

There's no "I" in TEAM

Develop your teamwork skills

Apex Leadership Ltd



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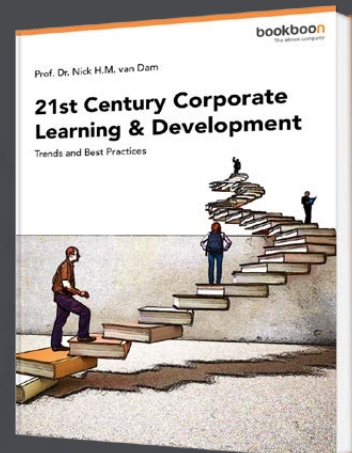


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Preface

Most surveys into what employers want in their staff would result in a similar list. Employers are looking for people who are good at:

- Teamwork
- Communication
- Self-motivation
- Planning and organising
- Problem solving
- Decision making
- Time management and prioritising
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Willingness to learn
- Interpersonal and negotiating skills

This e-book is about the importance of teams in the workplace. Whatever job you do, you're almost certainly going to be part of a team. This book offers some insights into teams, and some tips on how to develop your **teamworking skills**. It begins with a discussion of teamwork theories and introduces some unusual approaches to using them. Then it offers some practical advice on how to develop your teamworking skills. Both as a team member and as a team leader. Whether you're applying for your first job or for your first promotion to team leader, understanding how teams work will give you that extra career boost.

Apex Leadership Limited was founded by [Anthony Sturgess](#) and [Phil Higson](#). They have a long track record of developing innovative and challenging management and leadership development interventions, including programmes which have won national awards. From several MBA programmes to tailored, client specific programmes, Anthony and Phil have worked with new and experienced managers, in a wide range of organisations, across a breadth of management and leadership roles.

Anthony Sturgess has almost twenty years experience in the teaching, facilitation and coaching of managers and leaders. This experience ranges from individual leadership and management development to leading organisational change.



Anthony has worked with a wide range of managers from small and large organisations. More widely, he has worked within client organisations, using an internal consultancy approach to create tailored development solutions and programmes. These have supported numerous public and private sector organisations to successfully develop their managers, to achieve effective change, and to realise genuine organisational improvements.

Phil Higson is a published author and active researcher, with over 25 years experience in business and management education as lecturer, course developer, manager, external examiner and consultant. He has worked mainly in UK universities although he has also consulted or taught in France, Russia and Hong Kong.



A former MBA course leader, Phil has also written research articles and conference papers exploring the role of business schools in workplace management development. Before becoming an educator, Phil worked in several small and large organisations, in both the UK and Australia.

This combination of management experience in small and large organisations, in both private and public sectors, has given Phil a wide ranging perspective on work and management. Phil has authored or created numerous training and development tools and is experienced in managing large projects to support management and leadership development in a range of organisations.

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Or you can visit the major online resource developed by Apex Leadership at:
[The Happy Manager](#) helping you find a better way to manage.

1 Introduction

All organisations see the value in teams. The vast majority of work done in organisations is performed by teams. It's not that we don't recognise their value. Rather perhaps it is the nagging frustration that they don't deliver what we believe they could. For most of our organisations there is much more that teams *could* deliver. And usually it isn't a lack of knowledge that prevents teams from being more effective: it's that we don't put into practice much of what we already know.

Teams are more than groups of people working together. They don't just happen, they need to be built. And even when they are built, they will only be effective with real teamwork.

Have you ever been a part of a team that has really worked well? Or perhaps you've seen a team that really does deliver? Have you ever thought what it is that they do differently? It's not just that they do their jobs well. Perhaps they are somehow better together, conveying a sense of belonging and joy in what they do. There can seem to have an elusive quality about them, which we often describe as teamwork.

This e-book will help you to understand teams and teamwork. It does this by introducing some teamwork principles and exploring the answers to other key questions:

- What kind of work are teams best suited for?
- What makes teams work?

The e-book guide finishes by introducing the key attributes needed to be a good team member and team leader.

2 Teams and Teamwork

Teams are a fundamental part of working life. They account for the vast majority of work done in organisations. Yet it's one thing to create a team, but quite another to create a team that works. Just as it's one thing to join a team, but quite another to perform as a team member. To put it simply, teams don't work without teamwork.

Before defining teamwork it's worth clarifying what it isn't and thinking about the distinction between teams and teamwork. In our view a team is in place when individual strengths and skills are combined with teamwork, in the pursuit of a common direction or cause, in order to produce meaningful results for the team members and the organisation. A team combines individual strengths with a shared commitment to **performance** – it's not just about getting on well together.

Teamwork is more than necessary, it's actually fundamental to a team. But it's not enough just to call a group of people a team. Only when the skills and strengths of individual team members are joined with shared goals, and a focus on collective performance, will you start to see the benefits of a team at work.

Why does this matter? Well language can sometimes be confusing. Teamwork is perhaps more helpfully understood as only part of what is needed in order to have an effective team.

Based on this understanding of teams and teamwork, whilst you can't have a team without teamwork, you can have teamwork without being a team!

2.1 What is teamwork?

A good place to start is with a dictionary. Teamwork is defined as: "co-operation between those who are working on a task." Commonly teamwork is understood as co-operation and willingness to work together.

For example we often use the phrase: "he or she is a good team player". This means someone has the interests of the team at heart, working for the good of the team.

There are several ways to define teamwork but perhaps one of the most memorable is the French expression: *esprit de corps*. This means a sense of unity, of enthusiasm for common interests and responsibilities, as developed among a group of persons closely associated in a task, cause, enterprise, etc.

Teamwork can be likened to two compounds, almost essential to modern life. It's the glue which keeps a team together, a bond which promotes strength, unity, reliability and support.

Teamwork is also the oil that makes the team work. It can enable smoother movement towards targets, can prolong forward momentum, and can help teams to overcome obstacles.

Teamwork has the potential to underpin so much of what is valuable in work. In fact, the benefits to be gained from teamwork synergies are essential for the effective management of teams and organisations.

But teamwork is not exclusive to teams. You can have good teamwork in a committee which is not necessarily a team. In this context, teamwork might be random co-operation, effectively working together for periods or time, but not always!

2.2 Teamwork as attitudes and behaviours?

Another way to think about teamwork is as both an attitude and a set of behaviours. It is about how people work together effectively. Attitudes come from what you value and are expressed in how you behave. If you place a high regard on such things as team spirit, valuing and respecting others, and that together you can achieve much more than being apart, then what you do should reflect that, you behave accordingly.

Remember the French "esprit de corps". The spirit of a group that makes the members want to succeed. There is a sense of unity, of enthusiasm shared in common interests and responsibilities.

Teamwork suggests that people work in an atmosphere of mutual support and trust, working together cohesively, with good inter-group relations. Each other's strengths are valued. It should also foster an increasing maturity of relationship, where people are free to disagree constructively, and where both support and challenge are a part of helping teams work.

When teamwork is in place we tend to see:

- Everybody pulling their weight
- Everyone pulling in the same direction
- Depending on your colleagues to deliver what they said
- Getting help when it's needed,
- Sharing an exciting vision of the future.
- Co-operation and blending of each other's' strengths

When teamwork is flourishing it's supported by behaviours demonstrating what we value such as:

- Actively listening
- Giving the benefit of the doubt
- Supporting others
- Providing encouragement
- Persuading and building consensus
- Resolving conflict
- Communicating openly

Teamwork then, is a group of people working together cohesively, creating a great spirit and working atmosphere, and supporting each other so that their strengths combine to enhance what they do.

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3 Why is Teamwork Important?

