

TEAM PERFORMANCE



THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS CHAPTER ARE TO:

- 1 IDENTIFY THE PURPOSE, NATURE AND IMPACT OF TEAMWORK
- 2 REVIEW A RANGE OF BROAD TYPES OF TEAM
- 3 EXPLORE THE NOTION OF TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

The appointments pages of *Personnel Management*, *People Management* and other periodicals have since the early 1990s been littered with advertisements from organisations that are seeking ‘proactive’, ‘natural’, ‘enthusiastic’, ‘genuine’ and ‘effective’ team players, who ‘enjoy’ or ‘have a preference for’ working in a team environment, and who are ‘committed’ to team working. The report of the 1998 Workplace Employee Relations survey (Cully *et al.* 1999) acknowledged that teamworking is central to new forms of work organisation, Geary and Dobbins (2001) suggest that teams are repeatedly identified as an aspect of post-industrial society and we could say that ‘the team is now the norm at work’ (Blau 2002). Yet again, however, a gap between rhetoric and reality has been identified due to unevenness of current practices (Griffith 2002).

PURPOSE, NATURE AND IMPACT OF TEAMWORK

While it is generally accepted that teamworking has increased, there are continued debates about the prevalence of teamwork, its definition and the advantages and disadvantages of this way of working.

Determining the prevalence of teamwork is extremely difficult because of differences in the definition used and the criteria applied. Teamwork is frequently seen as an aspect of high-performance work systems (*see*, for example, Bacon and Blyton 2003), in which case the focus is on lean production teams/semi-autonomous teams, usually in the production sector. However, teams are used in a much wider context than this, as we shall explore later. Even in this narrower context there is much debate about what might constitute a team. In teamworking surveys lists of team characteristics are typically used and only if the organisation being surveyed ticks off a sufficient percentage of these is it considered that teamworking exists. In addition, for an organisation to be identified as being based on teamworking, there has to be a specified percentage of employees, or employees in the largest employee group organised by team. Benders and others (2002) provide an excellent discussion of the definitions used in teamworking surveys across a range of European countries.

In spite of a more critical perspective being taken of late, teamwork is still used and introduced as a way of empowering employees and facilitating the development of their full potential in order to enhance organisational performance. A heavy emphasis on teamwork usually corresponds with ‘flatter’ organisations, which have diminished status differentials, and reduced staffing. Teamwork, of course, is not a recent idea, and the autonomous working groups of the 1960s and 1970s are its clear forerunners. The similarities are increasing responsibility, authority and a sense of achievement among group members. The protagonists of autonomous working groups were also intent on improving the quality of working life of employees by providing a wider range of tasks to work on (job enrichment) and a social environment in which to carry them out. The emphasis currently is quite different. While it is argued that team members will gain intrinsic rewards from autonomy, job satisfaction, identification with work and greater skills development, performance is the unvarying aim. Higher performance is expected due to increased flexibility and communication within teams, increased ownership of the task and commitment to team goals. Some of the most famous autonomous working groups at Volvo in Sweden have now been disbanded because their production levels were too low compared with other forms of production. Current teams are designed to outperform other

production methods, and Natale *et al.* (1998), for example, argue that they are fundamental to continuous corporate improvement. They are also seen as critical in the development of a learning organisation (*see*, for example, Senge 1990).

There remain many strong supporters of teamwork and many organisations committed to this approach, although it is also criticised as management control by another means and has often failed to improve performance. Van den Beukel and Molleman (2002) found a range of unintended consequences of teamwork, and others have reported loss of skills, work intensification and peer pressure as problems. Butcher and Bailey (2000), for example, note that teamwork has not always achieved the desired result, and Attaran and Nguyen (2000) found that flexible structures, such as teamwork, have sometimes been abandoned in favour of returning to more traditional approaches. Not only have organisations begun to consider whether teamwork will produce the expected productivity gains, employees who have experienced teamwork have sometimes viewed it as unsuccessful and feel less optimistic about it than previously (Proehl 1997). Part of the problem may also be unrealistic expectations. Very often performance dips when teamwork is introduced, and the performance improvements only come later on. Teamwork is not a 'quick fix', as has been noted by many of those who have been involved (*see*, for example, Scott and Harrison 1997; Arkin 1999). Part of the problem may also be that, as Church (1998) notes, there has been a tendency to think that teamwork is a solution for all our problems. Thus teamwork has undoubtedly been used in some situations where it was inappropriate, or where there was insufficient support to make it effective.

WINDOW ON PRACTICE

Sharpe (2002) analyses the way that teamwork was enacted by an assembly team with 22 associates and a team leader on a greenfield manufacturing site of a UK subsidiary of a Japanese-owned firm. Team meetings were held at the beginning of every day and these were a central element of management control in which individual performance was discussed and those associates making faults were recognised. The supervisor aimed to reduce faults through developing a positive attitude and encouraging a sense of responsibility amongst the team to ensure improved performance. Break times were taken together, and away from other teams, in a hot corner where production charts were displayed, and this was systematically used to develop a sense of team and commitment to shared objectives. This team exhibited high co-operation, dependency and communication which provided a suitable context for the development of team spirit and unitary goals, and a sense of not letting the team down. As jobs were interdependent there was increased pressure on the team associates not to stop the manufacturing line, there being little slack in deadlines. However, each member had a quality control role in checking the work of the person before them in the line, and was required to press 'red' to stop the line and report quality problems when they occurred. In practice this system was also used to express antagonism against another worker who was in a different clique. Alternatively, in order to protect friends, associates would not press red when a fault was passed to them, and they would help friends out further down the line so as not to have to press red. Pressing the red light was also used as a form of protest when the whole team felt that the work they were being given was too difficult.

