

Teamwork

A team is more than just a group with a common aim. It is a group in which the contributions of individuals are seen as complementary.

Collaboration, working together is the keynote of a team activity.

(Adair, 1986)

Teamwork can also be defined as: The process of working collaboratively with a group of people, in order to achieve a goal [1].

Introduction

There are various points in our lives where we will be expected to be part of a team, whether it is a sports team, a team in a working environment or for groupwork in education. For a team to be successful, each team member must possess certain skills, which include:

- Communication – face to face, meetings, e-mail, telephone calls/ messages.
- Time Management – deadlines, planning, milestones etc.
- Compromise – roles adopted, getting along, giving and receiving criticism.
- Focus and commitment – demanding in time, effort, agreed goals and targets.

Research also suggests that there are many distinct team personalities and that each person has a 'natural' team role. However, if the team is small then a person may be asked to take on multiple roles or to switch between different roles.

In the 1970s, Dr Meredith Belbin set about observing teams, with a view to finding out where and how these differences come about. They wanted to control the dynamics of teams to discover if – and how – problems could be pre-empted and avoided. As the research progressed, the research revealed that the difference between success and failure for a team was not dependent on factors such as intellect, but more on behaviour. The research team began to identify separate clusters of behaviour, each of which formed distinct team contributions or "Team Roles" [2].

As the research progressed, it was revealed that the difference between success and failure for a team was not dependent on factors such as intellect, but more on behaviour. A Team Role came to be defined as:

"A tendency to behave, contribute and interrelate with others in a particular way."

It was found that different individuals displayed different Team Roles to varying degrees. Overall, nine different team roles were discovered:

- The Plant – highly creative and good at solving problems in unconventional ways.
- The Monitor Evaluator – needed to provide a logical eye, make impartial judgements where required and weigh up the team's options in a dispassionate way.
- Co-ordinators – needed to focus on the team's objectives, draw out team members and delegate work appropriately.
- Implementers – needed to plan a practical, workable strategy and carry it out as efficiently as possible.
- Completer Finishers – were most effectively used at the end of the task to 'polish' and scrutinise the work for errors, subjecting it to the highest standards of quality control.
- Teamworkers – helped the team to gel, using their versatility to identify the work required and complete it on behalf of the team.
- Shapers – provide the necessary drive to ensure that the team keep moving and do not lose focus or momentum.

It was only after research was complete that the ninth role emerged. This was the 'Specialist', an individual with in depth knowledge of a key area [2].

All of these roles are essential to make a team work and achieve the set goal. However, the key is balance, elimination of one of these roles or too many of one role will result in the team failing to work, and the possibility of conflict arising.

Working Individually V Teamwork

There are both advantages and disadvantages to working as a team. When you work individually, you can work at your own pace and to your own schedule and your work is recognised as your own. You don't have to rely on others to get things done and you also know that you are responsible for your own work only. However, tasks can be more time consuming.

When working as part of a team, you have the opportunity to share the workload, ideas and suggestions, making the task appear simpler. Team members can share strengths to compensate for weaknesses, which helps with motivation and overall better quality of work. However, this is not always the case. As with any team, each person has to put in the same amount of effort and produce 'quality' work. Should one person not contribute as much as others then this inevitably causes conflict within the team. Other members will start to resent that person and could result in them being alienated from the group. Good communication is therefore essential to ensure any problems or grievances are aired sooner rather than later.

There are various factors that lead to conflict. These include:

- Poor communication
- Unclear goals
- Being convinced that there is only one way to do something
- Assuming you know the other person's point of view
- Unequal ability or participation in resolving the issue.
- Communication styles
- Personality

To keep control of conflict within the group, all team members should:

- Set goals together before starting
- Maintain two – way communication
- Recognise individual learning styles
- Listen to and acknowledge each person's ideas
- Recognise their own strengths and weaknesses
- Try to see the other person's point of view.

It is also important to empathise with different situations and personalities. If there is a weaker member of the team then they should be given every opportunity to improve and help should be given where needed. This also leads onto differences in standards of performance. Some weaker member of the team will hand in work which is not up to the standard expected. Constructive feedback should then be given to ensure they understand what is required and the areas they need to improve on.

It is always beneficial to nominate a team leader. All teams need a good leader who can articulate goals and give direction. A good team leader will make sure everyone knows their responsibilities and understands their importance. They will communicate importance and balance workloads and give each team member equal opportunity and time to complete work. They will also routinely check progress, knowing the team's strengths and weaknesses and allow time for the team to meet to discuss issues as a group, keeping everyone in tune with common goals, problems and the team's general progress. However, the team can tend to become over reliant on the team leader and some members could start to become 'lazy', allowing others to complete most of the work. Difficulties can also arise when the team encounter a self nominated leader and personality clashes can develop as a result.

Conclusion

For a team to work there has to be an equal amount of commitment and quality of work. Each team member should take on a role and commit to that role and the goals set at the start of the task. As mentioned above, any grievances should be aired as soon as possible, as

if they are left then this could result in a complete breakdown of communication and therefore failure to complete the set task. Team work can be enjoyable, motivating and can develop social skills in individuals but only if each member is fair and keen to work together. Some individuals struggle to work as part of a team and simply do not possess the relevant skills or behaviours that are necessary. Teamwork is something that sometimes needs to be taught. It means developing a disciplined work environment where the participants must conform to a specific set of rules. Inevitably, it means breaking some work habits and creating new ones [3].

References

- 1 – “Teamwork Definition”, *BusinessDirectory.com*, 2010 [Online] Available: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/teamwork.html>. [Accessed: May 4th, 2010]
- 2 – “Team Role Theory”, *Belbin Home*, 2007 – 2010 [Online]. Available: <http://www.belbin.com/rte.asp?id=8>. [Accessed: May 4th, 2010]
- 3 – “Individualism Vs Teamwork”, *Toolbox for IT*, Dec 2006 [Online]. Available: <http://it.toolbox.com/blogs/irm-blog/individualism-vs-teamwork-9841>. [Accessed: April 28th, 2010]

Bibliography

- Belbin Home, *Team Role Theory* (2007 - 2010). [Online]. Available: <http://www.belbin.com/rte.asp?id=8>.
- Business Directory.com, *Teamwork Definition* (2010). [Online]. Available: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/teamwork.html>.
- Toolbox for IT, *Individualism Vs Teamwork* (Dec 2006). [Online]. Available: <http://it.toolbox.com/blogs/irm-blog/individualism-vs-teamwork-9841>.