Because it's a better way to work! It:



3.1 Teamwork

1. **Creates synergy** – where the sum is greater than the parts. Perhaps the most significant impact a team can have is the ability to achieve more together, than if each member worked individually. It's in the combination of skills and expertise, when the skills of one member complement the skills of another, and compensates for each other's weaknesses, that teamwork really works.

2. **Supports** – a more empowered way of working. It helps to remove the constraints which may prevent someone from doing their job properly. Teams can hold themselves accountable, and often this positive peer pressure encourages people to take on responsibility and be pro-active.
3. **Promotes flatter and leaner structures** – with less hierarchy. Teams have the capability of solving problems and making decisions together. When they work well they can be largely self-managing. Teams can inter-act with other teams in an organisation reducing the need for excessive hierarchy.
4. **Encourages multi-disciplinary work** – where teams cut across organisational divides. Teams value the different skills and expertise of their members and can combine those skills in different ways to meet changing needs. When people have developed good teamworking skills (they know how to work well in a team), they can use those skills to work well with other teams in the organisation.
5. **Fosters flexibility and responsiveness** – especially the ability to respond to change. Teams can take responsibility for complete processes. They can inter-change and respond to the needs of customers, and of the processes they manage
6. **Pleases customers** who like working with good teams (sometimes the customer may be part of the team). When customers experience a team which responds to their needs, as opposed to being passed on from one person to the next in the organisation, they see the value of the team. Increasingly customers are a part of what we do. This is especially the case with services, where customers are often a part of the service. In some ways they can be seen as part of the team. This is potentially a powerful way to engage customers in the services your organisation delivers.
7. **Promotes a sense of achievement, equity and camaraderie** – essential for a motivated workplace. Working well together builds a sense of togetherness, which is not only experienced by team members, but a visible encouragement to others too.
8. **When managed properly, teamwork is a better way to work!**

3.2 Ask your team!

One of the best ways to develop teamwork is to encourage “buy-in”. If you are reading this because you want to be an effective team leader, here are some activities to use with your team. Even if you're not yet a team leader, they'll come in handy when you are!

Use these activities to find out what your team or group consider to be important about teamwork. Involving them in this way will encourage engagement with the team building process.

Activity	Ideas
Ask the team to think for a moment about what teams can do better than individuals working on their own.	Allow the team to discuss their ideas.
Ask the questions "why is teamwork important". Emphasise the "WHY".	If the team is big enough split into groups of three. Get each group to write down their ideas.
Let each group talk through their ideas and record them on a flip chart.	Note similar responses and group them on the flip chart.
Ask the group(s) to rank the collective list which they think are the five most important reasons.	You can arrange the reasons in a bubble diagram around the questions "why teamworking". See the example bubble diagram below.
Record the ranked reasons and circulate the findings to the team after the meeting.	

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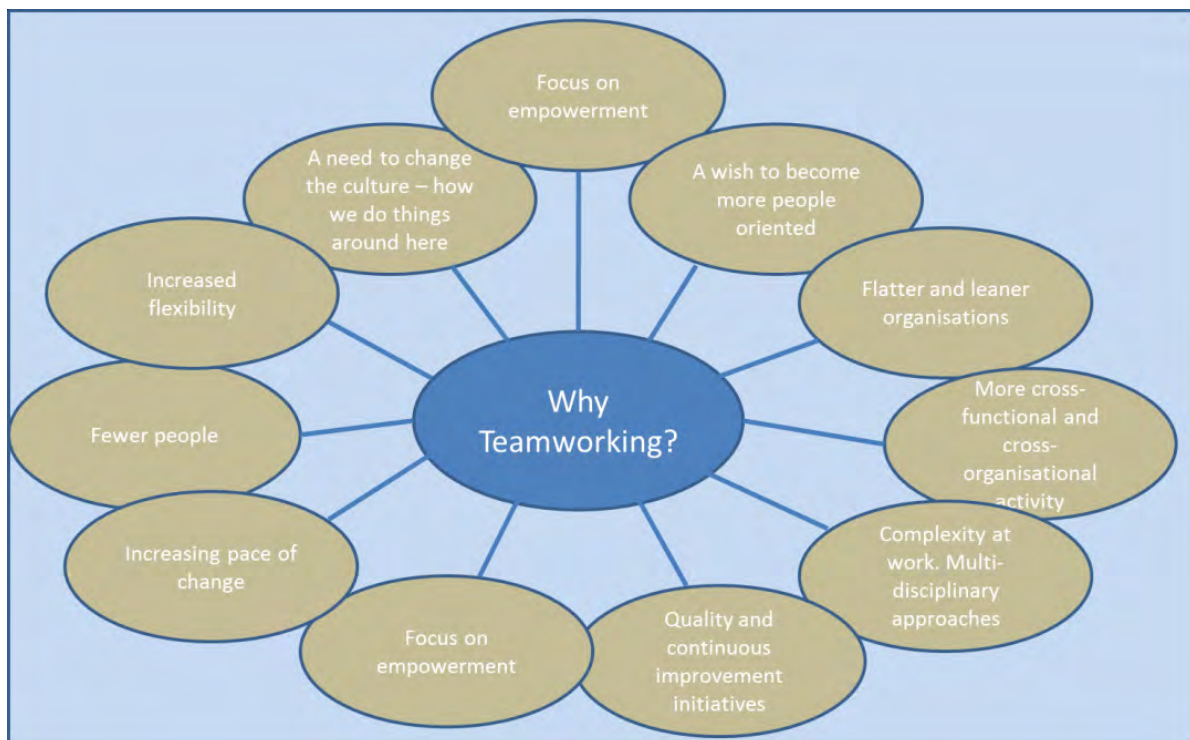
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Example reasons for why teamwork is important:



3.3 The value of teamwork

The value of teamwork is regularly seen in sports. How often do we see teams made up of expensive star players outperformed by teams with players who may be individually less talented? Assuming transfer price tags really are an indicator of talent! Why is this so? The answer lies in two things:

- The synergistic value of teamwork (our glue and oil).
- The crucial role of the manager.

Teamwork doesn't mean everybody doing the same thing or everybody being able to do each other's jobs. It's more a means to a synergistic way of working, where the sum is greater than the parts. Properly managed, teamwork maximises strengths, bringing out the best in each team member. These specific, possibly unique individual strengths are then complimented by the strengths of others, or of the team as a unit.

Teamwork can support crucial social networks which encourage happiness and performance. In particular, note the experiences of Hal Rosenbluth who built a small, family-owned travel business into one of the largest retail travel chains in the United States. He described his initial experience of working in the family business, observing that it seemed to be "full of unhappy people producing unhappy service and deteriorating profitability."

Rosenbluth's own business philosophy evolved from two things. Firstly, from his experience of bad management. He joined the family business after leaving college at the age of 22, and "wandered around the company working for one lousy manager after another. Each added to a growing list of negative role models with whom I had come in contact over the years. Fortunately, I learned a lot from these negative role models".

Secondly, the recognition that it was his friends who came to his aid, and stayed with him, during the trying times.

"Friends never let friends down. This realization led to my plan to build a company of friends. First, I had to create and sustain an environment that would breed friendships. Second, I would only hire nice people."

UK entrepreneur, Richard Branson, echoes some of Rosenbluth's points.

"What matters is working with a few close friends, people you respect, knowing that if times did turn bad these people would hold together."

Not all teams are made up of friends. Nor, for that matter, do they need to be, in order for them to be effective. Teamwork does however, have the potential to foster a fulfilling, meaningful way of working together.

Why is teamwork important? It's not necessarily an easy option, nor a panacea for all organisational ills. However, working with a group of people, on a worthwhile activity, with a common goal, can be one of the most rewarding and enjoyable aspects of work.