Sharpe concludes that while this team was a clear example of a system of managerial control that encouraged worker compliance, the workers still engaged in a form of resistance, albeit in a form less overt and direct than in traditional manufacturing settings.

Source: Adapted from D. Sharpe (2002) 'Teamworking and managerial control within a Japanese manufacturing subsidiary in the UK', *Personnel Review*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 267–82.

So, what is a team? How does it differ from all the other groups in organisations? A team can be described as more than the sum of the individual members. In other words, a team demands collaborative, not competitive, effort, where each member takes responsibility for the performance of the team rather than just their own individual performance. The team comes first, the individual comes second, and everything the individual member does is geared to the fulfilment of the team's goals rather than their individual agenda. If you think of a football team, a surgical team or an orchestra, it is easier to see how each member is assigned a specific role depending on their skills and how individuals use their skills for the benefit of the team performance rather than selectively using them for personal achievement. In a football game, for example, a player making a run towards the goal would pass to another player in a better position to score rather than risk trying to score themselves for the sake of personal glory.

Moxon (1993) defines a team as having a common purpose; agreed norms and values which regulate behaviour; members with interdependent functions and a recognition of team identity. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) and Katzenbach (1997) have also described the differences that they see between teams and work-groups, and identify teams as comprising individuals with complementary skills, shared leadership roles, mutual accountability and a specific team purpose, among other attributes. In organisations this dedication only happens when individuals are fully committed to the team's goals. This commitment derives from an involvement in defining how the goals will be met and having the power to make decisions within teams rather than being dependent on the agreement of external management. These are particularly characteristics of self-managing teams.

Organisational teams differ, though, in terms of their temporary or permanent nature, the interchangeability of individual members and tasks and the breadth of tasks or functions held within the team:

- **Timespan.** Some teams are set up to solve a specific problem, and when this has been solved the team disbands. Other teams may be longer term and project based, and may disband when the project is complete. Some teams will be relatively permanent fixtures, such as production teams, where the task is ongoing.
- **Leadership.** Some teams are based on shared responsibility, although a leader may emerge, and this leader may change depending on the task. Other teams will have a hierarchically appointed leader.
- **Interchangeability.** Teams differ in the range of specific skills that are required and as to whether there is an expectation that all members will learn all skills. In some production teams interchangeability of skills is key, and all members will have the potential and will be expected to learn all skills eventually. In other types of team, for example cross-functional teams (surgical teams, product development teams),

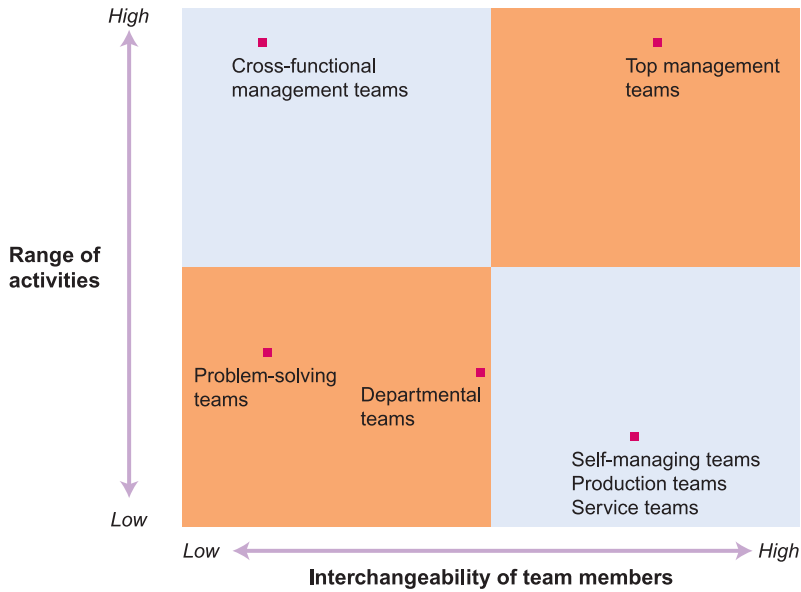


Figure 13.1 Different types of team (Note: High range of activities indicates activities over a broad range of functions; low range of activities indicates activities within a function and within a single task.)

each member is expected to bring their specialist skills to use for the benefit of the team, and they are not expected to be able to learn all the skills of each other member.

- **Task and functional range.** Many production teams will often be designed to cover a whole task and within this there will be a wide range of activities. This clearly differs from the traditional line form of production where the tasks are broken down and segmented. Other teams will span a range of functions – for example cross-functional teams involving, say, research, development, marketing and production staff.

Figure 13.1 shows how different types of teams can be represented on a framework representing interchangeability and task/functional spread.

In this chapter we shall go on to look at the characteristics of four broad types of team: production or service teams; cross-functional management teams; problem-solving teams; and departmental teams. We then look at what factors affect teams’ performance and what can be done to improve team effectiveness, as these matters are currently of critical concern.

