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Cwrs Astudio: : **BMPD5000 Developing Professional Practice in Human Resources**

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CHAPTER 8

Effective Team-building and Communication

GILLIAN WATSON

OVERVIEW

Teamwork is a common feature of contemporary organisations and it is critical for today's and tomorrow's managers to understand how they form and perform and how they can be led effectively. This chapter discusses the key theories of building, managing and working in teams, with a particular focus on team roles and the behaviours and skills of individual team members. It also considers the need for communication and giving feedback in a team context. This chapter ends with a discussion of conflict in teams, including the emergence of conflict and different ways of handling it.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this chapter, provided you engage with the activities, you should be able to:

- identify various stages in group/team development
- evaluate a range of methods to aid team-building and development
- critically evaluate the worth of team role when compiling a team
- explain how a virtual team works and what leadership skills may be employed to manage such a team
- evaluate the need for interactive communication and feedback in teams
- understand the emergence of conflict in teams and how it can be managed.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Groups and teams are naturally occurring features in organisations as the notion of organisation itself implies that several individuals work towards a common goal. All members of a group, team or organisation bring in their personality, life stories and prior experiences, which often results in complex group, team or organisational dynamics. Ideally, these group dynamics lead to improved organisational performance (Jackson and Carter 2000). To achieve its maximum potential, a group or team is more than just a collection of individuals. A group or team is a collection of individuals in which there is *social interaction*, a relatively stable pattern of *relationships* and the sharing – and working towards – a *common goal*. In most instances, however, groups and teams are made up of

very diverse individuals – individuals of different age, gender, background (including nationality and culture) who have different knowledge, skills, views and agendas. While such diversity is undoubtedly the strength of groups and teams, it is also often the source of confusion, irritation and conflict (see also Chapter 1).

This chapter introduces you to the theory of working in groups and teams. We begin by distinguishing between groups and teams and examine what it means to work as part of a group or team. We then consider what needs to be done to build a team as well as the different roles that individuals take in teams. We also discuss how team role theory can be applied in practice to build and develop teams and introduce the notion of the virtual team. We end this chapter with a discussion of communication (including feedback) and with consideration of conflict in team situations.

8.2 WORKING IN GROUPS AND TEAMS

8.2.1 DISTINGUISHING GROUPS AND TEAMS

Groups and teams have long been common types of working in organisations. There is a number of theories on why humans tend to live and work with others, which Clegg et al (2005) summarise as enhancing the safety of individuals in evolutionary terms as well as the need to belong that the 'social animal' called human seems to have. From an organisational perspective, there are significant similarities between groups and teams; for instance, they comprise different members that ideally complement each other, they perform different tasks and roles, and they can contribute significantly to organisational effectiveness and efficiency. This may be the reason why the terms groups and teams are often used interchangeably. There are, however, significant differences between groups and teams, so let's consider both terms/concepts in detail.

8.2.2 WORKING IN GROUPS

Groups consist of a number of members who perceive themselves and recognise each other as being part of that group. In mutual interaction, group members define the boundaries of the group and the ground rules (Schein 1988). Group members contribute individually to the group's common goal, and the evaluation of their performance depends on their individual contributions. There are different types of groups. Formal groups, that is, groups that are intentionally created to achieve certain goals, can be permanent (for instance to head a department or unit) or temporary (such as committees and taskforces). The creation of formal groups often leads to the emergence of informal groups which are dynamic, inventive and can transform organisations into a living, functioning and goal-oriented entity and could therefore be harnessed by team leaders to support the attainment of organisational goals (Luthans 2005). Formal and informal groups are often regarded as distinctly separate entities, but all formal organisations tend to give rise to informal groupings that eventually resemble formal groups and refer to them as the emergent organisational structures (for example McKenna 1999). Informal groups can enhance the effectiveness of organisational structure, lighten managers' workload, fill gaps in managers' knowledge and skills, improve communication and provide a safe outlet for sharing thoughts and feelings.

ACTIVITY 8.1

Analysing informal vertical groups

Consider an informal vertical grouping in the workplace, with which you are familiar. Can you identify what characteristics form part of their bond? Also reflect upon an informal group of which you have been a member using the characteristics of power in informal groups. To what extent have they:

- enhanced the effectiveness of organisational structures?
- lightened the managers' workload?
- filled gaps in managers' knowledge and skills?
- improved communication?
- provided a safe outlet for emotions?

Have you been aware of any of these processes taking place? Does our work environment and culture support any of these working practices? Compare and contrast those elements you believe are working and those that are not. Why might this be the case?

Individuals take on specific roles in groups, and Allcorn (1985) identified three types of such roles: group task roles, group maintenance roles and self-oriented roles. In more detail, group task roles focus on productivity and the development and achievement of organisational goals. Group task roles usually involve:

- *facilitating*: setting goals and procedures for problem-solving activities
- *seeking information*: initiating discussions, seeking ideas and viewpoints from others
- *disseminating information*: offering suggestions, information and own viewpoints
- *co-ordinating and monitoring of activities*
- *energising or motivating* the group to achieve higher levels of output.