4 Teamwork Principles

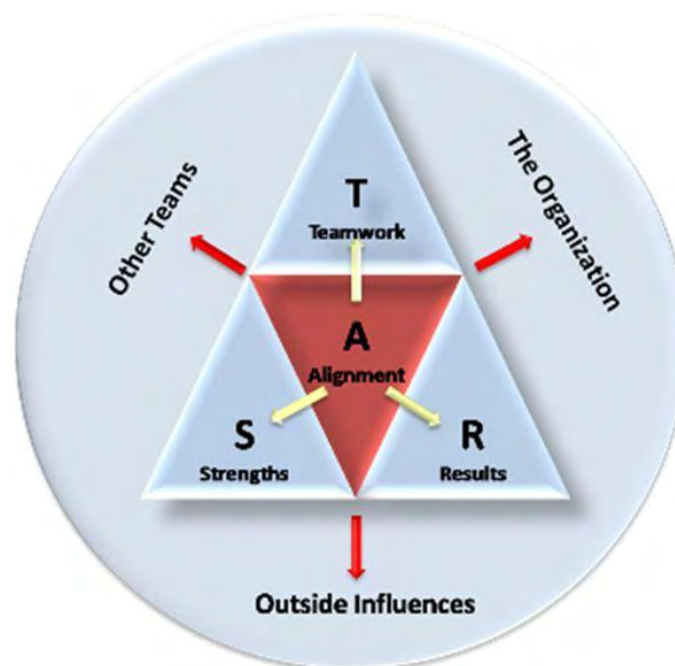
So we have established the value of teamwork but how is it possible to benefit from that knowledge? Perhaps by examining some teamwork principles.

Think for a moment, if you were asked what does teamwork mean to you, what would you say? Perhaps it's everybody pulling their weight, or everyone pulling in the same direction. Maybe it's about getting help when you need it, or sharing an exciting vision of the future.

4.1 STAR Teams

We've summarised the principles that underpin effective teamwork in our STAR Teams Model:

- **Strengths** – a team works best when the strengths of individuals are combined.
- **Teamwork** – an attitude and practical steps encouraging individuals to work together, supporting each other to benefit from strengths and synergies.
- **Alignment** – the strengths of individuals and the support of colleagues are directed towards meaningful goals in the organisation.
- **Results** – the team focuses on delivering results, encouraging a clear performance focus.



This summarises the teamwork elements of the STAR Teams model but the real value of the model comes from thinking about the contextual elements – teamwork in the bigger picture.

The STAR Team model has been shaped using 3 distinct strands of teamwork theory:

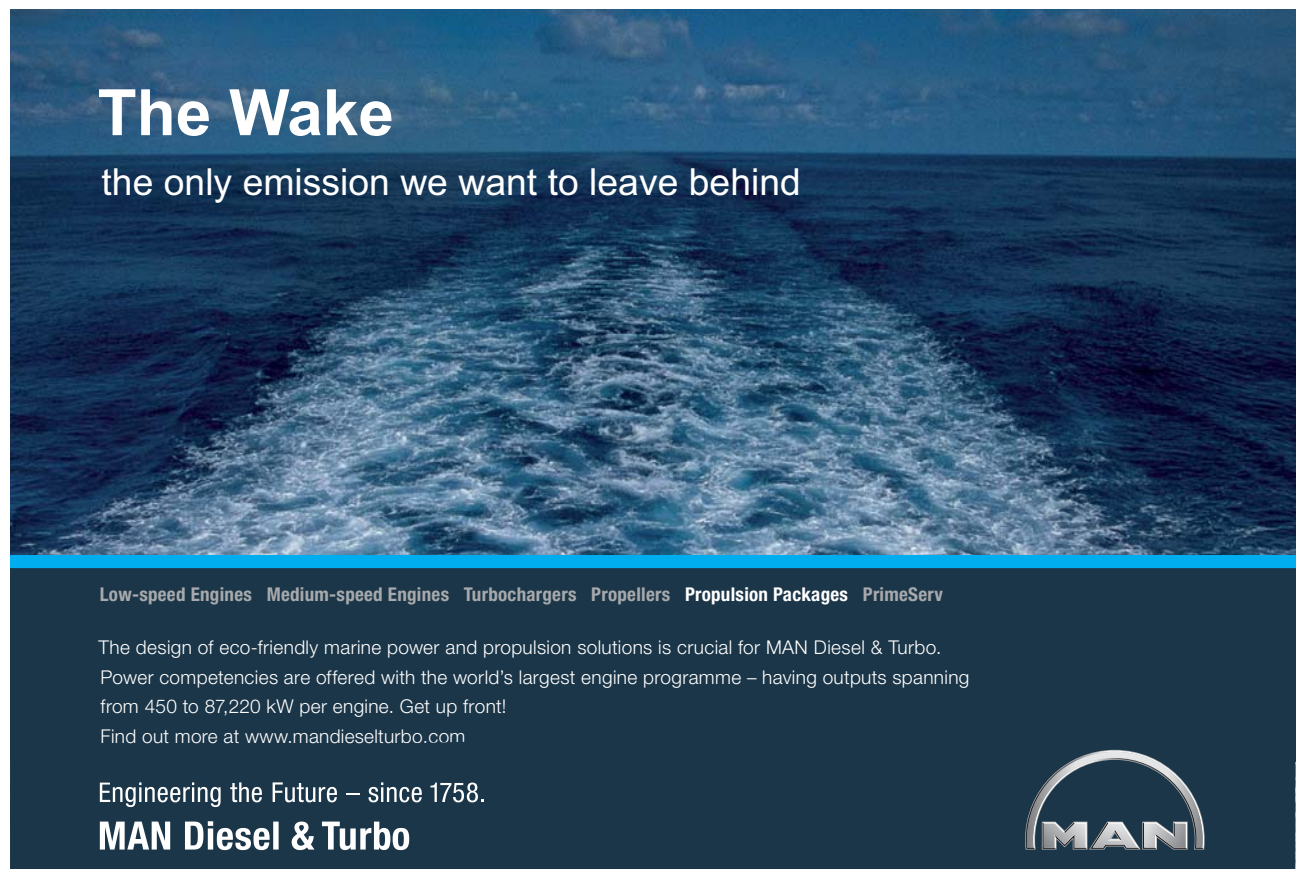
- **Stages:** Team development stages.
- **Styles:** Team leadership styles.
- **Surroundings:** Factors affecting the team from the outside (of the team or of the organisation).

How do these theories fit with the STAR Team model?

4.2 Stars and stages

In the theatre, stars need stages to perform. The STAR team model has been developed to explain how leaders can build teams by taking them through the various team development stages.

The Star team model provides the substance (or content) to the stages, situation and surroundings of the teamwork theory mentioned above. It helps to determine what a team and team leader need to focus on. Remember:




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“Good team leadership is about creating the conditions that allow ideas and people to flourish, people to come together and performance to flow. When you balance developing people's strengths, with building good relationships and connections between people, in the pursuit of challenging and meaningful team goals you are moving a long way towards encouraging effective teamwork in the workplace.”

4.3 Tuckman's theory

Team development theories, such as Bruce Tuckman's well-known group development stages (forming, storming, norming, performing) recognise that teams develop through different stages. They progress from initial formation through to performance:

Forming:

This is the initial stage of team development during which individuals have not yet gelled together. Everybody is busy finding their place in the team, sizing each other up, and asking themselves why they are here!

Storming:

People begin to see themselves as part of a team. However at this stage they may challenge each other, and the team leader, about such things as what the team is doing, and how things should be done. As the stage title suggests, conflict and confrontation typify this stage, as differences surface.

Norming:

This is the phase where team members start to come together, developing processes, establishing ground rules, clarifying who does what, and how things will be done. This phase is characterised by a growing sense of “togetherness”.

