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Building a High-Performing Team: Achieving the Benefits of Teamworking

Authored by: (LID Editorial, 2015)

Benefits of Teamworking

Adapted for learning purposes

Benefits of Teamworking

- **People collaborate and work more effectively,** making the whole team greater than the sum of its parts. For example: employees' knowledge, experience and ability are more fully used; individuals have a greater sense of ownership, responsibility and motivation; collaboration leads to plans and objectives that are realistic, and team working fosters loyalty and a common determination to succeed.
- **Greater innovation often results from team working,** as teams that are working well provide an excellent environment for discussing problems, new ideas, opportunities and better ways of working. Team working promotes creative thought and the free exchange of ideas; also, teams, with their range of skills, can often implement new ideas faster and more flexibly.
- **Individuals develop their skills and perform their jobs better through teamworking.** In particular, job satisfaction increases, people are more relaxed and more likely to do their job well, conflict is reduced and problems are solved quickly and effectively. Also, team members take greater responsibility – monitoring their own performance and providing feedback – and this expands the range of what the organisation can achieve.

Action Checklist: Building a High-Performing Team

Understand and manage team roles

Meredith Belbin has devised a popular method of understanding the ways that people work together in teams. He identified eight types of preferred ways that people work in teams and some of the essential characteristics are highlighted below. It should be emphasised that these team types are *preferred ways of working*, meaning that some people may exhibit characteristics from a number of categories but one style tends to dominate the way they work in a team. Understanding these individual styles is important in developing and leading effective teams.

Belbin's team preferences and their characteristics	Key points for leaders
The Implementer Diligent and action-oriented; self-motivated individuals that get things done. Good planners and well-organised administrators. Tend to be knowledgeable and respected in their specialist field.	Implementers help to focus the team on tasks. They focus on objectives – and help to define them, if necessary. They are calm and reliable under pressure, and are prepared to persevere. They provide practical support to others. Weaknesses include: Insensitive to the suggestions of others. They can lack flexibility. **Summary: implementers (or company workers) are vital members of the team: they are efficient, effective and practical.**
The Plant Creative, innovative people that constantly generate radical new ideas. Provide a new, independent	Plants are a valuable resource offering ideas and creativity. However, more focus on detail is often needed, as their ideas can range too broadly if not directed. Weaknesses include:

Belbin's team preferences and their characteristics	Key points for leaders
perspective. Focus on big issues, formulating new approaches and looking for breakthroughs. Contributions are well timed and appropriate.	Can be self-indulgent, possibly ignoring the needs of the team when suggesting solutions. Can be sensitive. This may result in being inhibited in their contributions (although they have good ideas to suggest) or not taking criticism well. **Summary: serious, individualistic, highly intelligent and focused on the big issues, but can be impractical and focused on their own ideas.**
The Resource Investigator A networker that develops the team's external resources. Works independently, quickly making contacts, developing and harnessing resources. Is interested in new ideas and explores outside possibilities. Has excellent interpersonal skills and maintains good team relationships, providing encouragement and support, especially under pressure.	Resource investigators are creative people with good communication skills and they bring a fresh perspective (along with contacts and resources) to the team. Weaknesses include: Can work too much in isolation: they focus on their own ideas and often reject ideas and information before raising them with the team. Can be distracted by unproductive activities (usually because of their highly-sociable nature). **Summary: enthusiastic, curious, communicative and sociable, but they need to be kept focused as they can lose interest.**
The Monitor Evaluator Particularly successful with skills of analysis: they focus on facts, analysing and evaluating ideas for their value, relevance and practicality. Builds on the suggestions of others – turning ideas into practical applications. Provides clear thinking, offering firm and realistic arguments for rejecting unsound approaches. Balances innovation and experimentation with the practical needs of the task.	Successful Monitor Evaluators combine critical skills of analysis and evaluation with a practical, results-oriented approach. They often possess strong leadership qualities, but can be undone by their scepticism and cynicism. Weaknesses include: Can be too negative, with their critical skills outweighing their openness to new ideas. They can be competitive with other team members. In a non-directive team role, they can find it hard not to appear threatening to others, whereas in a directive role they can stifle contributions. **Summary: does things right and is careful, rational, methodical and analytical, but can over-emphasise detail and lack vision or inspiration.**
The Team Worker Strong team workers that encourage and support others. Promotes team spirit and effectiveness. Leads by example and is often selfless in their outlook.	Generally tough and determined, team workers persevere and have a strong sense of duty. They are conscientious and do not tend to ignore detail. Team workers can appear at any level in the team: from new recruit to team leader. Weaknesses:

Belbin's team preferences and their characteristics	Key points for leaders
Has good interpersonal skills, improves team communications and develops relationships. Works hard. Understands the strengths and weaknesses of the team and acts accordingly.	Team loyalty can override their focus on the task. Tend to avoid resolving tough problems. **Summary: sensitive and a valuable team player, with good interpersonal skills, but can be anxious and indecisive.**
The Co-ordinator Controls, organises and marshals the team. Tends to stand back from the team, providing comments from a different perspective. Is skilled at getting people to work together. Helps team members to understand their roles and what they need to do. Is encouraging and supportive and provides positive feedback. Co-ordinates resources well and delegates effectively. Identifies weaknesses in the team and takes action to develop the team. Perseveres and acts as a focus for the team's efforts – particularly when under pressure.	Co-ordinators are well placed to manage the team; they can stand back from the detail and mobilise people to tackle the right issues. They tend to be effective communicators, with good interpersonal skills. Weaknesses include: Competitive with other team types, and will abdicate leadership in the face of strong competition. Do not necessarily have a creative or challenging aspect to their role. Can be too aloof from the action to recognise the team's full capabilities. **Summary: commands respect, steady, patient, assured, but radical or creative thinking is not their strength.**
The Completer Finisher Completer Finishers provide an all-round perspective necessary for completing a task or project. They bring a focus on quality and an attention to detail, ensuring that tasks are completed as well as possible. They raise the standards of the team's activities.	As a manager, a Completer Finisher needs to avoid interfering and they need to work on their delegation and empowerment skills. In a more junior role, the CF can be perceived as a fussing worrier. They are valuable in driving the team forward, achieving the task at a pace and to a standard that is as good as they can make it. They find mistakes in the detail, and they can identify aspects of the task that need more work. Weaknesses:

Belbin's team preferences and their characteristics	Key points for leaders
They inject urgency, priority and purpose into the team.	Over-emphasising detail at the expense of the overall plan. Lowering motivation and morale by worrying, perfectionism and undue criticism. **Summary: conscientious, provides focus and has a strong ability to follow through, but has a tendency to worry and a reluctance to let go.**
The Specialist Possess detailed knowledge or experience that they contribute to the team Their knowledge is often scarce and hence valuable They are experts	Leaders rely on the specialist's information, knowledge or skills and these are typically vital (e.g. legal advice). However, specialists can be overly focused on their knowledge at the expense of its broader application. Specialists may also find difficulty applying their expertise, preferring instead the more esoteric activities of gathering and managing specialist information. **Summary: they need to be more involved in the team and have their expertise focused on specific priorities. When this happens, their input is illuminating and they can provide a useful broad, external view.**

Manage the stages of team development

There are many different views concerning the evolution of successful teams, but most tend to follow the same pattern. The one that is used most frequently, and perhaps most clearly defines the development of teams, is the four stages of team development: *forming, storming, norming* and *performing*.

At first, the team is a collection of individuals that are just starting to form into a single unit. The ice is carefully being broken, people are introducing themselves and are generally quiet, polite and are getting the measure of others in the team.

The team then starts storming: conflict starts to emerge as people display their attitudes and set boundaries. This is an inevitable phase, as people get to know others in the team and find their own identity.

Next, norms are developed, as people understand each other's strengths, weaknesses and patterns of behaviour. The group functions as a team and tasks are accomplished. Often teams settle at this level.

Finally, the team starts excelling and performing at its very best. This largely results from a steady accumulation of trust, respect and understanding, combined with a common sense of purpose and some successes.

To these four stages can be added a fifth, *reforming*, which is about renewing and reinvigorating the team, perhaps after failures, difficulties or major changes.

Recognise the characteristics of a high-performing team

1. Individuals within the team recognise their mutual dependence on each other. They understand that this is the best way to achieve personal and team success (people do not waste time trying to achieve success at the expense of others).

2. Team members work at understanding each other, communicating honestly and openly. Also, team members take a mature view of conflict, realising that it is unavoidable, trying to work through the conflict as swiftly as possible, looking to generate new ideas and understanding as a result. Also, team members feel a sense of pride and ownership in the team and are committed to the team's success. They also trust and respect each other, providing encouragement and support, sharing information and experience and communicating openly.
3. Individuals understand when the leader needs to act and make a decision (i.e. in an emergency or if there is a major problem or disagreement).
4. Team members are relaxed, determined and dynamic: they know the team and understand their own strengths and weaknesses.
   It can be useful to consider one's own career and reflect back to when you worked in a successful team: what made it effective and how could it have been better? Could your current team be improved?