Group maintenance roles, in contrast, focus on fostering open and positive relationships between group members. In this set of roles, group members act as:

- *encouragers* to create a friendly interpersonal atmosphere and encourage others
- *harmonisers* to mediate in conflict situations
- *gatekeepers* to keep information flowing and facilitate participation
- *standard-setters* to propose and negotiate standards for group members to adopt
- *observers and followers* can provide useful feedback, and willingly follow given direction.

Finally, self-oriented roles refer to each group member's individual needs and personal agendas, which can move the group on or have a negative impact on the group's cohesiveness. In particular:

- *Aggressors* can be excessively competitive, thus they are likely to devalue contributions from others.
- *Blockers* can be negative and resist agreed-on decisions.
- *Recognition-seekers* crave attention and work primarily to further their own position in and beyond the group.
- *Dominators* tend to control the group by means of flattery or giving orders.

Allcorn (1985) suggests that the categories are self-contained and mutually exclusive and that different group members take on a distinct role. However, while groups need to contain a balanced mix of all the three types of roles, it would be more realistic to conceive that each individual in a group possesses a combination of all three role types. For example, a facilitator may be at the same time an encourager and a recognition-seeker. This makes it difficult to objectively evaluate someone's role effectiveness. Moreover, group size is another key contributing factor to group performance. The relationship between group size and group performance is an inverted 'U' shape: as a group grows, so

does the level of performance. At some point, the critical mass of group effort exceeds the task needs. At this point, a phenomenon called 'social loafing' or 'self-limiting behaviours' comes into play, and individuals begin to withdraw by exerting less effort than they would if working alone (Clegg et al 2005).

Hogan et al (1994) observed a number of senior management teams during decision-making and identified a number of reasons for managers' self-limiting behaviours. They found that the presence of someone with more expertise was the major reason for managers' self-limiting behaviour (73 per cent), followed by a presentation of a compelling argument (62 per cent), lack of belief in their own ability (61 per cent) and unimportant and meaningless decisions (58 per cent). Almost half of the study participants gave in to team pressure to conform (46 per cent). While these results are somewhat outdated, we can safely assume that similar dynamics are in place today. Self-limiting behaviours or failure to participate in decision-making reduce the group member's ability to offer the kind of dynamic leadership that organisations need to succeed.

8.2.3 WORKING IN TEAMS

Teams can be defined as 'a group whose members have complementary skills and are committed to a common purpose or set of performance goals for which they hold themselves mutually accountable' (Greenberg and Baron 1997, p270). Hence, a team depends on both individual and team contributions, and its members take collective responsibility for the results. The notion of collective responsibility thus seems to be the key issue that qualitatively separates teams from groups, and team members enter into a psychological contract with each other that group members do not (Clegg et al 2005).

There have been major changes over the years in the way in which teams are being perceived, created and evaluated. The following four general types of teams have long been identified (Aranda et al 1998):

1. *Management teams* inspire and integrate the work of the organisations, such as creating a vision, refining the organisational culture and improving morale, carrying out major change initiatives and improving the organisation's image.
2. *Task teams* tend to be cross-functional teams (that is, their members come from different functional units within the organisation) that work on projects for a defined but often extended period of time.
3. *Work teams* are self-contained work units that are responsible for manufacturing a particular product or delivering a particular service.
4. *Parallel teams* work independently but in parallel to the organisational structure and focus on problem-solving or seeking organisational opportunities.

Teams have many advantages, but also many disadvantages, which are summarised in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1 Advantages and disadvantages of teamwork

Advantages	Disadvantages
Team decisions may deliver a wider choice of solutions.	Team meetings can be costly; it is a hidden cost although important enough to affect the organisation's effectiveness.
Team participation may lead to higher commitment and ownership of outcomes.	Pressures to conform may lead to premature decisions and result in poor leadership.
Team discussions increase feedback and can decrease timing in communication.	Personal agendas may lead to conflict and poor quality of outcomes.
Team membership is known to increase overall effort.	Extreme cause of cohesiveness may lead to 'groupthink'.

Source: drawing on Haynes 2008, Hall 1991 and Janis 1972

ACTIVITY 8.2

Reflecting on your experiences of teamwork

Analyse, using your own experiences, the points made in Table 8.1 regarding advantages and disadvantages of teamworking. Would your evaluation differ if your role in the team was that of a team member or a team leader? Discuss this with others – does their experience differ from yours?

Early research on team dynamics linked team cohesiveness with stability and higher productivity. Communication in cohesive teams was found to be more frequent and more satisfying, and team members were found to be more participative when they held similar values. Less cohesive groups experienced more difficulty in enforcing standards of behaviour amongst their members. The key factor influencing their productivity, however, was the teams' performance norms. Highly cohesive teams with high performance norms were found to be highly productive, and their performance levels dropped when they adopted lower performance norms. Highly cohesive teams with low performance norms were by far the poorest performers (Bartol and Martin 1991, Mullen and Cooper 1994). But what makes an effective team?