Performing:

This is the final stage where increased focus on both the task and on team relationships combine to provide synergy. Performance is delivered through people working effectively together.

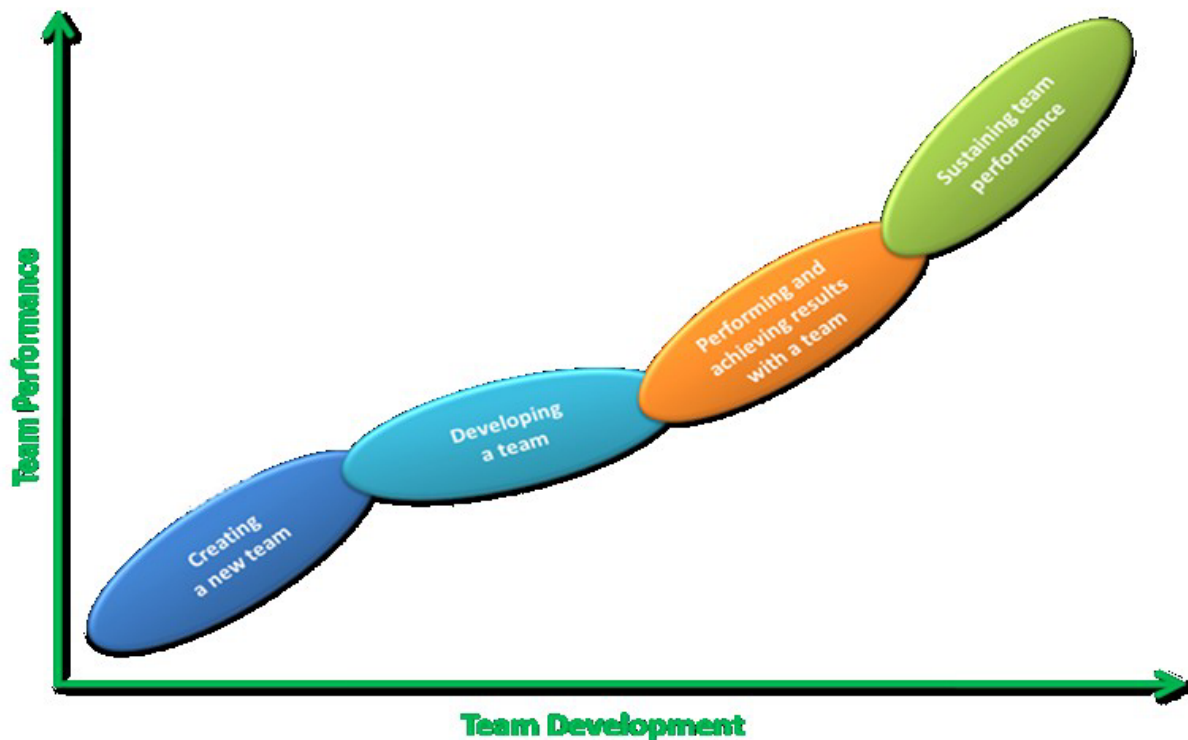
The value of Tuckman's model is that it helps us understand that teams evolve. It also helps us to consider how they may encounter different problems at different stages of their development.

4.4 Beyond Tuckman

One limitation of the model may be that it makes team building appear too linear and sequential. Although it's a useful analytical tool, we must remember that some teams may “loop” around in their development.

For example, not all teams evolve smoothly through Tuckman's stages but may yo-yo between norming and storming until they either begin to function, or are disbanded! Regardless of limitations, all well-conceived models can be useful in helping us to understand and better manage our circumstances.

Our own team stages model is illustrated below. It categorises these basic team growth stages as: **creating; developing; performing/achieving; sustaining.**



Whilst these models give a useful understanding of different team requirements at different times, there are a number of questions that aren't particularly well answered.

For example:

- How should you lead at the different stages of a team's development?
- How do you identify when you are progressing through a stage?
- How does the team develop within the organisational setting?
- How is it affected by other outside influences?

Group stages theory doesn't explicitly answer these questions. To do so we need to think about two more areas:

- Ideas about team leadership.
- The influence of factors outside of the team.

4.5 Leadership styles

The second strand of theories that inform the STAR model relates to leadership styles. These suggest that the style of leadership needed at the various stages of a team's development will vary. This is a common notion in management and leadership studies. That many models are in fact situational, suggesting that the approach to be adopted should change dependant on the particular context. This idea is also common to a number of leadership theories, which suggest leaders should adapt their behaviours and actions according to the situation.

For example, contingency or situational leadership models tend to offer a range of responses which a leader might take. These can be depicted as a continuum, varying from a directive approach where the leader steers the team, to approaches that tend towards delegation. Here team members would have much more say about what and how they do things.

Other models recognise different functions of leadership. One well known example is John Adair's action centred leadership, in which leadership is expressed as a focus on each of: task; team and the individual. In this model, the balance of emphasis will vary from situation to situation.

The STAR team model highlights the leader's role as the need to align individual strengths, with teamwork, and meaningful results. The model incorporates the idea that a leader needs to behave differently given the different stages of team development. The focus of the leader's attention will vary according to the different stages of the team's development (and how well the team goes through them).

The advertisement features a central graphic on the left consisting of a circular arrangement of four arrows pointing clockwise, with three stylized human figures and several gears in the center. To the right of this graphic, the text 'UNLEASHING CHANGE MANAGEMENT' is written in large, bold, blue capital letters. Below this, the dates 'OCTOBER 18 & 19, 2018' and the location 'DE RODE HOED AMSTERDAM' are displayed in smaller blue text. At the bottom of the ad, there is a silhouette of an Amsterdam skyline including a windmill, a bridge, and various buildings. In the bottom left corner, the text 'Global Executive Events' is visible. A hand cursor icon is positioned over the bottom right corner of the ad, pointing towards a green oval button.

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Combining leadership style with team stages helps to answer the questions:

- Where should your emphasis be during the different stages?
- What do you need to look out for, and what activities do you need to focus on, at the different stages of a team's development?

4.6 Surroundings – the organisational and wider context

The third strand of thinking relates to the team's context. Teams do not exist in a vacuum. Their effectiveness can be greatly influenced by factors external to the team – from other teams, the wider organisation and external factors outside the organisation. Whilst group stage theories provide a useful way to think about how teams develop, they place little (if any) emphasis on the external environment.

Similarly, leadership models too often focus on the leadership needs of the team, without giving enough recognition to the leader's crucial role outside of the team.

A number of researchers have placed an emphasis on the context within which the team operates. For example the academic work of Eric Sunstrom and colleagues views teams as embedded within an organisation. They suggested that team effectiveness is therefore dependant on how the boundaries work between teams and other teams, and how the organisational context impacts on the team.

This raises the important role of the team leader in:

- Establishing boundaries.
- Ensuring the links between other teams work well.
- Enabling the systems and processes in the wider organisation to support and encourage the effectiveness of the team.

So, to develop a teamwork concept such as STAR teams, it is important to blend together three strands of teamwork theories:

- Building teams through development stages.
- Adopting the right style of leadership.
- Recognising that teams exist in an organisational and wider external setting, that can support or inhibit teams.

5 Making Teamwork Work

The preceding sections have summarised the benefits of teamwork, and how to focus on achieving them. This section offers some advice on how to make teamwork work.

How do you create the conditions for effective teamwork? Good team leadership is about creating the conditions that: allow ideas and people to flourish; people to come together; and performance to flow. This means striking a balance – between developing people's strengths, building good relationships and connections between people, while pursuing challenging, meaningful team goals. If you can achieve this you will be well on your way to making teams work.

