

*Helping You to Develop
Your Business with Free
Hints and Tips...*

... In This Issue

*Building a High
Performing Team*



www.fdoutsorce.co.uk
enquiries@fdoutsorce.co.uk
T: 01889 358921

The Coach House
Bellamour Way
Colton
Staffordshire
WS15 3LN

Building a High Performing Team

⇒ *Achieving the benefits of teamworking*

Overview

Team-based working has developed into the normal way of structuring organisations and undertaking tasks, yet it is a difficult and complex aspect of leadership and is often developed through experience. Every leader has their style and when developing a high performing team this needs to combine with an understanding of:

- The benefits of team building – what it can achieve, what to do and what to avoid.
- Team roles and dynamics – how teams work and achieve their greatest success.
- The stages of team development – what they are and how to support the team in each stage.
- The features of a successful team and team leader.
- How to avoid potential problems and pitfalls.

Team building is a continuing process requiring energy, commitment, feedback and review. Leading an effective team is achieved by doing several basic things well. These include:

- Choosing the best people for the team based on skills, ability and diversity.
- Setting the framework people will work within and the direction they will take, and ensuring that they understand both.
- Encouraging active participation in activities and decision-making.
- Empowering team members within agreed limits.
- Managing conflicts that arise from bringing diverse groups of people together.
- Demonstrating the standards of behaviour that you expect from the team.

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 is more fully used; individuals have a greater sense of ownership, responsibility and motivation; team members' 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 hence 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
<p>The Implementer</p> <p>Diligent and action-oriented; self-motivated individuals that get things done.</p> <p>Good planners and well-organised administrators.</p> <p>Tend to be knowledgeable and respected in their specialist field.</p>	<p>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 in the team.</p> <p>Weaknesses include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insensitive to the suggestions of others. • They can lack flexibility. <p>Summary: implementers – also known as company workers – are vital members of the team: they are efficient, effective and practical.</p>
<p>The Plant</p> <p>Creative, innovative people that constantly generate radical new ideas.</p> <p>Provide a new, independent perspective.</p> <p>Focus on big issues, formulating new approaches and looking for breakthroughs.</p> <p>Contributions are well timed and appropriate.</p>	<p>Plants are a valuable resource offering ideas and creativity, and these need to be focussed; their ideas can range too broadly if not directed.</p> <p>Weaknesses include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>Summary: serious, individualistic, highly intelligent and focused on the big issues, but can be impractical and focused on their own ideas.</p>
Belbin's team preferences and their characteristics	Key points for leaders
<p>The Resource Investigator</p> <p>A networker that develops the team's external resources.</p> <p>Works independently, quickly making contacts,</p>	<p>Resource investigators are creative people with good communication skills and they bring a fresh perspective (along with contacts and resources) to the team.</p>

<p>developing and harnessing resources.</p> <p>Is interested in new ideas and explores outside possibilities.</p> <p>Has excellent interpersonal skills and maintains good team relationships, providing encouragement and support, especially under pressure.</p>	<p>Weaknesses include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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). <p>Summary: enthusiastic, curious, communicative and sociable, but they need to be kept focused as they can lose interest.</p>
<p>The Monitor Evaluator</p> <p>Particularly successful with skills of analysis: they focus on facts, analysing and evaluating ideas for their value, relevance and practicality.</p> <p>Builds on the suggestions of others – turning ideas into practical applications.</p> <p>Provides clear thinking, offering firm and realistic arguments for rejecting unsound approaches.</p> <p>Balances innovation and experimentation with the practical needs of the task.</p>	<p>Successful Monitor Evaluators combine critical skills of analysis and evaluation with practical, results-oriented approach. They often possess strong leadership qualities, but can be undone by their scepticism and cynicism.</p> <p>Weaknesses include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>Summary: does things right and is careful, rational, methodical and analytical, but can over-emphasise detail and lack vision or inspiration.</p>
<p>The Team Worker</p> <p>Strong team workers that encourage and support others.</p> <p>Promotes team spirit and effectiveness. Leads by example and is often selfless in their outlook.</p> <p>Has good interpersonal skills, improves team communications and develops relationships.</p> <p>Works hard.</p> <p>Understands the strengths and weaknesses of the team and acts accordingly.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team loyalty can override their focus on the task. • Tend to avoid resolving tough problems. <p>Summary: sensitive and a valuable team player with good interpersonal skills but can be anxious and indecisive.</p>