Traditionally, organisations have used productivity to measure both individual and team effectiveness, but there is increasing scepticism as to whether such measures remain appropriate in an uncertain and rapidly changing business environment. For instance, task teams need to be flexible, operate within shorter planning and production cycles and often with changing targets. In addition, it has been recognised that different organisational theories perceive and evaluate teams differently, even though competency in problem-solving, technical know-how and the maintenance of relationships within the group have been found to be widespread criteria to evaluate team performance.

Aranda et al (1998), for instance, identified three types of skills that enhance team productivity. These are team problem-solving skills, team interpersonal skills and task problem-solving skills. Table 8.2 summarises the tasks and outcomes associated with each of these skills.

Table 8.2 Skills and tasks that enhance team productivity

Skill	Tasks include	Outcomes
Team problem-solving	Identifying alternatives Making and justifying decisions Putting plans into practice	Critical thinking Creativity
Team interpersonal	Encourage communication between team members Consult team members in the decision-making process Analyse and synthesise information	Facilitating Supporting

Skill	Tasks include	Outcomes
Task problem-solving	Gathering, analysing and communicating data Prioritising	Analysing Synthesising Discovering

Source: drawing on Aranda et al 1998

Ideally, a team comprises individuals with a wide range of such skills to tap into each other's strengths and to achieve increasingly complex tasks in an increasingly uncertain work environment. Hence, team members should be selected on the basis not only of the skills that they already possess but also on their willingness and ability to learn new skills. This poses a challenge to managers and other organisational decision-makers who have traditionally selected team members based on position and proximity, that is, seniority, association or location. It is also common practice to use the same team over and over again, which results in the team taking the same or similar actions and arriving at the same or a similar outcome. This has far-reaching implications on organisations. Firstly, new organisational problems require fresh thinking that established teams are unlikely to create and, secondly, there is a reluctance to develop potential new team members that might bring in new knowledge, skills and ideas. It is therefore imperative that current and aspiring managers know how to build effective groups and teams, which is what we will discuss in the following section.

8.3 POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN BUILDING A TEAM

There is much written about team-building, possibly because teams infrequently perform as well as they might or up to their managers' expectations; therefore we constantly strive to find the factors that make a difference – always, it would seem, trying to redefine our community of practice in relation to building the perfect team. Some dynamics (Kruyt et al 2011) that could aid this practice are discussed in this section, which are: (1) acquire the appropriate associates, (2) ensure teams concentrate on their own work, and (3) be conscious of the team evolution and energy.

8.3.1 ACQUIRE THE APPROPRIATE ASSOCIATES

'Acquire the appropriate associates' may be an obvious sentiment. However, while it is probably the most neglected activity managers use to configure a team, for the most part it is a critical element that impinges on the team's performance. It is important that the department head takes the crucial decision in deciding what contribution to the organisation the team as a whole and each individual should make. Sharing the vision or team remit contributes to the synergy in aspirations and potential achievement the team can make.

8.3.2 CONCENTRATION ON THEIR OWN WORK

Teams need focus and, therefore, the team leader needs to be able to create the circumstances that help enforce the team parameters, their culture and work ethic. To ensure this happens, part of the team leader's role is to ensure that priorities are devised and met. This may include deciding on what tasks individuals embark upon, those that are collective activities, those that are monitored and activities that are to be curtailed. The aim here is to maintain focus and not have work that drags on too long or that takes the team away from their priorities, as this can render the team dysfunctional. Team associates need to be aware of their responsibilities – personal and collective – and have a relevant series of performance directives which are transparent and consistent.

8.3.3 EVOLUTION AND ENERGY

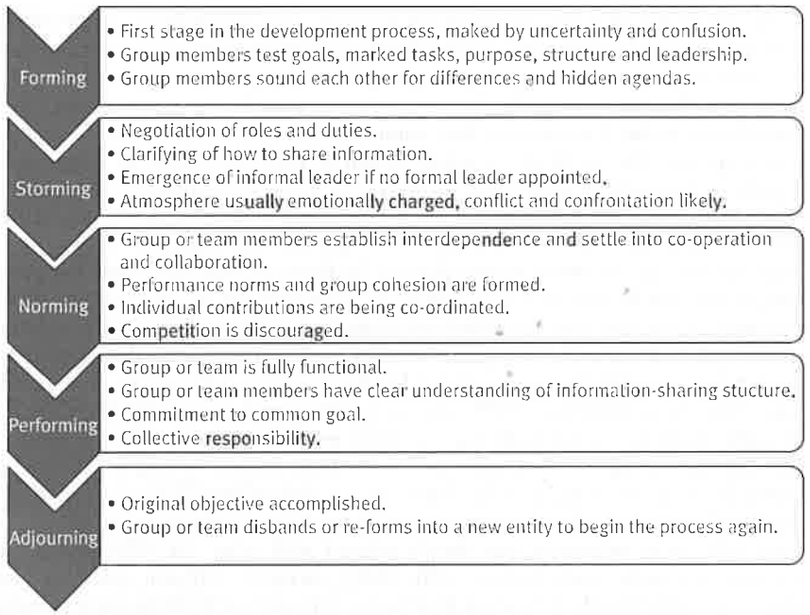
This area concerns how the team develops, how they work together, who works with whom, who collaborates well with others and who is recurrently absent, all adding to the team's overall dynamic and whether they function well together or whether there is incongruence. The team's ability to operate is linked to their energy and motivation, their ability to take ownership of events and their ability to collaborate and communicate. The team may therefore exhibit commitment to each other and the tasks at hand, engendering trust and a need to achieve as a team. Dysfunctional elements such as disagreements, deep-rooted interests, organisational politics and outside interference can all add to problems that could result in a lack of commitment and performance (see also Chapter 9).