So, to sum up, we think these three factors are key to creating the right conditions:

- **Developing individual strengths.**
- **Establishing good relationships with others.**
- **Pursuing worthwhile and meaningful goals**

To help explore these fundamentals, we have related teamwork to the ideas of three leading thinkers: Stephen Covey (personal development); Peter Senge (organisational learning) and Mikhael Csíkszentmihályi (working at peak performance). Covey emphasises the value of synergy, where people, ideas and views are brought together to make a joint impact. Another useful point here is Senge's ideas on team learning. Having identified the value of individual flow and of team synergies, we can emphasise the value of encouraging teams to learn how to benefit from these.

Reflecting on their ideas and on our own approach, here's our recipe for making teamwork work.

5.1 Developing the strengths of individuals

Often teams work well because individuals take their own strengths and use them for the benefit of the team. When the skills of individuals complement each other, together they can achieve more than they would individually.

Focusing on individual strengths emphasises Senge's notion of personal mastery, where individuals seek to continually improve on their strengths. You can do this by:

- Ensuring you place a **high value on the ideas of others.**
- Allowing time to **foster creativity.**
- Encouraging **personal mastery** – and personal growth and learning by encouraging the team to “continually expand their ability to create the results in life they truly seek.” (Senge).
- **Building on the strengths** of your colleagues in the team.
- **Aligning and blending strengths** of individuals so that they complement each other.

5.2 Cultivating relationships and friendships

Our “connectedness” to others has a big impact on how happy we feel and therefore, how well we perform. Relationships matter, probably much more than we realise. Helping to foster good relationships in a team is not just a nice idea. It is central to helping people flourish, feeling good at what they do, and feeling supported.

According to Covey, thinking win-win is an important skill, which in a team context means seeking mutual benefit. Covey also advocates an approach that seeks first to understand others, which is a crucial skill for teams to develop in order to build trusting relationships. Good relationships can help build a shared vision for the team, an approach which Senge argued as crucial. You can do this by:

- **Trusting the team** to deliver.
- **Developing your own teamwork definition** that you all share, and that fits your context.
- **Thinking Win-Win.** Consistently seek mutual benefit in what you do. Cultivate an abundance mentality – there is more for everyone and together people can achieve more.
- **Seeking First to Understand.** Communication is the most important skill in life. Seek to understand another person's view first, in order to best put your view forward. To communicate well you must listen first.
- **Developing a shared vision** – encourage personal vision, move from this to shared vision, spread this vision and anchor the vision within a set of governing ideas.
- Aligning people's **sense of togetherness** with the vision of where you are going.

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5.3 Encouraging performance to flow

Bringing individual strengths and good relationships together is the focus of the third factor, encouraging the team to perform. One helpful aspect is to think of Senge's idea of team learning. The central theme of promoting performance comes from applying Csikszentmihályi's idea of "flow" to a team situation. He argues that, when we work in this state we find work almost effortless, and high performance can be achieved when we are engaged in work we find absorbing or worthwhile.

Making teamwork work means matching the challenge of team tasks, with the team's strengths and skill-mix, providing immediate feedback, and ensuring there is clarity in team goals. Added benefit comes from the synergy of teams, when several people are working in flow. You can do this by:

- **Energising team learning** – the potential wisdom of teams, where individual talent combines for the benefit of the team and energy and activity is aligned in the same direction.
- **Synergising** – bring together ideas, other people and their views. Do this properly and the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.
- Encouraging the team to take on **meaningful challenges** which are manageable (high challenge with high skills).
- **Together generating clear goals** that you share, and to which you are committed.
- **Providing immediate feedback on performance** (so that it is clear how well everyone is doing) and encourage others to support and provide feedback to each other.
- **Aligning strengths with good teamwork** in a common direction towards meaningful goals.

5.4 Teamwork: naturally

Teamwork is like many things in life. It will grow naturally if the conditions are there. At the heart of effective teamwork is the sense of camaraderie and value for each other. This leads to synergy – when people come together they deliver more collectively than they would separately

In summary, teamwork works when three things are in place:

- Individuals flourish, as they use their strengths.
- People working together, building relationships that often become friendships, resulting in TEAM.
- TEAM – Together Everyone Achieves More, as performance flows and results are achieved.

6 Is Teamwork the Right Work?

Although we have made a very strong case for the value of teams and teamwork, they may not always be the best way to organise work. Making teamwork work is not easy. We have already seen how much there is to do in order to create the right conditions for teams to flourish. So it's worth considering whether or not a team approach is the right one in the first place.

To do that, you need to ask two questions:

1. What type of work is suitable for teams?
2. How do you know when it is best to form a team?

6.1 What work is right for teams?

Work that *can be performed* by teams, which will benefit from: the blending of individual, complementary strengths; with a sense of camaraderie and shared vision, directed at the achievement of common, meaningful goals.

Understanding teamwork is about understanding the kind of work most suitable for teams to perform. Why is this important? Because teams are not the answer to all organisational issues. Some tasks are better carried out by a group of individuals (or just an individual), each with responsibility for their own area, with little or no overlap. Groups of people aren't teams.

Answering these question means considering some key factors. These include:

- The complexity of the work.
- The level of inter-dependence of the tasks.
- If and how they overlap or combine.


6.2 How do you know when it is best to form a team?

To help you decide if the work to be done is best suited to a team, think about whether you can:

- Align and blend strengths of individuals so that they complement each other?
- Focus the team's sense of togetherness with a vision for where it is going?
- Align strengths with good teamwork, in a common direction, towards meaningful goals?

Here are some points to consider before deciding to form a team:

- Is the task best carried out by an individual? Is it straightforward or too complex for just one person?
- Is there too much for one person to cope with?
- Do several different activities need to happen at the same time?
- Is there a number of inter-dependent and overlapping tasks?
- Does the work require a variety of high level strengths and skills to be used by individuals?
- Is it essential to combine the strengths of several individuals, in order to achieve success?
- Is the activity a meaningful whole, that makes sense as a complete entity?



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7 Unlocking the Potential of Teams

There is considerable potential for teams to deliver more in organisations than is currently the case. But how do you realise the synergy of a team, achieving far more together than they would as individuals, working separately? How do you unlock the potential of teams?

7.1 Building teams

Teams don't just happen, they need to be built! As a team leader or manager, the key to unlocking the potential of your team is:

- Starting well – get the basics right and you'll have a head-start on building a cohesive team.
- Building the team. Take a group of individuals, with a range of strengths, and make them into a team. Developing a group of individuals into a team is certainly one of the more demanding team stages, but it's not enough.
- Creating a team that performs. Performance requires individuals to excel in what they do for the team.
- Leading a team that can sustain its performance and exceed expectations.

In order to do this, you will need to think about some critical issues:

- How do teams develop?
- What should be the team leader's focus at different stages of a team's development?
- What do teams need to cope with internal and external factors?
- How do you start a new team?
- How do you take over an existing team?
- How do you develop teamwork in a team?
- What conditions are needed for a team to perform?

In addition to thinking, you'll need to take some critical action! Here are some tips to help you get started:

- Define teamwork with your team, to encourage common understanding and commitment.
- Jointly identify and agree the benefits of teamwork with your team.
- This will make it easier to set direction and share your vision.
- Establish team goals.
- Align individual goals to team goals.
- Set SMART goals (goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time bounded).

- Think about synergy – the real value of teamwork activity. What individual strengths in team members can combine to produce more value from the whole team?
- Find and use team-building activities.
- Monitor and manage team performance. There is no point in developing teamwork which results in more team than work!
- Take quick action to correct or improve.
- Feedback quickly and effectively. Privately where necessary, publically where appropriate.
- Celebrate team success with the team.