ACTIVITY 13.1

Think of the different types of teams in your organisation, or any organisation in which you have been involved (such as school, university, sports clubs, etc.) and plot them on the framework given in Figure 13.1.

What does this tell you about:

- your organisation’s approach to teamwork?
- the different purposes of the different types of team?



BROAD TEAM TYPES

Production and service teams

It is production and service teams that are often referred to as **self-managing teams**, **self-managing work teams** or **self-directed teams**. They are typically given the authority to submit a team budget, order resources as necessary within budget, organise training required, select new team members, plan production to meet predefined goals, schedule holidays and absence cover and deploy staff within the team. There is a clear emphasis on taking on managerial tasks that would previously have been done by a member of the managerial hierarchy. These managerial tasks are delegated to the lowest possible organisational level in the belief that these tasks will be carried out in a responsible manner for the benefit of the team and the organisation. The payoff from this self-management has been shown in Monsanto, for example, to be a 47 per cent increase in productivity and quality over four years (Attaran and Nguyen 2000). These teams are often used in such areas as car production and the production of electrical and electronic equipment. Teams will be based around a complete task so that they perform a whole chunk of the production process and in this way have something clear to manage. For example, the team will normally include people with maintenance skills, specific technical skills and different types of assembly skills so that they are self-sufficient and not dependent on waiting for support from other parts of the organisation. The ultimate aim is usually for all members to have all the skills needed within the team, in other words to be multiskilled. Examples of well-known companies using teams are Coca-Cola, Motorola, Procter & Gamble and Federal Express (Piczak and Hause 1996). Although used initially in the manufacturing sector such teams have increasingly been used in the service sector too.

WINDOW ON PRACTICE

Vesuvius

Arkin (1999) reports how Vesuvius, an isolated Scottish outpost of a large international conglomerate, used self-managed teams throughout the production process, and how this, together with an emphasis on employee development, has driven rapid company growth. Vesuvius introduced self-managed teams in a careful manner and built upon a period of gradual change in working practices, negotiated (with the union) where the job and wage structure was changed, and where production workers were given training so that they could do all jobs within the new teams. There were suspicions to begin with and some resistance, and the new teams were slow to start operating effectively. Inevitable concerns were about job losses, but management tried to develop trust by taking out the time clocks so there was no more checking in and out. Teams became responsible 'for the tasks they carried out, the materials they used and the problems they encountered'. Foremen were extensively developed in their new role as facilitators to the teams, and began to focus on safety, quality and training. In addition every employee had a personal development plan. Opinion surveys show that the workforce is more enthusiastic, the number of customer complaints has decreased

and the company has made cost savings of £500,000 a year. While it is not possible to attribute these satisfactory outcomes purely to the introduction of self-managed teams, it is reasonable to conclude that these have contributed.

Source: Summarised from A. Arkin (1999) 'Peak practice', *People Management*, 11 November.

Nationwide

In a very different setting the Nationwide Building Society decided to introduce self-managed teamworking into the administrative centre at Northampton as an approach which would further develop multiskilling in a flatter structure (Scott and Harrison 1997). Teams were introduced into the mortgage and insurance customer service department, based on previous work-groups, and were accompanied by increased training and support for decision making, conflict management and team-building skills. Each team has between 9 and 18 members, and the leader's role is defined as a coaching rather than a directing role. The team allocates work as it comes in, depending on skills and workloads. Gradually teams took on the responsibility of liaising with branches to improve mutual understanding and develop better ways to work together. The results of each team are charted in a variety of league tables and there is a conscious competitive element between teams. This spurred teams to manage absence levels, among other performance criteria. At first there were concerns that self-managed teams were a way to get greater work out of the employees with no more pay, and some team leaders feared a loss of control. There was a temporary dip in performance after the teams were initially set up, but eventually performance improved and absence declined. The approach is now being spread to other locations, although the presence of other initiatives means that it is difficult to tie improvements to the introduction of self-managed teams.

Source: Summarised from W. Scott and H. Harrison (1997).
'Full team ahead', *People Management*, 9 October.

There are, however, two major variations of such teams. In some teams there is a hierarchically distinct team leader, and these are sometimes referred to as lean teams, compared with teams where everyone is on an equal level (*see*, for example, Kerrin and Oliver 2002). Doorewaard *et al.* (2002) distinguish between 'hierarchical teams' and 'shared responsibility teams', making the point that in the hierarchical teams, team autonomy does not mean team member autonomy. They go on to say that a lot of so-called autonomous teams are lean teams and there is not much autonomy for team members as responsibility is in the hands of the team leader. In shared-responsibility teams a leader may emerge, or the leadership may vary according to the nature of task, resting with whoever has the most appropriate skills to offer. Leaders, in both forms of team, will need to take on managerial tasks such as planning, organising, supporting individuals, presenting information and representing the team to the rest of the organisation. The way that the leader carries out these activities and involves others in them will clearly have an impact on the effectiveness of the team. Where leadership is static the leader's role is often defined in terms of a coaching rather than a directing role.