Belbin's team preferences and their characteristics	Key points for leaders
<p>The Co-ordinator</p> <p>Controls, organises and marshals the team.</p> <p>Tends to stand back from the team, providing comments from a different perspective.</p> <p>Is skilled at getting people to work together.</p> <p>Helps team members to understand their roles and what they need to do.</p> <p>Is encouraging and supportive and provides positive feedback.</p> <p>Co-ordinates resources well and delegates effectively.</p> <p>Identifies weaknesses in the team and takes action to develop the team.</p> <p>Perseveres and acts as a focus for the team's efforts – particularly when under pressure.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>Weaknesses include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>Summary: commands respect, steady, patient, assured, but radical or creative thinking is not their strength.</p>
<p>The Completer Finisher</p> <p>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.</p> <p>They raise the standards of the team's activities.</p> <p>They inject urgency, priority and purpose into the team.</p>	<p>As a manager, a Completer Finisher needs to avoid interfering and 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.</p> <p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-emphasising detail at the expense of the overall plan. • Lowering motivation and morale by worrying, perfectionism and undue criticism. <p>Summary: conscientious, provides focus and has a strong ability to follow through, but has a tendency to worry and a reluctance to let go.</p>

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, and 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 and 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.

Avoiding problems

Recognise problems

Problems developing in teams are often highlighted by the following behaviours:

- Uncharacteristic or prolonged dissent or unhappiness towards the job, other team members or the leader.
- People working independently.
- People changing their working routine – for example, increasing out of hours working.
- Team members work at cross-purposes, undermining each other unintentionally or deliberately.
- Initiative and responsibility are lacking: people are told what to do or wait to be told what to do.
- People are cautious of each other, perhaps even afraid to clearly speak their mind, motives are not trusted and the atmosphere is overly political.
- Domineering members of the team restrict contributions from others.
- Tensions and conflicts increase and become harder to resolve quickly and amicably.
- Team members do not participate in decisions affecting the team: they withdraw from the group and no longer feel personal responsibility for success or failure.

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?

Strengthen the team

When teams are forming, individuals make judgements of each other, they look to make friends and 'alliances', the atmosphere is polite and co-operative and the 'team' is little more than a group of individuals. Problems can be avoided or resolved at this stage by:

- Gaining team support for the vision, values and direction.
- Building a supportive atmosphere.
- Asserting the team's objectives.
- Getting the team to start working together.
- Clarifying roles, expectations and personal objectives.
- Enabling relationships to form and giving people time to find their role and strengths in the team.

When teams are storming people attack the rules and structure that the team must operate within, they criticise the leader, challenge each other, display sensitivity and act defensively. Unsurprisingly, morale, motivation and confidence fall as a result. Problems can be avoided or resolved at this stage by:

- Asserting the vision, values processes and objectives.
- Renegotiating processes, procedures and structures within the team and with the rest of the organisation.
- Clarifying (and enforcing) the process for decision-making.
- Limiting personal attacks, defusing and resolving conflicts by identifying key issues.
- Moving the team from 'testing and proving' to a problem-solving mentality.
- Staying positive, calm, cheerful and confident!

When teams are norming, consistent team behaviour begins to emerge, ground rules are accepted, the team focuses on its purpose and objectives, mutual support begins, information is shared and team members co-operate effectively. Problems can be avoided or resolved at this stage by:

- Prioritising objectives.
- Encouraging development, providing feedback to the team and to individuals and encouraging the team to provide feedback to each other.
- Showing flexibility and promoting openness.
- Encouraging the team's input instead of telling.
- Confronting problems and resolving issues with the team.
- Coordinating and facilitating the team's efforts – acting as a chairperson.