Every team has distinctive elements and will have support systems and challenges which they must work out for themselves. Areas of development for a newly formed team may include learning to rely on or trust each other, and developing a workable culture and communication process. A nascent level of satisfaction and even pride in their work may help to bring a team together.

8.4 BUILDING GROUPS AND TEAMS

We have seen that organisations require teams that are fluid and functional, and that possess a mix of interpersonal, technical and problem-solving skills and the ability to form and re-form in order to respond to changing organisational needs. It has long been established that groups and teams go through different developmental stages that are relatively predictable. Probably one of the best-known models of group and team development is Tuckman's (1965) five-stage model of forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning.

Figure 8.1 Developmental stages of groups and teams



Source: drawing on Tuckman 1965, Quinn et al 2003

Tuckman's (1965) model demonstrates that the road to an effective group or team is bumpy. It is satisfying for individuals to know that they contribute to a group or team and achieve outcomes that they would not be able to achieve on their own. It is also desirable for organisations to have effective groups and teams that perform well and contribute to its success. However, it often seems that the ideal of effective groups and teams overshadows the difficulties and conflicts that groups and teams have on their journey to operating effectively. Current and aspiring managers must therefore have the necessary skill and understanding to facilitate the building of groups and teams to help them to achieve their potential. The team leader's role is paradoxical in that they have to demonstrate a strong personal vision while having to balance the task and group/team maintenance by allowing group or team members to lead and take responsibility themselves (Quinn et al 2003). Micromanaging and allowing some group or team members to shine at the expense of others can have detrimental effects on team productivity and cohesion.

ACTIVITY 8.3

Reflecting on your group or team

Consider a group or team of which you are a member, either at the workplace, at university or in your leisure. Reflect on your experiences as a member and determine if they tally with Tuckman's (1965) model. Can you identify a particular moment or event when your group or team moved from one stage to another? Were you aware of that happening? Can you think of any evidence to demonstrate this?

8.4.1 TEAM ROLES

After our discussion of group and team development, let us now focus on the different roles that team members take on. (We focus on teams rather than groups because teams have clearer roles and a more strategic approach to their creation rather than groups; however, this discussion may also be helpful when considering group issues.) When leading a team, we need to consider how teams are created or what types of behaviours may be required. The work of Meredith Belbin is important here, as a team-based management approach is constantly advocated in many contemporary organisations. Gunduz (2008) considers this to be the second industrial revolution and indicates that it may also be a milestone on the road to increased organisational productivity.

Organisations use whatever means possible at their disposal to ensure competitive advantage; in order to achieve this they need to be flexible and they need teams that are able to identify activities and associated resources (including people) to react quickly to environmental requirements. Therefore, a well-run, well-managed team should bring with it certain positive aspects that are acceptable to all members and fit into the organisation's strategic imperatives (Ozbilgin 2005). The team leader's task is to create the right team atmosphere, make-up of the team, team attitude and behaviour so that the team role concept (Benne and Sheats 1948, Bales and Slater 1955, Belbin 1981, 2007, Watson and Gallagher 2005) can work successfully. Therefore, a review of what Belbin's work offers to the team leader in order to build a team is relevant to contemporary practice.

Team role theory advocates that people interact with others in different ways and exhibit different behaviours. Belbin (1981, 2007) identifies different roles that team members take, which partly depend on their personality and partly on the team dynamics. These roles can be classified into three different sets of roles – task-related, team-related and individual- or thinking-related. Table 8.3 provides details about the different team roles Belbin's work distinguishes and the characteristics that individuals possess and display.