WINDOW ON PRACTICE

The British company Whitbread has established a small, upmarket chain of restaurants called 'Thank God it's Friday', which is abbreviated to 'Friday's' or 'TGIF'. The marketing is directed towards the relatively young and affluent and a part of this strategy has been to avoid the traditional hierarchy of the good-food restaurant – maître d'hôtel, *chef de rang*, commis waiter and so forth – by empowering the person with whom the customer deals directly: the waiter. This person can take decisions on such matters as complimentary drinks without reference to anyone else. There is no manager, but each restaurant has a team leader known as the Coach.

The nature of self-management also has an impact on the role of managers outside the team. Traditionally these managers would carry out the tasks described above and would monitor and control the performance of the team. If these tasks are no longer appropriate, what is the role of the manager – is there a role at all? It will come as no surprise that the formation of self-managed teams is seen as a threat to some managers. However, Casey (1993) comments that 'self-managed teams do not deny the role of manager, they redefine it'. He also notes that the management of the team is a balance between responsibility within the team and management without, rather than an all-or-nothing situation. He suggests a move towards 90 per cent within the team in a self-management situation rather than nearer 30 per cent in a traditional management situation.

Where there are self-managed teams the role of the traditional manager outside the team changes to adviser and coach, as they have now delegated most of their responsibilities for directly managing the team. These managers become a resource to be called on when needed in order to enable the team to solve their own problems.

Oliva (1992) draws a helpful framework for understanding the respective managerial roles of traditional managers and teams in a team environment, shown in Figure 13.2.

Teamwork relationships in the 1990s

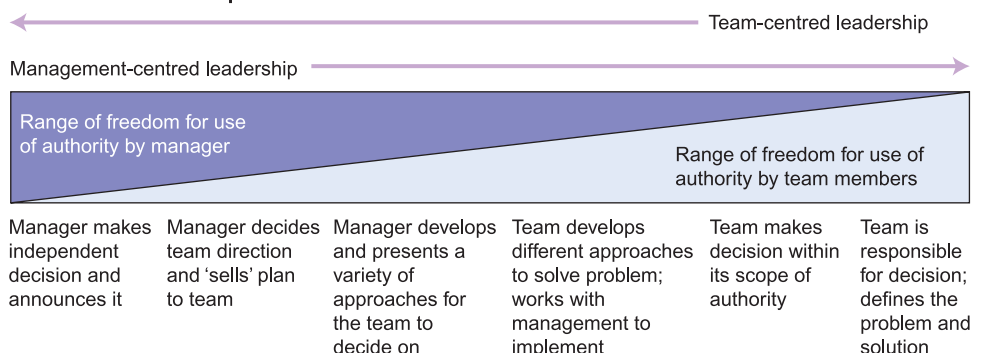


Figure 13.2 Teamwork relationships (Source: L.M. Oliva (1992) *Partners not Competitors*, p. 76. London: Idea Group Publishing. Reproduced with the permission of Idea Group Publishing.)

The self-managing team concept has much to offer in terms of increasing employee ownership and control and thereby releasing their commitment, creativity and potential. There are, of course, potential problems with this approach too. These include the difficulty of returning to traditional systems once employees have experienced greater autonomy; resistance from other parts of the organisation; and peer pressure and its consequences. We would also add resistance from team members too. Let us look at some of these in more detail.

Resistance from other parts of the organisation

As self-managing teams have clear knock-on effects for other parts of the organisation these other parts will react. If traditional managers do not give direction and control over to the team an immediate conflict is set up as to ‘who makes the decisions around here’; if they fail to support and coach, the team may feel abandoned and insecure. In general, the climate of the organisation needs to be supportive in terms of the value placed on individual autonomy and learning. Marchington (2000) points out that it is unrealistic to assess teamworking in isolation from management’s perceived commitment to employees and their approach to the employment relationship as a whole. There are situations also where the rhetoric of the organisation is about delegating responsibility to the team, but where management fail to give up ownership of the task.

Resistance within the team

Individuals who have spent many years being told what to do may need some time to take this responsibility for themselves. It is clear that operating self-managed teams will be easier on a greenfield site. However, for locations which want to make the transition, the importance of team selection of newcomers and of selecting skills relevant to a team environment as well as essential technical skills will be key. Salem, Lazarus and Cullen (1992) note that the most often cited individual characteristics for a team environment are ‘interpersonal skills, self-motivation, ability to cope with peer pressure, level of technical/administrative experience, communication skills and the ability to cope with stress’. Other characteristics that have been noted elsewhere include the ability to deal with ambiguous situations and cope with conflict in a constructive way. Team members may feel resistant due to fear of loss of valued skills, but this seldom actually happens (*see*, for example, Bacon and Blyton 2003).

Peer pressure

The byproducts of peer pressure have been identified as lower absence levels, due to an awareness that colleagues have to cover for them; and a higher production rate so as not to let colleagues down. However, intense peer pressure can lead to stress and destroy many of the perceived benefits of team involvement from the employees’ perspective. It is argued that peer pressure makes team members active participants in their own work intensification, as they develop rules to monitor behaviour in the team. Ezzamel and Willmott (1998) found that social loafing within the team (i.e. not pulling your weight) provoked other team members to act as supervisors, when team performance was related to rewards, adding yet more pressure.



