Introduction to Teams

Working in teams to solve problems and achieve collective goals is a common experience for many. While teams can achieve extraordinary results, they can also deteriorate into an ineffective and immobilized group of frustrated individuals. This chapter introduces the concept of teams and describes common team problems as well as the conditions that are associated with team success. As individuals join together and build trust, groups develop a shared identity and a common purpose as they progress through predictable stages of development. Team leaders that understand those stages are able to facilitate growth. The chapter concludes with a look at the current trends in team research.

CASE 1.1: ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAK

Alternative Spring Break (ASB) began at Vanderbilt University in 1986, when four students decided to form a team and spend their spring vacation together serving others. Although they had the best of intentions, being with a group of friends under stressful conditions for a week can be quite a challenge. Under duress, the very best of human nature comes out and the very worst of human nature comes out. The sheer logistics of organizing and planning a week-long service trip can be daunting. Once teams are on site, interpersonal problems often emerge as people start working together. As soon as a leader or a coalition of members decides to do one thing, other people will question those decisions and advocate a different direction. Even though ASB participants are well meaning and eager to contribute to the common good, problems almost inevitably emerge.

Whitney was a typical student and would be quick to attest to the life-changing power of her ASB experience. She spent every spring break during her college career volunteering at different ASB sites. She remembers her first spring break as setting the stage for involvement in a student group that would forever change her life. During that year, her team conducted conflict resolution workshops in some of the most troubled public schools in Detroit, Michigan. While the work was overwhelming at times, it was also extremely meaningful. Team members called the Detroit experience that year the "all-star site" because of the incredible friendships they forged and the important work they accomplished together.

The "all-star site" was not without its problems, though. One of the memorable experiences for Whitney was an argument that took place between two of the male members of the team. It was a heated debate about whether or not sports should be presented to urban kids as a viable career option. One member viewed sports as

an opportunity for disadvantaged youth, while the other saw it as an unrealistic dream and barrier to educational success. Interestingly, Whitney found herself pleased that group members had become comfortable enough with one another that they were able to disagree so openly after only spending a short amount of time together. Because of the amount of time ASB participants spend with one another and because of the issues they face, they tend to go through the stages of group development quickly. While some teams get bogged down in communication misunderstandings and interpersonal squabbles, most become cohesive units that not only make a difference in the communities in which they serve but also in the lives of the members themselves.

Case Study Discussion Questions

1. If you were screening applications of students who wanted to go on an ASB trip, what are the qualities for which you would seek?

2. What are some of the tasks that need to be done ahead of time to prepare for a spring break trip?

3. Describe the general climate of ASB. What are the collective values and beliefs of students who are involved with this organization?

4. What would you do if you were on a team in which two of the members were hostile toward each other? How do you respond to interpersonal conflict?

5. From an administrative level, what do ASB leaders need to do to ensure a safe and successful experience for students?

In their article "The Discipline of Teams," Katzenbach and Smith (2005) suggest that "The essence of a team is shared commitment. Without it, groups perform as individuals; with it, they become a powerful unit of collective performance. This kind of commitment requires a purpose in which team members can believe" (p. 3). ASB students who are willing to forgo a fun and relaxing spring break in order to provide meaningful service to others are certainly committed to the mission of their teams. But their level of commitment does not ensure a smooth and successful experience. There are a multitude of things that can go wrong because of site leaders who are inexperienced or activities that are poorly planned or team members who do not get along with one another. Any one of these, which come from a much longer list of potential team obstacles, can serve to create disappointment and frustration. As the title of this text suggests, a collection of high-potential individuals does not always develop into a high-performance team. In fact, it is quite the exception (Wheelan, 2005). But with a little bit of knowledge and planning, teams can be rewarding and extremely successful enterprises (Hertel, 2011).

WHAT IS A TEAM?

Perhaps we should begin by defining what a team is. Kozlowski and Bell (2003) define teams as groups of people ''who exist to perform organizationally relevant tasks, share one

or more common goals, interact socially, exhibit task interdependencies, maintain and manage boundaries, and are embedded in an organizational context that sets boundaries, constrains the team, and influences exchanges with other units in the broader entity'' (p. 334). First and foremost, according to this definition, teams exist to accomplish specific tasks that are related to common goals. In order to do this, people must interact with one another in some form or fashion to accomplish those tasks.

Summarizing the existing definitions, Wageman, Gardner, and Mortensen (2012) define a team as a "bounded and stable set of individuals interdependent for a common purpose" (p. 305). Team boundaries are created so that members know who is on the team and who is not. And finally, we must acknowledge that teams exist within a larger organizational context that influences them to varying degrees. While some organizations give tremendous autonomy to their teams, others require strict adherence to a set of rules, roles, structures, and operating procedures.