When teams are performing the team is highly focused with a high degree of commitment. Consequently, tasks are rapidly prioritised and assigned, the quality of the work accomplished exceeds expectations (in terms of standard and time taken) and individual skills continue to improve and combine to achieve excellent results. Problems can be avoided and momentum sustained by:

- Providing feedback and encouraging the team to openly provide feedback.

- Celebrating successes: this may mean telling others outside the team, as well as rewarding the team performance.
- Being prepared to relinquish greater control to the team.
- Delegating, mentoring and developing team members.
- Maintaining momentum, setting new challenges and keeping the team focused.

When a team is reforming, it is characterised by tiredness, disillusion and a lack of momentum. Disagreements and criticisms emerge, the work rate falls both in terms of quality and quantity and the team is attacked and criticised from outside. Problems can be avoided or resolved at this stage by:

- Finding ways to renew, reintegrate and reinvigorate the team (i.e. consider new resources, new purpose).
- Integrating the best of the past into the present.
- Providing a fresh vision and new challenges.
- If necessary, reverting to an earlier phase of development.

Dos and don'ts

Do:

- Provide opportunities and support to team members.
- Coach, facilitate and guide the team, acting as a sounding board when needed.
- Co-ordinate team efforts, both within the team and with others outside the team.
- Establish a reward system that satisfies the needs of the team and individuals.
- Promote on merit.
- Inspire teamwork and mutual support.
- Stimulate action and excitement.

Do not:

- Fail to give and receive feedback, or discourage questions and open discussion.
- Fail to set goals with team members or discuss expectations;
- Discourage people who have the desire to excel and the ability to work with others.
- Misunderstand how teams work, or fail to develop your own leadership style.
- Ignore people's potential, or stop empowering and enabling them to succeed.

Key questions

Are you:

- Gaining the trust and commitment of team members, relating to people as individuals?
- Mobilising and involving people in the team – getting the best from each person?
- Encouraging people to find solutions to their problems?
- Encouraging people to innovate, experiment and take the initiative by fostering a positive, blame-free environment?

- Proactive in relationships – getting to know people and supporting them?
- Leading by example?
- Developing and clearly communicating a powerful vision, setting direction for the team?
- Showing sensitivity, awareness and understanding, monitoring conflict and intervening before it becomes too destructive?

Things you can do

Establish a project team

First, understand (or estimate) the requirements of the project or initiative. Timing is critical and this involves analysing current and future work. Also, understand what is involved, avoiding assumptions and discussing plans with people that may have expertise in this area. What changes and pressures will be faced? What skills are vital and what are desirable?

A mentor will help you develop your teamworking skills, acting as a sounding board and providing the benefit of their experience.

Next, assemble the project team by asking:

- Who has the right blend of capabilities and experience?
- Who has access to the right information?
- Who would benefit from the project (for example, by developing their skills and knowledge)?
- How much time is available?

Reaffirm relationships, overcoming disagreements or friction

Activities that can help you do this include:

- Identifying relationships where there is currently some friction and considering why friction arose (its underlying causes) and how it has developed (the catalyst or ongoing reasons for friction).
- Discussing with peers, your manager and mentor where challenges lie, and agreeing what action needs to be taken.
- Assessing your decision-making style (for example, by using 360-degree feedback or by discussing with colleagues and mentor).
- Finding an opportunity to work together, separating areas of disagreement from the quality of the relationship.
- Allowing time at team meetings for an open exchange of views: look for what people think as well as what they say.

Establish a 'support and challenge' group

The group meets informally with each member spending 10 minutes explaining, uninterrupted, about a problem or challenge they face. Members of the group then ask questions and provide ideas to help progress or solve the issue.

Further action

Use the following table to identify areas for further development.

Issue	Response	Further action
<p>Do you understand the different stages a team is at and modify your actions to reflect this? Different activities may be appropriate at different phases for the team.</p>		
<p>Does the team overcome challenges, or does progress become frequently obstructed?</p>		
<p>Does your team possess a positive balance of skills, experience and teamworking styles?</p>		
<p>Does your team understand the issues that need to be addressed? It is easy for teams to concentrate exclusively on building internal relationships, without focusing on external challenges to produce success. The main purpose of a team is rarely merely to strengthen the team – that is just a means to an end.</p>		

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