7.2 Team-building activities

When designed and conducted properly, team building exercises can be a very effective way to unlock the potential in teams. Especially when the exercise is adapted for a particular stage of team development. Team building exercises can be used for a variety of purposes such as: introducing ideas; fostering team bonding; developing teamwork skills.

Such exercises can be used in several ways:

- As short activities, perhaps to introduce a meeting for a specific purpose (such as discussions on progress or problems).
- As an item on a meeting agenda, to encourage team involvement and concentration.



The advertisement features a central image of a smiling teacher leaning over a laptop to assist two young children, a boy and a girl. To the right, there are two smaller circular images: one showing three children looking at a book together, and another showing children working at computers in a classroom. The background is a vibrant yellow and orange swirl design.

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- To close meetings, sending team members away with insights or ideas to think about until the next meeting.
- Adapted for use as part of wider team development activities, such as away days or off-sites.

If you're planning to use team building exercises, make sure you are prepared. Plan well in advance, ensure your aims and methods are clearly designed and communicated. Introduce the exercise with a description, aims and instructions. Ensure all materials and other preparations are in place.

It's also important that the exercises are not conducted in isolation. Make sure you summarise outcomes and relate them to the original aims of the exercise. Then try to incorporate any feedback or benefits into the daily routine of the team.

Example of some typical team building exercises:

Being a TEAM together	Two years from now	Conflicting views
Positive feedback	Keeping going	Did you notice?
Who does what in a team?	Mad, sad or glad	True or false
Getting the mix right	Seeing the bigger picture	Scarce resources
Limiting beliefs	Doing something for the first time	A clearer vision

The other key to effectively using teamwork exercises is to ensure they are relevant to the various stages of team development. Clearly, some exercises will be more appropriate for new teams while others will be better suited to teams which are already well established.

For example, here is the same collection of team building exercises, but related to different stages of our team stages model. Remember, each team is unique and needs to be led through several developmental stages, so finding and using the right development exercise is important.

Creating a new team or taking over an existing team

Being a TEAM together – to foster appreciation of the benefits of teamwork

True or false – to help team members bond and explore ideas of trust in the team.

Who does what in a team? – to help team bonding and clarify team roles.

Getting the mix right – to encourage discussion about the mix of skills needed for an effective team.

Doing something for the first time – to explore attitudes to change & illustrate the benefits of change.

Two years from now – to encourage focus on a team vision and ways to make it a reality.

Developing a team

A clearer vision – to enable team members to add detail to their team vision.

Mad, sad or glad – to allow team members to express their feelings about their work.

Seeing the bigger picture – to illustrate the importance of perception in the team's approach to work.

Positive feedback – to encourage team members to practice giving and receiving positive feedback.

Conflicting views – to encourage thought and action on managing conflict situations.

Performing and achieving results with a team

Did you notice? – to encourage teams to think about change management.

Limiting beliefs – to discuss limiting beliefs and ways to change them.

Sustaining team performance

Scarce resources – to encourage positive and creative thinking in the face of resource constraints.

Keeping going – to highlight the benefits of a step-by-step approach to achieving goals.

7.3 The problems with teams

Whether you are leading a new or existing team, you can't ignore the fact that there are lots of potential pitfalls with teams. As well as knowing how to build teams you need to recognise and deal with the problems with teams. If there is one thing as important as knowing how to develop a better team, it's being able to manage teams effectively when things go wrong. Knowing what can go wrong, why, and how best to deal with it, is the key to overcoming team problems before they cause too much damage.

Avoiding these common pitfalls can save you a considerable amount of wasted time and energy. Pre-empting these problem areas is far easier than trying to recover from difficult situations after they have happened. One thing you don't need is to become engulfed by problems, simply because you didn't see the warning signs early enough. Avoid them if you can. Deal with them if you can't!

The key to identifying and pre-empting team problems is to:

- Form your team instead of "forcing" it.
- Deal with individuals who are "exhausting" the team.
- Get "dorming" teams performing – deal with over-emphasis on team and not enough on work.
- Ensure you align your team leadership style with the team's needs.
- Organising the team to cope with other influences.
- Turn problems into opportunities, as your team gets better.

There are five significant problem areas which can affect team development and effectiveness. They are:

- **“Forcing” teams** – too much emphasis on achieving results, at the expense of team welfare and effectiveness.
- **“Exhausting” teams** – too many individuals pursue their own agenda. There is too much individuality and not enough teamwork.
- **“Dorming” teams** – too much emphasis on the team but not enough on the work it supposed to be doing, and on results.
- **“Aligning” teams** – ensuring team leaders use a leadership style which is most appropriate and beneficial to each individual team.
- **“Organising” teams** – to cope with external factors. Teams don't exist in a vacuum and their effectiveness can be significantly affected by factors outside of the team.

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7.4 Leading teams with style and focus

Management is fairly simple to define. It's about getting a job done with the people you manage. It needs skills such as the ability to plan, organise, budget and communicate. But to get sustained results you also need leadership.

What makes a good team leader? Style and focus! Your leadership *style* will determine how you engage with people, providing motivation and commitment. Your leadership *focus* will help ensure you apply the right leadership style for the right situation. Although different, both style and focus are critical for effective team leadership.

What is meant by leadership style? To some degree your own personal style or way of doing things reflects who you are as a person. However most people are also capable of adapting their behaviour to the context and situation they are in. This may sound complex initially, but in reality we often actually adapt our approach to different situations quite naturally. It's when you can't, or won't be flexible that problems often occur.

There is a common notion in management studies, that many approaches are in fact situational, and that the style adopted should change dependant on the context. This idea is also common to a number of leadership theories, which suggest leaders should adapt their behaviours and actions according to the situation. For example, contingency or situational leadership models tend to offer a continuum of responses a leader might take, from a directive approach where the leader steers the team, to approaches that tend towards delegation, where team members have much more say about what and how they do things.

Leadership focus relates to different functions of leadership. One well known example is John Adair's action centred leadership, which emphasizes leaders placing a focus on the task, team and the individual. The balance of focus will vary from situation to situation.

The STAR team model, discussed earlier, brought together some of these theories, highlighting the leader's role in aligning individual strengths with teamwork, to achieve meaningful results. The STAR team model incorporates the idea that a leader needs to behave differently given the different stages of team development. The leader's focus of attention will vary at different stages of the team's development.

For example, during the formation of the team it is important to ensure that team members are clear about why they are in the team, and what they are expected to achieve. So the primary focus in this stage will be on results, whilst recognising that aspects of teamwork and strengths will still need attention. During other stages, the focus will switch to the importance of teamwork and strengths.

So, one key to effective team leadership is to understand the relationship between leadership style and focus. Think about your leadership style relative to the stage of your team's development. Secondly, think about which aspects of team leadership you really need to focus on at each of those stages to ensure success.

Then answer these questions:

- Where should your emphasis be during the different stages?
- What do you need to look out for and what activities do you need to focus on, at the different stages of team development?

Once you've done this, think about these tips for combining the right style and focus for each team development stage:

- Specify the results you need.
- Play to the strengths within the team you lead.
- Focus your leadership style to support people and get results.
- Align the efforts of your team to focus on achieving its goals.



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8 Being a Team Member – Teamwork Attributes

A team exists when individual strengths and skills are combined with teamwork, in the pursuit of a common direction or cause. The ultimate aim should be to produce meaningful results for the team, its members, and for the broader organisation. Effective teams are made up of people who can:

- focus on team goals
- support each other
- solve problems together
- share (information, knowledge, insights, ideas)
- communicate effectively
- avoid or resolve conflict
- “go above and beyond” if needed

To achieve this, the team needs members who possess a range of attributes. Of course, the team will be made up of different people, with a range of strengths and weaknesses. Balancing these, finding the right people for the right roles is the key to good team leadership.