Table 8.3 Team roles

A) Task-related team roles		
Team role	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**
Shaper	Challenging, dynamic, goal-oriented, has drive and courage.	Prone to provocation, often offends people's feelings.
Implementer	Disciplined, organised, efficient, turns ideas into actions.	Somewhat inflexible, slow to respond to new possibilities.
Completer finisher	Accurate, conscientious, meticulously prevents error.	Inclined to worry unduly, reluctant to delegate.
B) The team- or social-related team roles		
Team role	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**
Resource investigator	Extrovert, enthusiastic, communicative, explores opportunities, develops contacts.	Over-optimistic, loses interest once initial enthusiasm has passed.
Co-ordinator	Calm, confident, clarifies goals, promotes participative decision-making.	Can be seen as manipulative, offloads personal work.
Teamworker	Co-operative, caring, diplomatic, sensitive, a good listener, averts friction.	Indecisive when faced with tough decisions.
C) The individual- or thinking-related team roles		
Team role	**Strengths**	**Weaknesses**
Plant	Creative, imaginative, unorthodox, solves difficult problems.	Ignores incidentals, too pre-occupied to communicate effectively.
Monitor evaluator	Logical, analytical discerning, judges accurately.	Lacks drive and ability to inspire others.
Specialist	Single-minded, motivated by the pursuit of knowledge.	Contributes on a narrow front, dwells on technicalities.

Source: drawing on Belbin Associates 2006 and Belbin 2007; printed with kind permission of Belbin Associates. For further information and access to updated material, please follow the links provided to www.belbin.com and www.belbin.info

Belbin (1981, 2007) makes many distinctions, for example: the need for different team roles being prevalent at various stages of the team's existence, that high-performance teams need a balance of team roles, that individuals show signs of behaviours in many of the roles and that an overall individual profile can be produced for each team member through team role tests. These tests seek to assist existing teams, help to form new teams and to be used as a recruitment or promotion tool. Belbin's team role tests assess dominance, intelligence, introversion/extroversion and anxiety/determination, and arguably we all have these attributes in our make-up in varying degrees. It is the combination of behaviours and attributes that are the key to determining the individual's place in the team and possibly how they are valued or whether they are 'engaged performers' (Stevens 2010) – ostensibly, whether an individual is motivated to want to feel they belong in the team. The leadership skill in these investigations is to achieve the best

fit for the work-related elements and the most attuned social combination. Again, this joining of people's attitudes and behaviour into a team can prove successful and is highly valued when the team engages and performs well.

8.4.2 THE TASK–TEAM–INDIVIDUAL MODEL

Figure 8.2 Task-team-individual model

Source: drawing on Adair 1986, Belbin Associates 2006, Belbin 2007; printed with kind permission of Belbin Associates. For further information and access to updated material, please follow the links provided to www.belbin.com and www.belbin.info

Adair's (1986) model enables us to see a more focused context in the differentiation between one role grouping and another:

- The 'task'/'action striving' grouping will use individuals from both the other grouping in the team to start or complete a task; this is a driving force that gives the team energy.
- The 'team' grouping focuses on the interrelationship within a team and socialisation that can be present in the team because of those 'team'/'socially relating' individuals within it.
- The 'individual'/'thinking' grouping, on the other hand, would contribute from what they view as a feeling of self-worth, which in itself emanates from their own particular way of thinking, cognitive style, attitude or specialist ability.

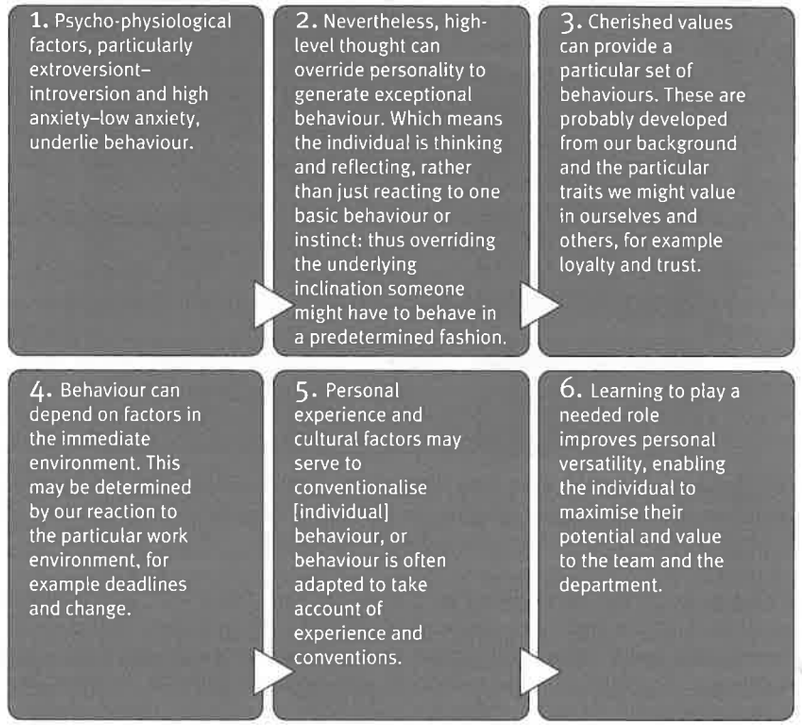
These attributes will enable them to accomplish tasks in their own way. Overall the characteristics of all the groupings contribute to the whole; in essence, there needs to be a balance of all the roles for the team itself to be successful. The way we interrelate with others in the team does concur with our tendency to behave in a certain way, principally because certain roles are prevalent in our team role profile. Team role tests offer the opportunity to the individual to assess their overall profile, and to review what are their most preferred as well as their least preferred roles in the team. Critically, identifying an individual's team role (Belbin 1996, 2007) enables us to:

- improve self-awareness and personal effectiveness
- foster mutual trust and understanding between work colleagues
- engage in team selection and team-building
- match people to jobs more effectively.