WINDOW ON PRACTICE

Bacon and Blyton investigated the impact of teamworking in a range of different teams at British Steel's (now Corus) Shotton Mill. They compared evidence from an attitude survey a numbers of years prior to teamworking and a similar survey after teamworking had been introduced. Follow-up interviews were also carried out. They found that team participants, overall, reported that there was greater development of skills, greater variety and job satisfaction, although work had been intensified. However, they also identified a differential effect depending on previous occupation and job grade. Previous craft workers reported increased training, freedom to choose own method of working and involvement in decisions to a (statistically) significantly greater extent than previous production workers. Those on a lower job grade were least likely to report increased job satisfaction due to teamworking with aspects such as job variety, freedom to choose own working methods, amount of training and opportunity to use abilities.

Source: Adapted from N. Bacon and P. Blyton (2003) 'The impact of teamwork on skills: employee perceptions of who gains and who loses', *Human Resource Management Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 13–29.

Cross-functional management teams

Cross-functional management teams are very different from the teams described above, and members are more likely to retain other roles in the organisation. Typically they will see themselves as members of their function, whether it be marketing, research, sales, development and members of a specific project team as well. In fact the term 'project' (for example as in 'projects for change') rather than 'team' is being used increasingly to minimise any negative connotations of the word 'team' (see, for example, Proehl 1997; Butcher and Bailey 2000). Very often the project team will manage the development of a particular product, such as a computer package, a drug, a piece of electrical equipment from creation to sales. Members may be allocated to the team by their home function for all or part of their time. In fact many cross-functional teams are virtual teams, and although they may work closely together, they are rarely physically together. Henry and Hartzler (1998) define virtual teams as 'groups of people who work closely together even though they are geographically separated and may reside in different time zones in different parts of the world'. It is in this context that technology comes into its own – video conferencing, for example. However, Bal and Grundy (1999) argue that all too often the emphasis is the technology, rather than the all-important human processes.

The thinking behind a cross-functional team is that each member brings with them the expertise in their own function and the dedication to the team task around a certain product or project. By bringing individuals together as a team the project gains through the commitment of team members to a task that they feel that they own. Bringing these individuals together enables the development of a common language and the overcoming of departmental boundaries. Such teams are a key feature of a matrix organisation where individuals may be, simultaneously, members of a functional department and a product-based team, frequently with two direct line managers.

Meyer (1994) expresses the importance of measures of performance for cross-functional teams, and sees process measures as key rather than just measures of achievements. His argument is that process measures help the team to gauge their progress, and identify and rectify problems. It follows from this that the performance measures used need to be designed by the team and not imposed on them from senior management, as the team will know best what measures will help them to do their job. Inevitably these measures will need to be designed against a strategic context set by higher management. Meyer describes a good example of the problems that can result if managers try to control the performance measurement process rather than empowering team members.

The process of agreeing their own performance measures will also enable the team to identify different assumptions and perceptions that each team member holds, and generate discussion on the exact goals of the team. All this is helpful in bringing the team together, generating a common language and ensuring that everyone is pulling in the same direction.

One special form of cross-functional management team is the top management team of the organisation. Clearly, this team is different in that it is permanent and not project based, but its members still need to work as a team rather than a collection of individuals. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) note that it is more difficult to get this group to work together as a team as they are more likely to be individualist than are team members elsewhere in the organisation. Directors often still see themselves as representatives of their function rather than members of a team, and thus will be more likely to defend their position and attempt to influence each other than to pull together. Katzenbach (1997) suggests that strong executive leadership and true teamwork require different, but equally important disciplines, which need to be integrated rather than being seen as alternatives. Garratt (1990) asks three key questions of top teams to assess whether they are truly direction-giving teams. He asks about regular processes, outside formal meetings, to discuss what is going on in the organisation and what possibilities exist; to what extent the team involve themselves in unstructured visioning before grappling with the practical matters of plans and budgets; and to what extent they assess individual contributions and the skills and resources owned within the team. He finds little evidence of any of these activities taking place. Case 13.1 on the website focuses on senior management teams, and their development needs.



Functional teams

Functional teams, as the name implies, are made up of individuals within a function. For example, the training section of the HR department may well be referred to as the training team – different groups of nurses on a specific ward are sometimes divided into, say, the ‘red’ team and the ‘blue’ team. Sales staff for a particular product or region may refer to themselves as the ‘games software sales team’ or the ‘north west sales team’. Some of the rationale behind this is to give the customer, internal or external, an identified set of individuals to liaise with. Given that these will be a smaller set than those in the whole department, they will be able to gain a much closer knowledge of particular customers and a better understanding of customer needs. The extent to which these are really teams as opposed to groups of individuals will vary enormously.

ACTIVITY 13.2

Think of some functional teams that you either belong to or have belonged to, or have had some contact with.

To what extent, and why, is each truly a team, or just a group of individuals with the title 'team'?

Use the ideas presented in this chapter and Figure 13.1 to help you with this assessment.

**Problem-solving teams**

Problem-solving teams may be within a function or cross-functional. Within-function teams may typically be in the form of quality circles where employees voluntarily come together to tackle production and quality issues affecting their work. Unfortunately, many of these teams have had little impact and it has not been possible to implement recommended changes and improvements, owing to the retention of management control. Other within-function problem-solving teams may consist of specially selected individuals who will be involved in the implementation of a major development within the function or department. For example, the implementation of performance management may be supported by specific coaches in each department who carry out related training, offer counselling and advice and who tailor organisation policy so that it meets department needs. These coaches may become the departmental performance management team.

