whatever task, they establish expected modes of behaviour and beliefs both formally and informally. These are known as **Group Norms**, and they tend to guide individual members to behave in a particular way, as they



## Teams

want to 'fit-in' and feel as if they belong. There have been a variety of interpretations for how and why these norms develop.

Individual members can yield to group pressure to conform to group norms, in three main ways (**Asch, 1956**):

**Distortion of perception** - Individuals can convince themselves that what they were seeing was wrong and the rest of the group must be right

**Distortion of judgement** - Individuals convince themselves they just must have misunderstood a task, rather than the group actually getting it wrong

**Distortion of action** - Individuals want to fit in and so will act in such a way as to ensure they are not left out or made to feel different

### Audio transcript: **Group norms**

"Once established, group norms are very difficult to change, and they will be enforced in order to ensure the survival of the team; to help it achieve its task; in order to clarify or simplify how members are expected to behave; to avoid embarrassing situations between members, and to clarify its central values or unique identity. Although norms can have a positive effect of team success, however, these norms can actively work against a team's ability to work together. They can also be ineffective for the company too. I have an example. Years ago, I worked for an anodising factory in Birmingham - which made shiny bits of metal to put on vending machines etc. I was a delivery driver for them, and when I started I was given a delivery in Manchester - which is roughly a 2 hour drive there and the same back, plus delivery time. So I get there and back in about 4 and half hours and ask the manager for another delivery and he sends me off to somewhere else - I can't remember where now. I get back from this delivery and the two other drivers are waiting for me. They tell me that a trip to Manchester from Birmingham takes ALL day, and that is the way they have always done it, and I needed to do the same if I wanted to be accepted within the driving team. So I took all day to get to Manchester and back - sitting in a lay by for 2 hours often to pass the time..... Not good for business but accepted ways of working for the team...."

The reality is that teams can establish very clear and controlling ways of behaving, and these can be detrimental to effective decision-making.

## Risky shift phenomenon

Working in teams can create what **Stoner (1968)** refers to as Risky Shift Phenomenon. This can be categorised as:

**Diffusion of responsibility** - Because there is no one person that will take the blame, this encourages the team to make more risky decisions

**Valuing risk** - A team can actually encourage its members to take more risky decisions because individuals can be seen to be tough or macho as a result

**Familiarisation** - The more something is discussed the more 'normal' it feels. What starts out as an outrageous idea soon becomes OK after being discussed for a while

**Prominence/leadership effect** - Those who speak the loudest or dominate the team may be listened to more, but they are not always the people with the best or most practical answers

Audio transcript: **Risky shift phenomenon**

"This translates as a group making more risky decisions than individuals would. Sort of 'bigging themselves up'. A gang will be far more courageous than one unruly youth, for example. This can have disastrous consequences. In work, teams this can mean that a team end up making decisions that are really not workable but the team mentality has created an air of confidence which means anything can be possible. This is not always the case. However, teams can make more creative decisions which are braver than individuals and this can be a good thing."

**Risky shift phenomenon can mean that the best decisions are not always taken, and this can have difficult consequences.**

## Groupthink

**Another way in which group norms can have a detrimental effect on decision-making is identified as Groupthink (Janis, 1972):**

"This translates as a group making more risky decisions than individuals would. Sort of 'bigging themselves up'. A gang will be far more courageous than one unruly youth, for example. This can have disastrous consequences. In work, teams this can mean that a team end up making decisions that are really not workable but the team mentality has created an air of confidence which means anything can be possible. This is not always the case. However, teams can make more creative decisions which are braver than individuals and this can be a good thing."

## The need for teams

Regardless of these potential difficulties associated with team working. Peter Honey argues that teams are as important as ever.

Audio transcript: **The importance of teams**

"Teams are very important - now so even more. Teams support individual members and satisfy all sorts of key motivators within people. They get jobs done with limited resources and speed up many tasks - although this is not always the case. Whatever the problems with teams, we have to find ways of overcoming them because they will always be here".

So what can you do to ensure your team is effective? We will look at this now.

## Making your teams more effective

### Arriving at Consensus

Conflict is perhaps most likely to arise in team work during decision-making. You can help to avoid unnecessary conflict by ensuring that individuals see and understand the logic of what you are proposing, by exploring and discussing the proposals and by making sure there is agreement before proposals are finalised. Some guidelines are:

- Present a position logically, pointing out strengths and weaknesses and illustrating with examples.
- Try to avoid using your extra power as team leader or manager.
- Demonstrate the benefits as well as any disadvantages of the proposal.
- Avoid changing your mind or agreeing with something because this is easier than promoting or defining what you regard as a good proposal.
- Remember that consideration of a variety of ideas and opinions is likely to be constructive.
- Make sure that everybody has access to all the information needed to reach considered opinions.