There is prevalence for contemporary organisations to use in-house trained Belbin assessors and consultants from private practice or higher educational institutions to conduct the Belbin analysis with their staff teams. An important point to note is that all Belbin-trained assessors/consultants will advocate the pitfalls of relying on self-reporting alone. Moreover, they would actively seek corroboration of the individual's behaviour from their colleagues so as to avoid the team role profile just becoming a self-fulfilling

exercise, open to faking and therefore somewhat unreliable, thereby acknowledging that self-perception can be skewed; for example, we may be unaware of how we are perceived by others. In amalgamating various sources of data collection, a normalising of the results occurs, enabling the Belbin group to assert that this test has validity and reliability. It is worth emphasising that the Belbin assessment itself is attempting to enable us to analyse behaviour rather than personality, as in a psychometric assessment – although our personality is part of our overall make-up and is a constituent part of our behaviours and attitudes (see also Chapter 5), which is elaborated upon in Figure 8.3.

Figure 8.3 Underlying factors to team role behaviour



Source: in Watson and Gallagher 2005

Developing a team is a quite complicated process. However, if conducted accurately, it will lead to the norming stage (Tuckman 1965) or a pattern of society within the team, what Belbin (1996, 2007) describes as 'a personality propensity, modified by the thought process, modified still further by personal values, governed by perceived constraints, influenced by experience and added to by sophisticated learning'.

ACTIVITY 8.4

Applying your team role profile

If you are fortunate enough to have a personal team role profile, reflect on the result. Try to establish what you and your team intend to do with it. How can it be used effectively? How can relevant personal development strategies be part of the overall outcome? How will you make the most of this knowledge, remembering that roles in your profile could be classified thus (for personal development purposes): least preferred, manageable, preferred (see Figure 8.4)?

Figure 8.4 Classification of team roles

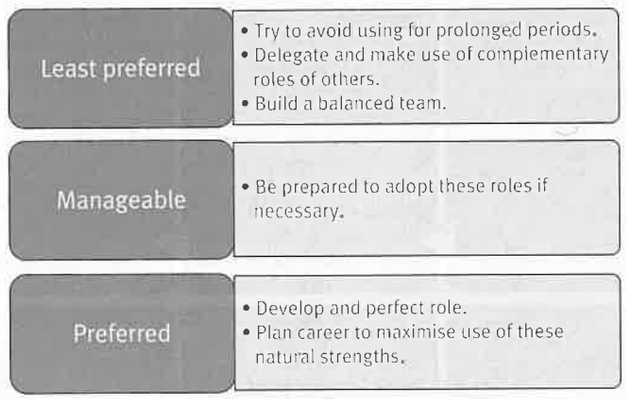


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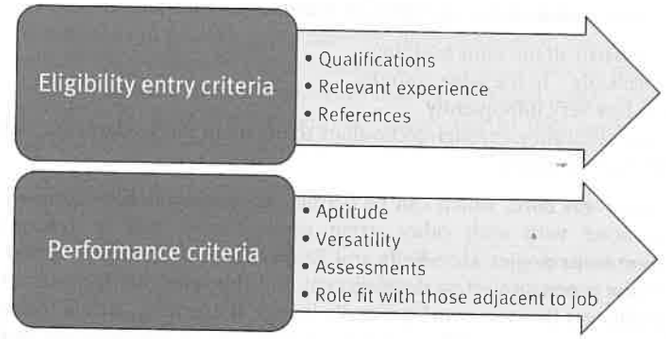
Figure 8.4 demonstrates that Belbin's team roles can play a significant part in evaluating personal development and career development choices. The point here is that awareness has been raised and therefore a three-tier decision-making process can exist regarding developmental decisions. The individual will need to make personal decisions, but the team, department and the organisation as a whole will need to make strategic decisions on how and why teamworking is of value to the organisation and how to utilise their talented individuals. This new awareness also enables the team leader and team members to discuss roles that are manageable, preferred and least preferred; for example, the individual has the choice of developing and maximising their strengths and enhancing areas that are least preferred. Indeed, it may serve to change a team member's job role in the team.

8.4.3 TEAM ROLE THEORY IN PRACTICE: MATCHING PEOPLE TO JOBS

Team role profiles can support recruitment and promotion decisions as the team leader has the option of recruiting the person that fits the demands of the job as well as having a relevant 'fit' within the team. While the conventional recruitment process considers the eligibility for a job linked to the relevant entry criteria, Belbin's work suggests that performance criteria and suitability of candidates should also be taken into account when recruiting, selecting or promoting candidates (see Figure 8.5).