Businesses and corporations are well aware of the potential of teams and frequently use them to carry out the missions of their organizations. Take Ford Motor Company, for example. When Henry Ford, the founder and chief engineer of Ford, envisioned his company, he wanted to find a way to efficiently create cars that were both affordable and reliable for the consumer. He developed several teams—each consisting of two to three members—that worked together on a specific part of the assembly process instead of separately building a car from start to finish. This innovative approach pioneered the assembly line method. With several teams working toward a common goal, Ford Motor Company went on to make millions of reliable automobiles and is now the world's fifth-largest automaker in the world. The 21st century business world is marked by the need for quick responses to rapidly changing market conditions. Keeping up with the complexities of a global economy requires businesses to draw upon multiple perspectives and multiple sources of input in order to be able to compete. For this reason, task-oriented teams can be found almost anywhere, from factory assembly lines to corporate executive suites (Polzer, 2003).

WHY DO WE NEED TO LEARN ABOUT TEAMS?

Individuals who affiliate with groups and learn to cooperate with others increase their chances of solving shared problems and meeting personal needs (Qin, Johnson, & Johnson, 1995). Families, neighborhoods, communities, work teams, organizations, and cultures are all attempts to increase collective stability in ways that meet individual needs for survival,

personal development, and social interaction. Given the shift in our economy to a more team-based, collaborative, and interdependent approach to work, it is not surprising that an Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) survey showed that 71 % of employers want colleges to place a greater emphasis on teamwork (AACU, 2010). It is more important than ever for college graduates to be prepared to work in a team-based environment.

While it is not uncommon to encounter group projects and team-based assignments throughout the college experience, the robust working knowledge and subtle interpersonal skills required for team success may not be effectively developed within the undergraduate curriculum. Another AACU report, "College Learning for the New Global Economy: A Report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise" (AACU, 2007) identifies teamwork as 1 of 15 "Essential Learning Outcomes" in college. Success in most work environments after graduation requires individuals to work well with others in collaborative team efforts. Whether in business, government, not-for-profit organizations, or a vast array of other professional pursuits, being able to work within and to lead teams is of central importance to individual success and organizational sustainability.

The primary focus of this text is to prepare students for task-oriented groups in which individuals have joined together to accomplish specific goals. The evidence-based concepts and skills that are presented can help both leaders and members alike as they work together to achieve collective success. After reading the text, students will be able to create meaningful social contexts that foster the development of individual members, changing "high-potential" teams into "high-performance" teams.

TEAMS VERSUS WORKGROUPS

Groups of people who join together to accomplish a specific task do not always exemplify the characteristics of a true "team." Hackman (2009) has identified five basic conditions that must be met if a group is to be considered a team versus a workgroup:

1. "Teams must be real." While many organizations assign people to teams, some of those structures are teams in name only. Real teams are groups of identifiable people who actually work together to achieve a common set of objectives.

2. "Teams need a compelling direction." In order for everyone to be pulling in the same direction, they need to understand and embrace a shared purpose.

3. "Teams need enabling structures." This means involving the right number of the right kind of people on the right tasks in the right ways, and governing them by the right norms and shared values.

4. "Teams need a supportive organization." Everything must facilitate success, from the behaviors and output that are most prized or rewarded, to the structure of the teams' people, systems, and processes.

5. "Teams need expert coaching." An expert third party must lend insight and guidance at key points in any groups' evolution. Too much coaching focuses on the individual, when it should be focused on teamwork and team process.

Clearly, teams and teamwork are nuanced, dynamic, and highly variable. In addition, they are increasingly valued across industries as instrumental in organizational success.

COMMON PROBLEMS

While teams have tremendous potential to accomplish tasks well beyond the reach of any single individual, they are not without problems. As a matter of fact, working in teams can be quite frustrating. Research about teams, personal observations, and personal experience point to five common problems that people experience when working in teams:

- Lack of commitment

- Productivity losses

- Poor communication

- Interpersonal conflict

- Poor leadership

One of the perennial problems in working with others is a **lack of commitment** among members. It is not uncommon for a majority of the work to be done by only a few members. While this may be extremely frustrating for those who are doing the work, those same team members are often reluctant to give up control in order to allow others to rise to the challenge. As a result, those who are doing little or nothing are content to ride the coattails of higher performing members. This free riding, or social loafing, is a regular irritant for countless team leaders.