Cross-functional problem-solving teams may be brought together to solve an identified and specific organisational problem, and will remain together for a short period until that problem has been solved. They differ from cross-functional management teams as their role is not to manage anything, but rather to collect and analyse data and perspectives and develop an understanding of the nature of the problem. From this they will make recommendations on how to solve the problem which are then passed on to higher management. Usually their remit ends here, and they have little or no involvement in implementation. Team members will retain their normal work role at the same time as being a team member.

ACTIVITY 13.3

If you have belonged to, or observed, a problem-solving team:

- (a) What were the barriers to team formation?
- (b) In what ways did team members support the team?
- (c) In what ways did team members concentrate on themselves as individuals?



TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

For a team to be effective its members need a clear and agreed vision, objectives and set of rules by which they will work together. Proehl (1997), for example, identifies the need for a clear project purpose, which members agree is worthy. In addition, he found that clear project boundaries, deadlines and specific follow-up activities by a designated co-ordinator were all important to team effectiveness.

Team members will need to feel able to be open and honest with each other and be prepared to confront difficulties and differences. It is also important for members to be able to tolerate conflict and be able to use this in a collaborative way in the achievement of the team's objectives. Some researchers have commented upon the size of the team and suggest it should be small enough, say no more than 20, for communications to be feasible. Others have suggested that proximity is important in maintaining communications and team spirit.

We have previously mentioned support from management as being critical to team success. Edwards and Wright (1998) note from their case study the problems caused by managers who interfere with team autonomy. Next we explore the key issues of selection, training and development, assessment and reward in relation to team effectiveness.

Selecting team members

The effectiveness of a team largely depends on the appropriateness of the team members. For self-managing teams there is a strong lobby for newcomers to be appointed by the team themselves, and indeed some would argue that unless this happens the team is not truly self-managing. Other case studies suggest that team members, whether selected by the team or by others, are chosen very carefully in the likeness of the team and with the 'right attitudes'. For all teamwork Katzenbach and Smith (1993) identify three critical selection criteria: technical or functional expertise, problem-solving and decision-making skills and interpersonal skills, and it also seems that successful teams have team members with high levels of emotional intelligence.

Another approach to selection of team members is to gain an understanding of the team roles that they are best able to play, so that the team is endowed with a full range of the roles that it will need to be effective. Meredith Belbin (1993), through extensive research and the evolution of his original ideas, has identified nine team roles which are important to a team and which individuals may have as strengths or weaknesses. The absence of some or many of these roles can cause problems in team effectiveness. Too many individuals playing the same type of role can cause undue friction in the team and again damage effectiveness. The key is achieving a balance. These team roles are as follows:

- 1 Coordinator.** This person will have a clear view of the team objectives and will be skilled at inviting the contribution of team members in achieving these, rather than just pushing his or her own view. The coordinator (or chairperson) is self-disciplined and applies this discipline to the team. They are confident and mature, and will summarise the view of the group and will be prepared to take a decision on the basis of this.

- 2 **Shaper.** The shaper is full of drive to make things happen and get things going. In doing this they are quite happy to push their own views forward, do not mind being challenged and are always ready to challenge others. The shaper looks for the pattern in discussions and tries to pull things together into something feasible which the team can then get to work on.
- 3 **Plant.** This member is the one who is most likely to come out with original ideas and challenge the traditional way of thinking about things. Sometimes they become so imaginative and creative that the team cannot see the relevance of what they are saying. However, without the plant to scatter the seeds of new ideas the team will often find it difficult to make any headway. The plant's strength is in providing major new insights and ideas for changes in direction and not in contributing to the detail of what needs to be done.
- 4 **Resource investigator.** The resource investigator is the group member with the strongest contacts and networks, and is excellent at bringing in information and support from the outside. This member can be very enthusiastic in pursuit of the team's goals, but cannot always sustain this enthusiasm.
- 5 **Implementer.** The individual who is a company worker is well organised and effective at turning big ideas into manageable tasks and plans that can be achieved. Such individuals are both logical and disciplined in their approach. They are hardworking and methodical but may have some difficulty in being flexible.
- 6 **Team worker.** The team worker is the one who is most aware of the others in the team, their needs and their concerns. They are sensitive and supportive of other people's efforts, and try to promote harmony and reduce conflict. Team workers are particularly important when the team is experiencing a stressful or difficult period.
- 7 **Completer.** As the title suggests, the completer is the one who drives the deadlines and makes sure they are achieved. The completer usually communicates a sense of urgency which galvanises other team members into action. They are conscientious and effective at checking the details, which is a vital contribution, but sometimes get 'bogged down' in them.
- 8 **Monitor evaluator.** The monitor evaluator is good at seeing all the options. They have a strategic perspective and can judge situations accurately. The monitor evaluator can be overcritical and is not usually good at inspiring and encouraging others.
- 9 **Specialist.** This person provides specialist skills and knowledge and has a dedicated and single-minded approach. They can adopt a very narrow perspective and sometimes fail to see the whole picture.