What attributes do you need to be an effective team member? This is a critical element which all team leaders and employers will be looking for. Essential attributes can be classified as interpersonal and technical skills, personal characteristics, and the ability to use these in the right team role.

8.1 Interpersonal skills

Inter-personal skills are essential for effectively fulfilling team roles and tasks. Many of these skills are used in leadership and management activities, so these relate as much to team members as to team leaders. Think about how effective you are in each of these areas:

- establishing trust
- communicating, verbally or in writing
- active listening
- clarifying, paraphrasing, reframing and checking understanding
- summarizing
- asking questions
- collaborating and co-operating
- working under supervision, able to follow instructions
- working independently, showing initiative
- solving problems

8.2 Technical skills

Effective teams will need people with specific or general technical skills. These include:

- relevant experience
- appropriate qualifications
- tacit or explicit knowledge
- continuing professional development (to ensure you are up-to-date)
- professional memberships or affiliations
- useful contacts or networks
- research ability (knowing how to find answers when needed)

8.3 Personal characteristics

Effective teamwork is also reliant on some of your own personal characteristics. Having or developing self-awareness, awareness of others and awareness of the group dynamics are also important in teamwork.

Here are some key personal characteristics which are useful in team members:

- ability to learn
- friendliness
- sensitivity
- integrity
- sense of humour
- openness to change
- self-awareness
- awareness of others, empathy

8.4 Team roles

Effective teams will combine this range of skills and characteristics by placing team members into appropriate roles. The best teams realise the synergy which comes from employing people where they use their strengths. So the mix of attributes each person brings to the team means each will probably be best suited to different roles. For example, balanced teams will probably need people who are particularly good at:

- Seeing that there's a problem which needs to be solved.
- Sensing that someone in the team needs extra support.
- Checking detail, searching for errors.
- Motivating the team to keep going in difficult times.
- Having ideas.
- Turning ideas into practical actions.
- Keeping things on track.

The key to effective teams is bringing complementary attributes together, then focusing these on achieving team goals.

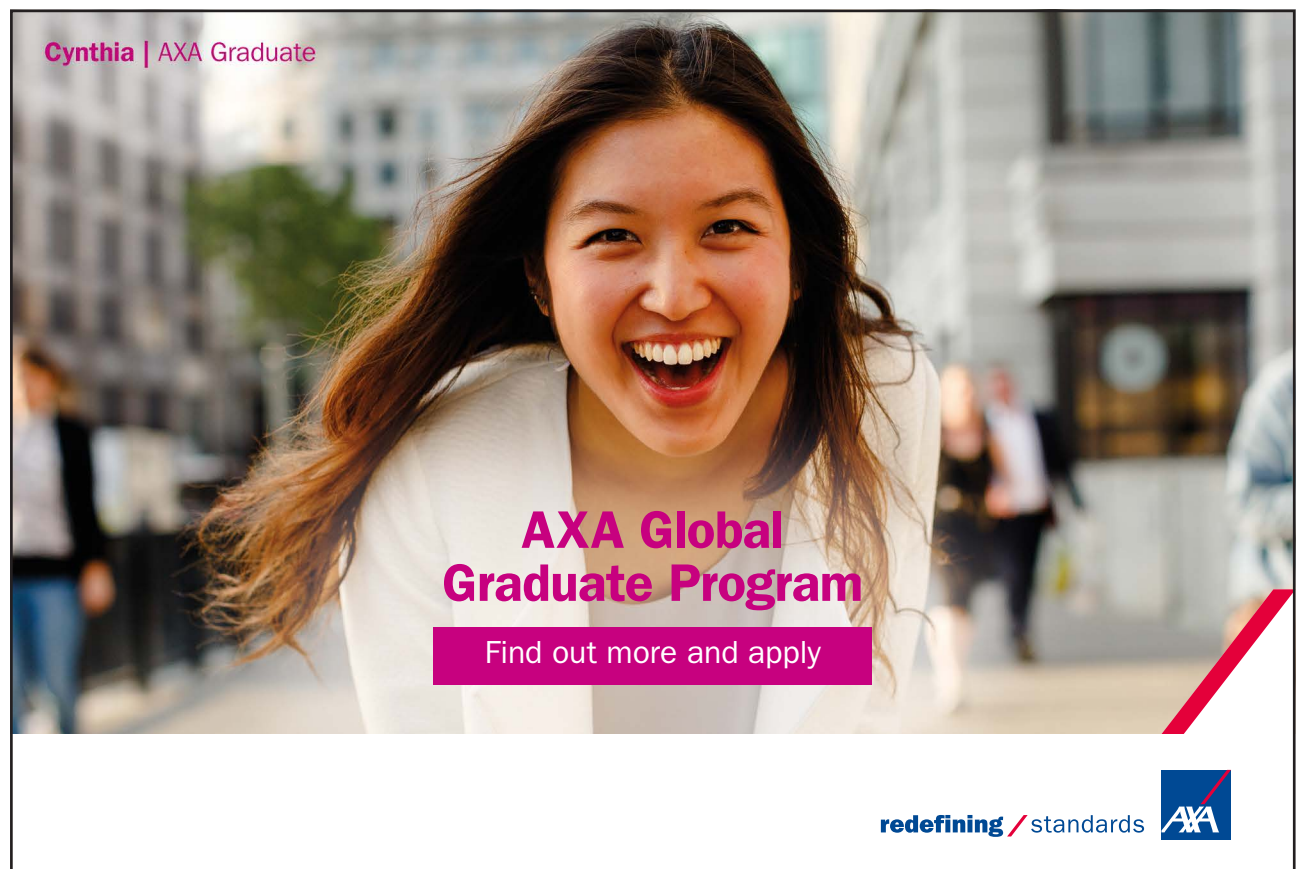
9 Being a Team Leader

It's one thing to be a team member, but what do you need to be a team leader? The role of team leader is vital to organisations, but it's not necessarily an easy job to do. Not only will you need to possess all or most of the attributes already discussed, but you'll need to develop some leadership skills.

9.1 The pros and cons of team leadership

Being a team leader can be rewarding but the changing demands of the modern workplace mean it can also be a complex role. Demands on team leaders can be heavy, particularly when organisations are struggling to cope with a competitive market or with constrained resources. For example:

- Team leaders can often feel that they are being pulled in different directions, trying to hold a middle ground between their team and with senior managers.
- The trend towards flatter organisational structures can bring opportunities for development but can also bring increased responsibility and workload, especially for team leaders..
- This can mean some roles and responsibilities that previously were done elsewhere in the organisation (such as some HR activities) are now a part of the team leader's role.



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- Teams and team leaders are becoming more autonomous and empowered. There are many benefits to this such as the opportunity to learn new skills and gain valuable experience. However there is also a danger that this trend can lead to anxiety, stress and overwork, as responsibility can also become a burden, if not managed properly.

9.2 The team leader's role

As a consequence of these emerging demands the team leader's role has increased in importance. It has also become more complex than ever before, demanding a wide range of skills and attributes. For example, modern team leaders need to be able to:

- **Balance** a performance focus with the need to build relationships with the team. Too much focus on performance can cause the team to feel that they are being forced. Too much focus on relationships can mean targets are missed as there is too much team, but not enough work.
- **Understand and interpret the wider business objectives.** If team objectives are to be aligned with the wider aims of the organisation, team leaders must be clear about the direction the business is going, and understand why it matters.
- **Express a clarity of vision.** A clear sense of what you are trying to achieve together. Any vision you have needs to be shared and developed, so that the team feels they are part of the vision and are far more likely to engage with working towards it.
- **Communicate.** It's critical that you can express yourself to your managers and to your team members. Remember that communication is not just about talking, it's also about listening and being observant.
- **Organise.** It's not enough to be well-organised yourself as a team leader, though this is important. Team leaders need to organise their teams, keeping track of targets, work-schedules, projects, shift rotas, and of team members.
- **Motivate others.** To motivate others you need to start with yourself. If you want a team that is energised, responsive and proactive, then you need to be energised, responsive and proactive yourself. Then practice techniques which will motivate your team to perform.
- **Coach others to perform.** Good team leaders help others to get better at what they do. Be interested in how your team members develop their skills. Help them set goals to improve, provide support and encouragement.