Losses in productivity that come from poor structure and a lack of planning and organization are called "process losses." They occur because of the additional layers of complexity that come from working in teams. For example, it may take longer to come to a decision, time may be wasted in trying to schedule meetings, and individual contributions must be integrated into the larger project. Furthermore, conflicts about goals, task assignments, and operating procedures all threaten to slow down the work of a team. Unless a team has specifically defined roles and responsibilities, and has established a sound system of coordinating its efforts, there will likely be losses in productivity.

Poor communication is often at the heart of poorly performing groups. Team members can emerge from the same meeting with completely different perspectives of what was said or what was or was not accomplished. In general, as the number of people working on a task increases, so does the chance for communication problems. Most of what team members perceive comes from highly subjective interpretations of nonverbal behavior including tone, facial expression, and body posture. In addition, members often do a poor job supporting or providing evidence for their positions. Thus, there is a great propensity to miscommunicate or misunderstand what is being said.

Communication problems easily give way to **interpersonal conflict**. On any given team, there are likely to be people with whom we get along better than others—and there may

even be some whom we strongly dislike. Strong dislike for a person is frequently quite evident to them even despite our best efforts to hide it. Furthermore, some members are prone to taking questions or challenges far too personally, and do not realize that banter and spirited debate actually sharpen the ability of the group to make good decisions. When members are emotionally fragile, they are likely to feel threatened by those who play the important role of the deviant or devil's advocate.

Finally, poor leadership can compromise the ability of teams to perform effectively (Sivasubramaniam, Murry, Avolio, & Jung, 2002). Leadership is a delicate dance that both guides and empowers. There is no shortage of cases in which team members were so discontent with their leaders that they disengaged, resisted, or even sabotaged their own teams. Team leaders who do not balance members' need for structure with their need for autonomy will hinder performance.

CONDITIONS FOR TEAM SUCCESS

Druskat and Wolff (2001) have identified three essential conditions for team success: trust among members, a sense of group identity, and a sense of group efficacy. Team leaders and organizers can impact their teams by nurturing the development of each of these components. As teams begin their journey together, trust, identity, and efficacy must be established for optimal performance.

Trust

According to Doney, Cannon, and Mullen (1998), trust can be defined simply as the willingness to rely upon others. Organizational researchers have become increasingly interested in its causes, nature, and effects (Costa, Roe, & Taillieu, 2001; Kramer, 1999; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Lencioni (2002) suggests that trust is necessary for effective team functioning. Without it, a host of dysfunctions may emerge, including a fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results.

Levels of trust are related to the personal characteristics of both those who trust and those who are trusted. Some people, by nature, are more trusting than others. This quality stems from positive past experiences and relationships that have proven others to be generally trustworthy. Thus, core beliefs in the goodness of people are established, which enables attraction and attachment to others. On the other hand, for those who have had negative experiences with people in the past, relying upon others will not be an easy thing to do. Group members with painful past experiences and negative beliefs will likely be less trusting of others and seek to be independent.

Trust in groups is also related to the trustworthiness of the group members. Members are trusted when they are perceived to have characteristics that engender trust. These include competence, benevolence, and integrity (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). First, members will rely upon those who are competent and have ability in an area of concern to the group. In other words, members must be relatively sure that the person has the capacity to perform the task at hand. Second, members will trust colleagues who exhibit benevolence. Benevolent members are kind and generous, and are opposed to intentionally

harming or manipulating other people. The third quality that begets trust is integrity. Members who have integrity are true to their word and do what they say they will do before the deadline. If enough members consistently demonstrate these qualities of competence, benevolence, and integrity, the group will establish a foundation of trust that will lead to success and satisfaction.

While trust takes time to establish, it can be compromised after just a single negative interaction. Distrust can become a group norm if members have a lack of confidence in one another or suspect that others are harmful or malicious (Kramer, 1999). Imagine a scenario in a local coffee shop in which a cashier takes an order from a customer and communicates that order to the barista. The line is long, the customers are in a hurry, and the barista inadvertently makes a mistake. When the customer comes back to complain, the cashier makes a condescending remark to the barista. The barista is upset and quickly tries to correct the mistake, only to find that she is still out of the vanilla syrup that the backroom person promised to bring 20 minutes earlier. At this point, the barista thinks the cashier is being overly critical (questioning his benevolence) and that the backroom person is not reliable (questioning her integrity). Meanwhile, the cashier is annoyed at the barista's error (questioning her competence) and no longer wants to work the same shifts because she makes him look bad. One can see how quickly trust can be violated. In a matter of a few short minutes, trust was lost—and it can be difficult to regain.

Team Identity

Team identity is Druskat and Wolff's (2001) second element necessary for team success. Teams that spend enough time together eventually develop a unique identity. When individuals derive their own identity in part from their team affiliation, they become invested in, loyal, and committed to it. Teams develop norms, values, and characteristics that separate them from other teams, and these characteristics can be the difference between an average team performance and a stellar performance.