ACTIVITY 13.4

Think of a team situation in which you have been involved, in either a work or a social/family setting:

- (a) Which roles were present and which were absent?
- (b) What was the effect of this balance?



An individual's potential team roles can be interpreted from some of the psychometric tests used in the normal selection procedure (for example, Cattell's 16PF). They can also be assessed in a different way. Belbin designed a specific questionnaire to identify the individual's perceived current team role strengths (that is, the roles they have developed and are actually playing). This is particularly helpful for development within the current team, but may be less useful for selection purposes. Although helpful, current team role strengths may not be automatically transferred into another team situation.

The psychometric properties of the Belbin Team Roles Self-perception Inventory (BTRSPI) have been assessed by Furnham *et al.* (1993), whose work has cast doubt on the ability of the BTRSPI to be a reliable measure of team role preference. Fisher *et al.* (1996) raise similar doubts but conclude that despite questions over its reliability, the model has intuitive appeal and some empirical support and it would be a pity to disregard it. Further research by Fisher *et al.* (2001) provides more support for Belbin's model. Using the 16PF, Fisher *et al.* (2000) found in a study of almost 1,800 managers that some roles were more scarce than others. Although coordinators and resource investigators were plentiful, there were few completers, monitor evaluators, plants and shapers. They suggest that selection preferences may be causing this pattern and recommend that managers consider wider selection criteria if they wish to broaden their base of employees adequately to represent all team roles.

Team leader and manager training

Both team leaders and senior managers begin to play new roles in team situations. Team leaders suddenly find themselves with a host of new responsibilities for the support of team members and the planning and organising of team activities, responsibilities for which they have little experience and often no training. Similarly managers will need some training support in moving from a directive, controlling role to a coaching and counselling role. Training needs to encompass not only new skills but an opportunity to discuss the changing philosophy of the organisation and to encourage attitude change. Support in understanding the nature of involvement, empowerment and participation will also be relevant.

Team member training

Whether or not the team has an appointed leader all team members will need some training support in working in a different environment with different rules about what they should and should not be doing. Being more involved and taking on more responsibility, and sometimes leading activities, will require some initial training support. Attaran and Nguyen (2000) suggest that training in problem solving, communications and time management is important. Applebaum *et al.* (1999) recommend training in conflict management. Further training in new technical skills can often be handled within the team once at least one member has the required knowledge and has gained some training skills themselves.

Team development

Blau (2002) suggests that the current interest in team building is due to the fact that many teams are not working effectively. Teams can be developed in many different ways, and perhaps one of the most critical is early development through the task

itself. For example, teams can develop by jointly describing the core purpose of the team, visualising the future position that they are aiming to achieve, developing the rules and procedures they will use, performance measures and so on. If the team are given some support to do this, perhaps a facilitator from the HR function or externally, they can not only develop vital guidelines but also gain an understanding of a way of working things out together, a process which they can use by themselves in the future.

Teams can also develop by looking at the way they have been working since they came together. One way of doing this is by completing a team roles questionnaire to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each member. This will help to promote a better understanding of why things happen as they do, and also pave the way for some changes. On this basis some individuals can develop their potential in team roles that they are not presently using, but for which they have some preference, and in this way a better balance may be struck, making the team more effective. Another process is to review what the team as a whole are good at and bad at, what different individuals can do to enable others to carry out their tasks more effectively, and what improvements can be made in the way that the team organises itself. Simple suggestions can be surprisingly effective, such as: 'It would really help me if you gave me a list of telephone numbers where I can leave a message for you when I need to get hold of you urgently' (cross-functional team); and 'I don't understand why we need to lay the figures out in this way and it really gets my back up – will someone take some time out to explain it to me?' Rubin, Plovnick and Fry (1975) identified four major problem areas in relation to group effectiveness – goals, roles, processes and relationships – and these four can be used to provide a framework for team development activities.

WINDOW ON PRACTICE

What is the most effective approach to team building?

Blau reports on a range of teambuilding activities which focus on forcing people into new situations. She found safaris in South Africa, interactive murder mysteries, 'bomb disposal' events, Harry Potter style potion making, working in a kitchen and dog sledding in Finland, among others. Suppliers of such courses say that while they may create a fun environment it is still possible to work on serious issues which can be applied back at work. For example Tim Sheply from 'Thyme management' says that working in a kitchen brings with it the same stresses and time pressures as at work, and Celia Francis at Leith's School of Food and Wine suggests it is important that participants come away with new knowledge – in this case gourmet cooking. Such offerings are now big business. While getting to know fellow workers better may be helpful, Michael West from Aston University argues that developing transferable skills in a team setting is much more valuable, and argues against team activities which centre around fun. Instead he suggests that the focus needs to be on specific skills relevant to the work context. Briner from Birkbeck College, London, suggests that there should be more emphasis on how people operate doing a real job task.

Source: Adapted from R. Blau (2002) 'Playing the game', *People Management*, Vol. 9, No. 11, 30 May, pp. 38–9.

Other less direct methods of development involve working through simulated exercises as a team, such as building a tower out of pieces of paper, and learning from this how the team operate and what they could do to operate better. Outdoor training is also used to good effect in team situations, where the team tackle new, and perhaps dangerous, activities in the outdoors. Typically, some activities involve learning to trust and to depend on each other in a real and risky situation, and the learning from this, and the trust developed, can then be transferred back into the work situation.