Figure 8.5 Entry and performance criteria



Source: drawing on Belbin Associates 2006, Belbin 2007; printed with kind permission of Belbin Associates. For further information and access to updated material, please follow the links provided to www.belbin.com and www.belbin.info

There are several crucial elements to consider in selecting an appropriate candidate. At the beginning of the selection process, the manager defines the job or project and compiles a job requirement assessment. In addition, certain team members compile a job observation survey and a job suitability report, which then assesses whether a candidate is suitable for the job in question. When selecting a candidate for a particular project or role, managers and those in roles of responsibility must consider not only entry criteria such as skills, experience and qualifications, but also suitability criteria such as aptitude, temperament and behavioural tendencies, which Belbin's test assesses. In particular, entry criteria are vital in actually securing an interview and requisite qualification will always be an essential part of the recruitment process.

However, these criteria do not guarantee that the new recruit will be successful in the job and suitability criteria will reduce the 'leap of faith' present in any recruitment decision. Given that the assessment of suitability criteria has been developed through using observation of behaviour with data-reporting variables such as self and others, the 'suitable' candidate can emerge. Belbin (1996) confides that he would always want to make a case for backing a suitable candidate rather than an eligible one. His argument is that the candidate that hitherto may not have been deemed eligible can have their level of eligibility enhanced through executing a personal development plan, although, as always in today's organisations, the cost of this development would have to be worthwhile. Cannall (2009, p1) puts this as follows: 'Team selection is not an exact science … A mix of types is necessary, as is a mix of skills.'

To build a diverse balanced team, other more important considerations are worthy of note: there needs to be a flow of readily available candidates with the right prerequisites and the relevant diversity of talent and measure of team roles. Each person on the team would have their own reciprocal role, with a given purpose or terms of reference to achieve results; this would therefore be used to assemble the 'perfect' team.

8.5 VIRTUAL TEAMS

The concept of the 'virtual team' was created out of the Internet revolution and the transformation of many subsequent business practices, such as e-business, e-learning and the overall e-economy, which arguably forced businesses to put aside their time-honoured, erstwhile practices and look for a new way of dealing with the globalisation of their business (Townsend et al 1998). Technology companies in particular realised that

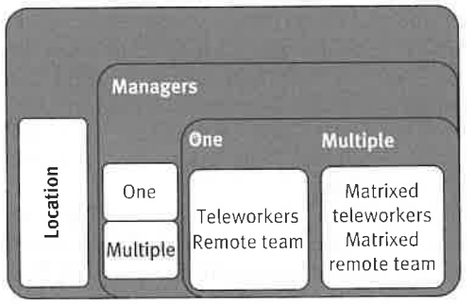
the way they communicated had to change. Therefore, the challenge was to harness the positive aspects of teamworking and translate it into a work team that:

- was not necessarily in the same building
- was not – probably – in the same country
- meet face to face very infrequently
- relies on communication through technology to maintain the fundamental nature or spirit of their co-operation.

The virtual team was born, which can be defined as 'geographically dispersed members who communicate with each other using some variant mix of information and communication technologies' (Lee-Kelly and Sankey 2008, p52). Often, virtual teams are created to realise a new project or development, but this does not diminish its worth or negate the challenges that teamwork generally brings. If anything, virtual teams are more complex than other, more traditional types of team due to geographical and temporal distance (Lipnack and Stamp 2000, Townsend et al 1998), 'boundary spanning, life cycle and member roles' (Bell and Kozlowski 2002). Cannall (2009, p1) suggests that the virtual team 'may need to communicate by telephone, e-mail and teleconferencing rather than face-to-face. Managing them is particularly difficult, not least because remote working can exacerbate misunderstanding.' Leadership skills can be the critical factor in managing a virtual team; therefore, we must investigate what the key issues are which can support success or condemn the team to failure. Technological processes are critical to the existence of a 'pure virtual team' (Arinson and Miller 2002) and fundamental to influencing how the team works. Therefore, the team leader in this instance relies on the organisation investing in the appropriate technology to support virtual teamworking.

Cascio and Shurygailo (2003) suggest there are four categories of virtual team: teleworkers, remote team, matrixed teleworkers and matrixed remote team, as defined in Figure 8.6. According to Cascio and Shurygailo (2003), a further other variable is time and shift-working; however, this will be salient to the particular organisation and therefore is not included here.

Figure 8.6 Forms of virtual teams



Source: drawing on Cascio and Shurygailo 2003

Organisations may create hybrid forms of virtual teamworking to suit their requirements. Agreement has not yet been reached about the skills involved in leading a virtual team. One view suggests that managers or leaders of a virtual team need have no particular leadership style (Cascio and Shurygailo 2003); the other view extols that any remote leader has little or no control over the virtual team (Kostner 1996, as cited in Lee-Kelly and Sankey 2008). This would suggest that the team's well-being and performance relies on the team for voluntary control and therefore its members need to be self-motivating and

to some extent self-managed individuals. In any case, leading a virtual team requires exceptional co-ordination and communication skills, and team leaders and those aspiring to become team leaders in future need to have self-determination in extending their skills.