Alternative Spring Break (ASB) teams are a good example of how team identity can produce superior results. Service organizations such as ASB, Teach for America, or Boys & Girls Clubs are known for their commitment to the common good and enlist members who are aligned with those goals. Their training programs seek to build a sense of camaraderie and unity among their team members that can stand up to the adverse circumstances they will likely encounter together. In the opening case study, the ASB team that went to Detroit dubbed itself the "all-star site." This demonstrated the members' belief that they were both special and unique. This clear sense of identity was one of the reasons the team was so successful.

Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy concludes the shortlist of the most vital elements leading to team success. We know that optimism and self-confidence can go a long way in enhancing personal achievement. Teams are no different. In order for teams to be most successful, they need to believe they can accomplish their goals (Porter, Gogus, & Yu, 2011). Visit the locker room of any high school football team and you will be inundated with messages of "We Can,"

"Believe," "No Limits," and the like. When members are confident that they can accomplish ambitious goals, their chances of success are much greater (Katz-Navon & Erez, 2005). There exists no shortage of examples of small groups of people accomplishing amazing feats simply because they believed they could.

IDEAL TEAM CLIMATE

Teams are often created and assembled to solve important problems within communities and organizations. For example, a marketing team might be asked to improve annual sales by 10 %, a school improvement task force might be asked to identify strategies to reduce student absenteeism by 5 %, or a product design group might be tasked with the responsibility of creating a new potato chip bag that will keep chips fresher longer. In each of these cases, team members must "think outside the box" to solve the problem presented to them. Anderson and West (1998) have found four team characteristics that lead to innovation and effective performance. The ideal team climate includes a shared vision, participative safety, task orientation, and support for innovation.

Shared vision describes the importance of developing clear, objective goals that are visionary in nature but also attainable. A shared vision can be dictated by the de facto leader of the group, or it can emerge organically through a collaborative process. Whatever the case, the group ultimately needs to agree upon the purpose of members' collective efforts. Members need to know the answers to questions such as "Where are we headed?," "What are we doing?," and "What are our goals?" Often, the leader can jump-start this process by asking those very questions. Some of the most successful groups begin their work with the question "What do we want to accomplish with this team?" The ensuing conversation invariably covers topics such as goals, benchmarks, balance of responsibility, commitment level, and other similar logistical concerns. A clear vision within the team is essential in order to produce and sustain long-term results.

Participative safety exists when levels of trust and support are such that members feel safe participating freely in group discussions and decisions (Kessel, Dratzer, & Schultz, 2012). This can be established with as little effort as setting ground rules and holding members accountable to those rules. As with shared vision, participative safety is something that the group can facilitate by establishing explicit rules of engagement and expectations for participation during meetings. For example, is everyone expected to "participate fully"? If so, what does that mean? If it's something that everyone understands, this will allow all group members to refer to that "ground rule" to encourage contributions *and* to discourage negative dynamics like condescending or judgmental behavior that hinder the willingness of other team members to offer ideas, voice dissent, or contribute to the shared process.

A task orientation is achieved when teams uphold their commitment to high performance standards by monitoring performance, holding one another accountable, giving one another honest feedback, and engaging in constructive conflict in order to reach their goals. As with other dimensions of successful teams, it is helpful to have an open discussion about this and lay out expectations. Structure is the product of intentional and earnest conversation about the things that matter most to members with regard to the *task* at hand. Leaders should be willing to discuss it in concrete and specific terms. They can begin by

saying something like, "I think it will be important for us to have some shared expectations about our group and the work we do. I know we all have our own ways of doing work, so can we take a few minutes to talk about how we work best in teams, giving special attention to how we can stay on task and accomplish our goals." It may be particularly helpful to have an agenda for each meeting and to have someone take minutes in order to record major decisions, action items, and assigned responsibilities.

Groups that have strong support for innovation are open to examining existing ways of doing things and are willing to take risks and experiment with new ideas. Innovation often means change, and change can create anxiety. Teams that support innovation are willing to endure the discomfort of thinking "outside the box" in order to explore new ways of understanding problems and creating solutions. These types of teams also give great latitude to creative members who at first might seem totally off base, but who often see things in very different ways.

Research and development (R&D) teams are often called upon to create new and innovative products and services. The amount of time it takes to design a new product or concept can be the difference between success and failure in a fast-paced, market-driven economy. In a study of 33 R&D teams over a nine-month period, Pirola-Merlo (2010) found that three of the four team climate scales (participative safety, support for innovation, and task orientation) were significantly related to project performance as rated by managers and customers. In addition, two of the scales (support for innovation and vision) were associated with higher levels of project innovation. Those teams with a stronger climate were also able to complete their projects more quickly.