The approach taken to team building needs to be appropriate to the stage of development of the team. Tuckman (1965) identified four stages of team development – forming, storming, norming and performing. Forming centres on team members working out what they are supposed to be doing, and trying to feel part of it. At this stage they are quite likely to be wary of each other and hide their feelings. Storming is the stage where members are prepared to express strongly held views, where there is conflict and competition and where some push for power while others withdraw. The norming stage is characterised by a desire to begin to organise themselves. Members actually begin to listen to each other, become more open and see problems as belonging to the whole group. Performing is where a sense of group loyalty has developed and where all contribute in an atmosphere of openness and trust. Proehl (1997) identifies the importance of mutual respect, and Ingram and Descombe (1999) found in their research that camaraderie was very important in getting the work done.



Case 13.2 on the website focuses on the nature of team building activities.

Recognition and reward

Like individuals, teams need some form of recognition and reward for their efforts. Recognition may be in the form of articles in company newsletters or local papers about team successes, inscribing the team name on the product or monetary rewards. A sense of team identity is often encouraged by the use of team T-shirts, coffee mugs and other usable items. It is most important that other reward systems in the organisation, say based on individual contribution, do not cut across the reinforcement for team performance. Kerrin and Oliver (2002), for example, found contradictions between the team structure of work and an individual focus in terms of reward. For example, workers did not put improvement ideas directly to the team, but submitted them to the company suggestion scheme instead as they could gain monetary awards from this. Also when new processes were suggested they did not voice their concerns about the problems they foresaw – instead they waited until the process was implemented and then put suggestions into the suggestion scheme. John Stevens, CIPD Director of Professional Policy (Glover 2002), argues that if we want to identify what teams contribute, team assessment needs to be fitted into the performance management framework of the organisation. The AstraZeneca Window on practice in Chapter 12 on individual performance management demonstrates one way of doing this. For teams where the longer-term objective is for all members to acquire the whole range of skills, a payment system which pays for skills gained rather than job done will be important.

Are teams always the right answer?

Team-based work seems set to increase – on the premise that it will improve organisational commitment and performance. The three difficult issues that will need to be tackled are that not all employees will feel comfortable or perform their best in a team-based situation; that teamwork is not always the best approach; and that not all teams are effective teams. Critics of a team environment suggest that it can have a downward levelling effect, that it stunts creativity and is generally limiting (Stott and Walker 1995). Generating the essential openness, trust and commitment is also a potential difficulty, and decision making can become a lengthy process. Where teams have been introduced inappropriately the result has been lower productivity, poorer decisions and increased dissatisfaction, as noted by Applebaum *et al.* (1999), and this finding conflicts with all the case examples of performance improvement due to the use of teams. These contradictory reports may be explained, as Edwards and Wright (1998) suggested, by the many different types of teams that are set up, and by the impact of different organisational environments.

ACTIVITY 13.5

Using the information in this chapter and other organisational experiences (your own, published case studies, or the experiences of people you know), identify the implications for the HR function of an organisation moving to a heavy emphasis on teamwork.



SUMMARY PROPOSITIONS

- 13.1** Team-based working has been increasing, due to a belief that this empowers employees, encourages them to use their full potential and results in better performance, although these aspirations are not always achieved in practice, or take some time to be achieved.
- 13.2** Three key variables in different types of team are timespan of the team, interchangeability of team members and range of activities and functions involved.
- 13.3** There are four broad team types – production/service teams; cross-functional management teams; departmental teams; and problem-solving teams.
- 13.4** Team effectiveness is dependent on the team having agreed goals and methods of working, and a climate where team members can be open and honest and use conflict in a constructive way.
- 13.5** Selection of team members is key and it is important to have a well-balanced team in terms of the team roles described by Belbin.

GENERAL DISCUSSION TOPICS

- 1 In an organisation which is moving into teamwork the supervisor's role will change from direct supervision to team facilitation and development. What problems are these supervisors likely to experience in their change of role, and what forms of training and development would help them?
- 2 The need to work as a team depends on the kinds of work that are carried out. Discuss.

FURTHER READING

Bateman, B., Wilson, F. and Bingham, D. (2002) 'Team Effectiveness – development of an audit questionnaire', *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 215–26
Aims to link organisational effectiveness and team building in a coherent way. An audit has been produced to assess six measures of team effectiveness: team synergy, clear objectives, required skills, effective use of resources, innovation/constant improvement and the identification and measurement of quality standards. The article provides an example of how this tool is used on a team development day to elicit the different perspectives of each team member.

Sheard, A. and Kakabadse, A. (2002) 'From loose groups to effective teams', *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 133–51

A framework is developed which reflects how loose groups can transform themselves into effective teams. The framework is based on the combination of Tuckman's four stages of team development and the Kubler Ross acceptance of change curve to form a matrix. (The Kubler Ross curve was developed in the context of research on reactions to bereavement and has been adopted in the management arena as representing the stages in the acceptance of change. Change of course involves both taking on the new and letting go of the old.) Also provided are nine key factors essential to the effectiveness of teams.

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An extensive range of additional materials, including multiple choice questions, answers to questions and links to useful websites can be found on the Human Resource Management Companion Website at www.pearsoned.co.uk/torrington.