- **Delegate.** With flatter structures, team leaders need to quickly realise that they can't do it all themselves. When people are capable and experienced, ask them to take responsibility for tasks. Delegating worthwhile and important team tasks is particularly valuable as it will not only lighten your workload but will motivate and energise team members.
- **Facilitate.** Sometimes the best skill a team leader can develop is the ability to help the team to generate their own ideas and approaches. Drawing out contributions and helping the team to gain consensus over how to take things forward can be a powerful way to utilise the team's knowledge and experience.
- **Network.** To build effective relationships, both with other teams and across the broader organisation. This will help your team to be more effective in achieving its own goals, and in working well with other teams in the organisation.
- **Influence.** Flatter structures mean team leaders need to develop their influencing skills, both to persuade their team members and to build support from other team leaders.

9.3 Key team leader skills

Four aspects of team leadership are worth elaboration as they are at the centre of effective team leadership. They are the skills of:

- Coaching
- Motivating
- Delegating
- Facilitating

Coaching

Coaching is a process which supports people in developing their skills and achieving their goals. This is done by helping people to set mutually agreed goals. To coach effectively you need to listen carefully, provide feedback regularly and encourage improved performance.

Coaching tends to follow a common management process of:

- Reviewing what has been done;
- Planning what needs to be done;
- Then putting those plans into action.

Motivating

Dictionary definitions of motivation suggest it's about providing incentives, compelling to act or stimulating enthusiasm to do something. Perhaps the key to motivating others is to start by being motivated yourself.

Although the theory of motivation might be hard to understand, the essence of motivation can be easy to catch. You might even say it can be highly infectious! As Gideon Skinner (Research Director for MORI) once said: "how likely are you to be enthusiastic about your company if your line manager can't be?"

So, assuming you are enthusiastic and motivated, what is the next most important thing to remember about motivation? If you were to ask what is most likely to motivate people at work, the answer is surprisingly simple. Make work challenging and interesting. That's why, managed properly, the modern trend to flatter structures and empowered teams can be very motivating indeed. Engage the team in challenging and interesting work, especially work that is meaningful, and you are well on your way to motivating them.

But if all else fails, you could always use that most valuable of management tools. The question. The best way to find out what motivates your team members? Ask them!

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Delegation

Delegation is giving authority to someone to carry out tasks that you normally would do. But don't mistake authority with responsibility. Although you are giving them the authority to do the work, you remain accountable for the outcome.

When delegating, ensure you are clear about what is being asked and expected of your team member. Once again, the key is to ensure you ask the right questions. For example:

- What – identify the task, or project.
- Who – match the person to the task, their capability and development needs.
- How – brief clearly, and agree SMART objectives.
- When – what are the deadlines or way points to check progress.

Delegating doesn't mean leaving someone to the job and forgetting about them. Make sure you stay engaged with the task, even in a supportive or supervisory capacity.

- Next – provide support as appropriate and be available.
- Review – set up meetings as necessary, to discuss progress, issues, plans and progress.

“The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it.” – Theodore Roosevelt

Facilitation

Team leadership, like management, is the art of getting things done through other people. So team leaders need to become adept at facilitating. What does this mean? The definition of the word is instructive in itself. Facilitating is:

- to make action or processes easier.
- to help forward or to help progress.

These are two things that would clearly have a beneficial impact in our organisations, if they were the focus of management. Sadly, that's not always the case. Good facilitation should both makes things easier, and help them to progress. And it could be argued that this is a key role of effective team leaders – to make things easier for teams to succeed. The next section looks at how to facilitate what for many is the most frustrating team experience, the team meeting.

9.4 Leading team development meetings

One of the most important team leader skills is the ability to develop your team. This will be largely done on face-to-face either with individual team members or in team development meetings. These may take various forms from induction meetings, to team building exercises, to celebration events.

Here are some tips for leading a team development meeting effectively. First, think about the content and process of the meeting. Then think about your own skills in leading the activity.

Managing content and process

Team development meetings are a valuable tool to help teams progress through the various stages we've discussed earlier. But such meetings need to be properly planned and led. The key to this is to distinguish between content and process.

The content of the meeting refers to:

- What is the purpose of the meeting.
- What needs to be done.
- Who should do it.
- When should it be done.
- What information is needed.
- What equipment is needed.

The process of the meeting is about ensuring that:

- People's interactions are managed.
- Contributions are shared around the group.
- Agreement is active not passive.
- Digressions are managed.
- Decisions are made using fair decision making processes.

Effectively combining meeting content with essential process steps will help your teams gain the most from their knowledge and skills, and to achieve agreed outcomes.

Skills for leading the meeting

Once you're clear about the meeting's content, and the process for achieving your aims, pay some attention to how you intend to lead the event.

It's helpful to think about your team leading skills as three broad areas: focus skills; inter-personal skills; and your own personal characteristics.

Firstly, think about using and developing your **focus skills**. These ensure that:

- The nature of the team meeting is outlined clearly and effectively.
- Enthusiasm and meaningful intent is clearly conveyed, setting the meeting tone right from the start, and motivating those present.

- People's interactions are effectively managed.
- Contributions are encouraged, acknowledged and shared around the team.
- Agreement is active, not passive.
- Digressions are managed.
- Pace and momentum are managed, ensuring that this is flexible and varied, appropriate to the nature of the meeting and team members.
- The meeting is "balanced", by allocating more time to productive topics and discussions, and to reflection, than to negative input.
- Support is balanced with challenge.
- Objectivity is encouraged.
- Decisions are made using fair decision making processes.
- Motivation is maintained by ending well, with a good summary, giving clear recognition of what has been achieved and of the contributions made. Promote action with an action plan and next steps.
- Action and outcomes are promoted by agreeing and recording action plans.

Now that you've considered the importance of focus, think about your **inter-personal skills**. These are essential for effectively developing self-awareness, awareness of others and awareness of the group dynamics. Many of these skills are used in other leadership and management activities, such as coaching or mentoring. Think about how effective you are in each of these areas:

- Establishing trust.
- Communicating, using a variety of methods, appropriate to the team.
- Active listening, using your eyes and your ears.
- Clarifying, paraphrasing, reframing and checking understanding.
- Summarising.
- Asking questions.

Finally, leading an effective team development meeting also relies on some of your own **personal characteristics**. When facilitating meetings, it's important to think about your own:

- Ability to learn (before, during and after the meeting).
- Friendliness (but don't be false or act unnaturally).
- Sensitivity.
- Integrity.
- Sense of humour.
- Openness to change.
- Self-awareness.

Leading team meetings effectively requires a wide range of skills. These include the ability to focus on how meetings/workshops are progressing, blended with your own inter-personal skills, and your personal characteristics. Combining these skills is not easy to do. They must be developed, firstly by building your knowledge base, then by getting plenty of practice.

Remember though, developing your process skills is much easier when you're clear about both the content of the team meeting and of the process for facilitating it. Being sure of these makes it much easier for you to focus on using your skills to get the best from your team both during the meeting, and beyond. www.the-happy-manager.com/teams



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