Not only does team climate affect innovation and efficiency, it also influences levels of member satisfaction and general team performance. In a study of 654 general practitioners and staff and 7,505 chronically ill patients from 93 primary health care practices in Australia, researchers found that a strong team climate is related to higher levels of job satisfaction as well as higher levels of patient satisfaction (Proudfoot, Jayasinghe, Holton, Grimm, Bubner, Amoroso, Beilby, & Harris, 2007). An optimal team climate creates both the structure and interpersonal dynamics that can lead to success. But it often takes time and intentional effort to develop that type of atmosphere. It doesn't happen by accident, and it doesn't happen overnight. But an understanding of the typical stages of group development can help team leaders shape the direction and destiny of their teams.

STAGES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Groups are dynamic social systems that change over time; the first few meetings of a newly formed group are substantially different from the twentieth meeting (Arrow, Poole, Henry, Wheelan, & Moreland, 2004). Group development models attempt to explain these differences and identify typical stages through which groups evolve. Knowledge of these stages can help leaders and members alike to understand the changes and manage expectations. Bruce Tuckman (1965) was the first to suggest the stages of development known as forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Sometime later, Susan Wheelan (1999) constructed a similar linear model that includes many of the same concepts.

During the first few meetings, while the group is in the forming stage of its development, members are sizing one another up while self-consciously assessing their own competence. At this stage, members are typically concerned with acceptance and belonging. They have an over-reliance on the leader and are generally cautious and tentative due to both a lack of role clarity and an understanding of the rules of operation (norms). Coincidentally, when existing groups add new members or change the composition of the group, they will often return to the forming stage as the existing members and the new members size one another up. New members can provide a fresh perspective that encourages an examination of the existing team structure that propels the group into the next stage of development.

Storming is the stage of group life characterized by members becoming increasingly impatient with the existing structure and directly or indirectly challenging the leaders of the group. Because there is rarely one right way to solve problems or achieve goals, it is nearly impossible for everyone in the group to be completely happy with decisions and plans.

Disagreement over procedures, role assignments, and any number of details related to group life are inevitable, and as the newness of the group wears off, members become bolder in questioning and challenging one another. "Individual" roles emerge at this time as members take a passive, passive-aggressive, or aggressive stance against the group (avoider, resister, and dominator roles, respectively). Groups will often become polarized as members form coalitions and alliances with one another as they jockey for status and power (Carton & Cummings, 2012). Although uncomfortable for some, this stage is necessary for optimal cohesion and group functioning.

The norming stage is an attempt by the group to restore stability and cohesion after the storm and to develop a more effective structure toward achieving goals. Having gone through conflict, the group has tested its boundaries and (hopefully) developed trust. At this stage, groups not only become more unified, but also better organized. Relationships deepen at the same time that task efficiency increases. During this stage, the storming period has officially given way to a renewed commitment to the goals and purpose of the group, resulting in an examination and redefinition of norms, roles, and relationships.

In the performing stage the group's focus is on getting work done. Relationships and cohesion have been built, optimal strategies have been constructed, and the underlying group structure has solidified. The group is now positioned for maximum productivity. During this stage, effective groups spend 80% to 85% of their time on task completion (Wheelan, 1999; Wheelan, Davidson, & Tilin, 2003). In terms of time frame, Wheelan (2004) suggests it takes approximately six months for a group to get to this level of functioning. Unfortunately, not all groups make it to this productive stage. Many groups remain stuck in one of the earlier stages.

In the adjourning stage of group development, groups are preparing to disband. The group is coming to an end and members need to prepare for its demise. For some this is a joyful event, but for others there may be disappointment or even sadness. Some group experiences are so positive and so powerful that members do not want them to come to an end. In either case, it is important for members to discuss what they have learned from the experience and to say their goodbyes to one another.

OTHER MODELS OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Not all experts agree with the stage model of group development. In Connie Gersick's (1988, 1989) research on team development, she found that by the end of the first meeting, groups had formed an initial structure that remained fairly stable until the middle of the project or life of the group. At that midpoint, Gersick observed a burst of energy and transition whereby members critically examined their progress and reorganized themselves for more effective functioning. Interestingly, whether the groups she studied met four times or twenty-five times over seven days or six months, they all had a major transition at the chronological midpoint of the project. As a result of her studies, Gersick postulated that groups do not progress through stages of development, but phases.