Sometimes during the life of a team, conflict can run so high that communication is impaired and intervention may be necessary. At such times, the team will need to examine its own progress. Here, you will need to:

- ensure that behaviour between members is appropriate
- reinforce and support desirable behaviour

## Teams

- be prepared to raise the issue of inappropriate behaviour
- create a sense of fairness by empowering or sharing power across team members
- make sure the team goals are shared. (**adapted from Hill and Farkas, 2001**)

### Team Goals and Objectives

A team needs clear goals that members believe are important and worthwhile. A team is more likely to be effective if it can participate in developing team objectives and work out how they are to be achieved, even if the team's overall goal has been imposed from above. Discussions should lead to action planning, including specific milestones, timetables and monitoring activities to keep the team focused and to create an appropriate sense of urgency. Defining a measurable output gives the team a framework to work within.

### Task and Maintenance Activities

One way of monitoring the successful functioning of teams is to look at two different types of behaviours. Task behaviours are those that aim to achieve the project or overall tasks set. Maintenance behaviours are those that keep the team running smoothly. It is important that both types of behaviours are present. Some examples are shown below:

#### Task Maintenance

**Proposing:** Proposing ideas or courses of action that help the achievement of the task.

*Gatekeeping:* Making a positive attempt to bring a person into the discussion or making an equally clear attempt to prevent a person from being excluded.

**Building:** Adding to other people's proposals.

*Encouraging:* Behaving or responding in a warm and friendly way.

**Disagreeing:** Contesting proposals that seem to be misconceived and might work against the achievement of the task.

*Resolving conflict:* Being ready to compromise and accept what others want to do.

**Giving and seeking information:** Providing data and opinions relevant to the task achievement.

*Giving feedback:* Giving position feedback on feelings and opinions

**Summarising:** Summarising a discussion or the group's progress.

*Recognising feelings:* In general, recognising that people have personal feelings about their work

Finding a balance between the two types of behaviours can be difficult. You may need to work hard to control the emergence of individuals' personal interests, motivations and

agendas which can be detrimental to team working. Trust between team members can help individuals to suppress their personal interests for the good of team development and performance.

### Ground Rules

The team needs to establish a mutually-agreed working approach. The means of participation and expectations of the team experience should be agreed on. Discussions will inevitably consider the norms and values held by the team and what rules are needed to preserve these.

Team members will also need to discuss process issues, such as how the group evaluates and self-regulates itself (that is, how any performance issues will be addressed) and how conflicts are managed.

### Developing Trust

A reasonable degree of trust is an essential ingredient of any successful relationship. Without trust, communication will deteriorate because people will begin to hide their views or try to impose them.

Each member of a team must take some responsibility for the development of trust, although team leaders and managers have the greatest responsibility and the greatest influence. Trust is likely to develop when people listen to and respect each other's views, irrespective of whether or not they agree with them. Then they are able to share their ideas and views without fear of recrimination.

As you can help to ensure the development of trust by involving team members in setting team and individual goals and by giving the team members the necessary autonomy to carry out their tasks without undue interference. You should take care, however, that delegating responsibility to team members does not result in abdicating responsibility - that is, ceasing to monitor the performance of team members. A team must also have ways of monitoring and giving feedback on the performance of its members. Any effective team will need to conduct regular reviews.

The higher the level of trust a group has, the easier it will be to deal with conflict when it (almost inevitably) occurs.

### Developing Individual Contributions

Based on their prior experience, team members will bring assumptions and ideas about how teams should operate, what is expected of them and what they can expect from the team-working experience. These assumptions, ideas and expectations may not be appropriate to

## Teams

the current situation. Conversations are essential to bring to the surface any possible tensions. Questions for you to address here include:

- How well do the tasks allocated fit with the person's preferred 'role(s)'?
- Who has the skills and experience to handle a particular task competently and efficiently?
- Who will find the task useful for their development?
- What further training, development or support might an individual need?

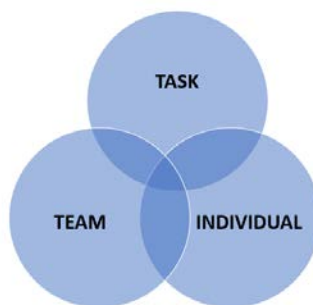
### Allocating Tasks

The allocation of tasks, responsibilities and priorities of individual team members is usually done, at least partly, through joint discussion and negotiations in the team. If the team has a manager, it will be the manager's responsibility to see that this is done effectively. Usually the process will be supported and strengthened by regular supervision and appraisal. Key questions for you to ask are:

- Has work been fairly distributed between team members?
- Have roles and responsibilities of team members been decided?
- Has each individual member taken personal responsibility for at least some aspect of the team task? (**adapted from West, 2004**)

### Some tips on leading teams

According to John Adair (1973), the task, the team and the individual are all inextricably linked. A good leader understands how to prioritise each of these 3 according to the situation. Team performance is based on the task being undertaken and the morale and trust of each team member. Maintenance of the individuals and evaluating the task regularly will ensure optimum performance of the team.



## Teams

### Summary

During this topic, you have been introduced to:

- benefits of team working and difference between groups and teams;
- stages of team development;
- team roles;
- problems with teams and how to overcome them;
- making your teams more effective.

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