According to her phase theory, the first phase is defined by the stable structure that is established by the end of the first meeting. Thus, the first meeting is extremely important in setting the climate, culture, and direction of the group. Then, at the midpoint, the group goes through a period of instability and transition before entering phase two, with the newly defined structure that will guide the project through to the end. Gersick also noted a flurry of activity and effort toward the end of the project as the deadline approached.

Research partially supports both the Tuckman and Wheelan models and the Gersick model (Chang, Bordia, & Duck, 2003). One way to reconcile them is to use the Tuckman and Wheelan models to describe the relationship dimension of group work while the Gersick model is more aligned with the task dimension. These dimensions of group dynamics (task and relationship) are the two primary components of group dynamics that require the attention of group members and leaders alike. The forming and storming stages often set the relational tone for the later, more task-oriented stages of norming and performing. Both dimensions are important for long-term group success.

Table 1.1   Comparing Models of Group Development

Tuckman (1965)	Wheelan (1999)	Gersick (1988)
Forming	Dependency and inclusion	Phase 1 (stability)
Storming	Counterdependency and fight	Transition (instability)
Norming	Trust and structure	
Performing	Work and productivity	Phase 2 (stability)

THREATS TO EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Collaboration is the ability of team members to work together effectively, efficiently, and meaningfully. Thompson (2004) asserts, "When groups perform highly uncertain tasks, they

need to integrate large amounts of information, form multiple perspectives, and collaborate closely. In such situations, collaboration is necessary" (p. 238). Yet only about a quarter of all teams progress through the normal stages of group development and reach their full potential (Wheelan, 1999). There are numerous threats to effective collaboration, including the size of the team, the degree of virtual participation, the amount of diversity, and the education level of the members (Gratton & Erickson, 2007). Each of these threats will be discussed in detail.

Size of the Team

In the last few decades, teams in organizations have become significantly larger in size (Gratton & Erickson, 2007). Technology has made it easier to include geographically remote members with presumably greater levels of expertise. Yet as teams grow in size, it becomes harder and harder for members to coordinate their efforts (Walsh & Maloney, 2007). Due to process losses and logistical challenges, large teams can be inefficient and, therefore, less effective. Furthermore, interaction among members is often more superficial, and thus less meaningful. Working closely with others to achieve mutual goals is often one of the most rewarding dimensions of team participation, but one that teams that are large and dispersed often lose.

Degree of Virtual Participation

As teams become more "virtual," the quality of collaboration decreases (Gratton & Erickson, 2007). Because the communication process relies heavily on nonverbal cues to interpret verbal statements, electronic messages can be ambiguous at best and grossly misunderstood at worst. Virtual teams have been studied at length, and while there are many benefits, there are drawbacks as well. In order to minimize potential misunderstanding and miscommunication, team leaders have to implement specific strategies that support collaboration in a technology-rich environment.

Amount of Diversity

Similar to technology, diversity can be both a benefit and a threat to collaboration. Differences of opinion and perspective can create innovative and fresh ways to understand and solve problems, but they can also generate distrust and frustration. For example, a university task force that is charged with addressing the role of the Greek system on campus would probably include members from the administration, faculty, and student body. However, such a task force would likely begin with some tension as each group sought to understand the motives and positions of the other stakeholders. Though diverse perspectives are important to the overall discussion, groups might regard one another with suspicion. Theoretically, a diverse team composition creates a more comprehensive approach to problem-solving, yet, in practice, diversity can put a strain on interpersonal dynamics and the ability to collaborate. Diversity can be found in any number of member differences, including personality, gender, age, race/ethnicity, functionality, education level, or length of tenure within the organization or industry.

Education Level

Interestingly, level of education is negatively correlated with group collaboration. According to Gratton and Erickson (2007), "the greater the proportion of highly educated specialists on a team, the more likely the team is to disintegrate into unproductive conflicts" (p. 5). Members who are very knowledgeable and highly trained tend to be resistant to perspectives and ways of doing things other than their own. Simply put, they have a hard time compromising. It is no wonder that academic departments that aspire to the highest ideals of virtue and learning can become mired in endless squabbles over relatively insignificant decisions. True collaboration requires an openness and willingness to understand and agree with other perspectives. The following section will describe specific strategies to increase team collaboration.

IMPROVING COLLABORATION

Team researchers have identified a number of things that can be done to overcome the inherent challenges in teamwork and increase the chances for effective collaboration. Specifically, team composition, meeting space, and leadership practices can all contribute to the conditions conducive for success (Gratton & Erickson, 2007).

Team Composition

New teams that are comprised of members who have successfully worked together in the past are at a distinct advantage as they have a history of trust and interpersonal strengths from which to draw, whereas team members without any history must go through the typical posturing and interpersonal jockeying that take place at the start of a new team. Thus, when possible, designing teams in which 20% or more of the members have successfully worked together in the past can help establish a strong foundation of collaboration (Gratton, 2007). The opposite is also true. People who have had negative experiences working together in the past may not be a good fit for a new team. While a small amount of interpersonal tension can be helpful, too much can engender negative emotional contagion that can sabotage trust and good will.

Meeting Space

The physical or virtual setting where meetings take place can also have a significant impact on collaboration. The setting should reflect the values of the organization and the goals of the team, and it should be conducive to effective and balanced communication. Rooms that are inviting and conducive to allow members to see and hear one another are obviously the most effective. Thus, consideration should be given to seating arrangements and the layout of the room. A study group that meets in a classroom would feel very different from a group meeting in a dorm room. Each setting has its relative strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, eating a meal together, or simply sharing snacks or soft drinks, may increase the sense of community and cohesion.

Leadership Practices

Team leaders impact team collaboration through the behaviors and attitudes they model, by publicly acknowledging collaborative behavior, by coaching individual members, and by focusing on both task and relationship dimensions of the team. Modeling is a powerful communicator of team norms and values. Thus, what a team leader does is often more important than what he or she says. Leaders that model collaborative behavior are setting the standard for the rest of the group (Ibarra & Hansen, 2011). For example, a leader who is transparent about personal goals and willing to admit mistakes opens the door for others to do the same. In a similar way, when a leader responds nondefensively to a direct challenge or personal attack, he or she increases the team's capacity for collaboration.

In addition to modeling collaborative behavior, team leaders can reward it publicly and coach members on it personally. Acknowledging a member who went above and beyond the call of duty for the sake of the team reinforces collaborative behavior. When leaders "encourage the heart," both the recipient of the comment as well as the rest of the team are reminded of the importance of ideal team behavior. Members who are not aware of their own behavior may need personal feedback and coaching. Effective leaders regularly pull individual members aside to facilitate conversations on how they view their own level of collaboration and team behavior.

TRENDS IN TEAM RESEARCH

Technological advances and trends in globalization are radically changing the ways individuals participate in teams (Wageman, Gardner, & Mortensen, 2012). Technology and globalization have increased both the scope and practice of our work with others. While it is unfathomable to think of a world without e-mail, social networking, and the Internet, these technologies have only been used by a majority of the workforce since the mid-1990s. For example, the popular social networking platform Facebook was only launched in early 2004. In just a few short years, it has revolutionized the ways in which individuals connect with one another. So are Facebook groups that are created to address social problems or discuss political issues actual teams? When some computer programmers voluntarily work together to develop the next release of an open source operating system, are they part of a team? When people join a virtual support group to help one another find medical solutions to diseases from which they all suffer, are they operating as a team? While these groups may not fit the standard definition of a team, they certainly have many characteristics of a team, including shared commitment to a common goal.

Teams in the 21st century are not as stable or bounded as they have been in the past. In contemporary social settings, people float in and out of teams, move quickly among teams, and are part of multiple teams (O'Leary, Mortensen, & Woolley, 2011). Technology has made it easy to be involved in multiple projects at the same time. Since formal team membership is a more loosely understood construct in today's world, researchers are just beginning to explore how to capture the complexities of multiple team membership and its effect on interpersonal dynamics and team performance.

Another trend in team research has been to reexamine the way we understand the concept of interdependence. Once again, technology has allowed us to contribute to collective tasks in novel and creative ways. The person who takes our order at the drive-thru menu of a fast food restaurant may actually be located many miles from the pickup window and may be taking orders from multiple stores at once (Friedman, 2006). This certainly challenges the way we have traditionally understood collaborative work teams. Contemporary team structures are more elusive, dynamic, and difficult to measure. Teams themselves have greater levels of autonomy than in the past to define their own goals and operating procedures. Thus, researchers are concluding that not only is team membership dynamic, so is the way people work together to define and accomplish shared tasks (Wageman, Gardner, & Mortensen, 2012).

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Effective team leaders pay attention to both the task and relational dimensions of teams. Clear roles, responsibilities, deadlines, and accountability can go a long way in accomplishing tasks and achieving goals. But on the relational dimension, members must learn to trust one another and create a sense of community in order to work together effectively. The best leaders are able to address both dimensions directly.

First of all, teams must have a clear vision of what they are trying to accomplish. A team mission, charter, or project statement can give a clear vision of the purpose of the group. Then, leaders must coordinate the work of the team to accomplish those goals. For example, a team leader might begin a meeting by asking members to give a status update on their individual tasks. At the end of the meeting, he or she might ask whether or not everyone knows exactly what they need to accomplish before the next meeting. Action plans, deadlines, and meeting agendas help keep teams focused and on task.

On the relational dimension, team members want to feel like they are appreciated and valued. They want to feel connected to the team on some level. This is where team-building activities come into play. It can be hard to trust others when you do not know them. So at the beginning of a new group, it makes sense to do an icebreaker or two to allow members to get to know one another. In addition, leaders can create a positive atmosphere by being enthusiastic about the team and by supporting team members both publicly and privately. When this happens, the group is well on its way to becoming a high-performing team.

KEY TERMS

Lack of commitment   5
Losses in productivity   5
Poor communication   5
Interpersonal conflict   5
Poor leadership   6
Shared vision   8
Participative safety   8

Task orientation   8
Support for innovation   9
Forming stage of development   10
Storming stage of development   10
Norming stage of group development   10
Performing stage of development   10
Adjourning stage of development   10

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Hackman identifies five basic conditions that distinguish a team from a workgroup. Name and describe each condition.

2. Although teams have great potential to accomplish tasks effectively, there is an array of common problems that can hinder performance. Describe three of those common problems.

3. Druskat and Wolff (2001) state that there are three conditions that are essential to a team's success. Name and explain the importance of each condition.

4. Levels of trust are strongly related to team success. Identify individual qualities that are related to trustworthiness.

5. Explain why each the following characteristics of team climate can impact team success: shared vision, task orientation, open communication, support for innovation, and interaction frequency.

6. Describe Tuckman's five stages of group development. Provide an example of each.

7. Name and describe the four threats to collaboration. What can be done in order to increase collaboration? Give at least two examples.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

EXERCISE 1.1 PAST TEAM EXPERIENCES

Get into groups of four to five and describe the positive experiences you have had in groups and/or teams in the past:

- What made the team exceptional?

- What was the shared goal of the group or team?

- Were members committed to the team? How do you know?

- Describe your past experiences with unsuccessful teams. What made them frustrating? Why did they fail? What was lacking in the leadership of the team?

Create a list of the top three reasons teams succeed and a list of the top three reasons teams fail. Be prepared to share your list with the rest of the class.

EXERCISE 1.2 BUILDING TRUST

Trust is an important component of relationships. Form groups of three or four and discuss the following questions:

1. What is trust?
2. Can you describe a trusting relationship in your life?
3. What does it take to form trust/a trusting relationship?
4. How do trusting relationships differ from relationships that may lack trust?
5. What ground rules and team guidelines will help build trust?

Be prepared to present your ground rules to the rest of the class. After all the groups have shared, you will have a final opportunity to add additional items to your list of ground rules.

CASE 1.2 WORKING WITH THE LONE WOLF

You have just finished a summer-long stint with your family's business, an office products supplier. The company generates about $3 million of revenue per year and employs 27 people. Employees are organized in three primary teams: sales and marketing, warehouse operations and distribution, and the executive team. Your mother, the CEO, has brought you on for the summer so you can rotate through each team to get a first-hand look at how the company operates.

You spent the first month with the warehouse team, sweating in the June heat with warehouse workers and delivery people. In spite of the backbreaking work, this crew proved to be a tight, strong community that ate lunch together, spent breaks playing basketball on the temporary hoop behind in the back parking lot, and often grabbed a beer together after work. Though they didn't immediately trust you as "the owner's kid," you worked hard to prove your worth through hard work and a minimal amount of complaining.

The second month, you went out with the sales team. Rick, your mentor for the month, referred to himself as "the lone wolf." He has been the top salesperson for the last two years and is vocal about his financial success and the value he brings to the company. Rick confides in you that he thinks other salespeople are jealous of his success and are actively trying to steal his customers. At the weekly sales team meetings,

you notice a lot of competitive jabbing among sales representatives. There are also a lot of complaints about the commission structure and criticism of the "lazy warehouse workers" who drag their feet and take too long to process orders.

By August, you moved inside the main office with the executive team. The executive team is made up of middle-aged, highly educated professionals who are the highest-paid people in the company. You often hear them complain about the "lack of effort" they see from the salespeople and the hourly employees. Lately, company executives have appeared frazzled and stressed out due to what they describe as "shrinking profits." At executive meetings nobody seems to know what to do to turn the company around. There appears to be a growing sense of pessimism about whether or not the company is going to make it.

By the end of the summer, you have experienced three different teams with three distinct cultures operating within the organization.

Describe and assess each of the teams according to the following:

- The problems each team is experiencing

- The conditions for team success they may or may not be experiencing

- Whether or not they have the characteristics associated with the ideal team climate.