Let us consider the leadership or co-ordination of virtual teams in more detail. The matrix in Table 8.4 shows practical approaches that the potential leader of a virtual team may need to adopt in their management technique and to take account of creating structure, culture and rules or plans by which the team will adhere.

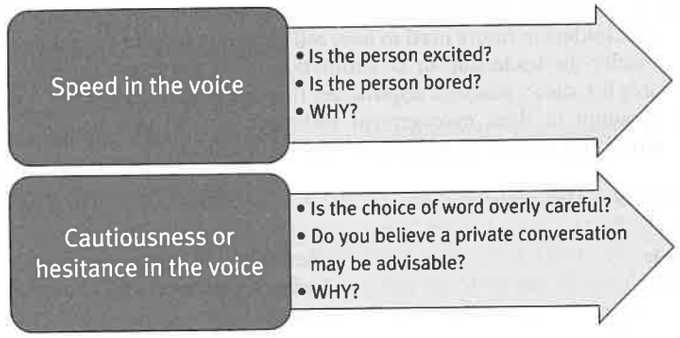
Table 8.4 Co-ordinating virtual teams

Shared goals	Clear roles and regular performance feedback are important and need to be explicit.
Standard operating systems	Clear timeframes for replying to communication media, and working in a congruent manner, for example how team meetings will operate.
Using appropriate technology	Telecommunications, Internet, email, groupware, Skype, video-conferencing, mobile phones, intranet.
Appropriate communication	Face to face when necessary, for conveying appropriate verbal and non-verbal information (Skype or web cam could be utilised here). Remember: email is relevant for simple tasks.
Building and maintaining interpersonal relationships	Team-building activities, possibly together at one venue – this is linked to training the workforce to work together, virtually. Also they need to learn how to work and interact in a cohesive and trustworthy manner and, importantly, to respect each other's cultural differences.
Selection	Ensure careful consideration is given to team-fit when selecting staff; also be clear about the skill level required in each area of the work, for example technical and interpersonal skills.
Maintaining levels of creativity	Motivate staff – ensure they have attainable goals.

Source: drawing on Axtell et al 2004, Watson and Gallagher 2005

A particularly neglected area of communication when managing virtually is listening, and Williamson (2009) advocates we should 'listen to silences'. She contends that we need to listen, with care, to every team member when they are on the telephone – remembering that there may not be a facility to use Skype or a web cam, which in itself makes it important to be vigilant to the nuances in the speed, quality and pitch in the voice as well as the silences within the conversation, especially critical in alleviating any potential problems the member of staff may be experiencing. Figure 8.7 may help illustrate this point.

Figure 8.7 The importance of listening



Source: drawing on Williamson 2009

ACTIVITY 8.5

Listening

In groups answer the questions posed by Figure 8.7. You may need to do this as a role-play exercise if you have limited experience of working in a virtual team. Suggest, analyse and discuss your own thoughts as to the problems a virtual team leader may encounter. Consider how you would detect any problems and how you would deal with them.

The following section will help illuminate many factors relating to group/team communication.

8.6 INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION IN TEAMS

Communication has long had a key role in an organisation's effectiveness, and it is therefore not surprising that managers spend much time communicating with others (Mintzberg 1989). Current and aspiring managers need to develop and hone their communication skills to make use of a wide range of different methods to communicate more effectively. Written communication through emails, proposals, reports and oral communication through presentations, interviews, negotiations, mediation, coaching and so on are all indispensable devices for managerial communication.

Face-to-face and telephone communication/Skype is fast, personal and offers immediate feedback. However, face-to-face communication can be costly, time-consuming and there is often a need to follow it with a document. Written communication occurs through different media, offers the sender an advantage to formulate the message prior to sending, can be widely disseminated and provides a record.

8.6.1 SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

There is an argument that 'successful communication patterns' (Pentland 2012) contribute much to the achievement of a team. Interestingly, Pentland maintains that the talent or skill of an individual member contributes less to team success. It is the elements of communication between team members that make a difference. There are also certain features of successful teams that Pentland's (2012) research revealed:

- Everyone on the team talks and listens in roughly equal measure, keeping contributions short and sweet.
- Members face one another, and their conversations and gestures are energetic.
- Members connect directly with one another – not just with the team leader.
- Members carry on back-channel or side conversations within the team.
- Members periodically break, go exploring outside the team, and bring information back to the team.

If we consider how a team member may adhere to these ideals, it is reasonable to suggest that the key is how they communicate. It is not on just one level; it encompasses several. For example, as a description of someone who exemplifies the points made above, they would have the following characteristics: they actively circulate, engage their associates in short, high-energy dialogue, communicating equally with team members while persuading all to voice their opinion on an issue. These people are not necessarily gregarious or assertive personalities; they are comfortable when engaging others and most of all they are active listeners. Pentland (2012) describes them as 'charismatic connectors'. In fact, this depicts a team player who is well connected to their team yet is engaged in probing data from outside the team. Essentially, though, the discussion illustrates an adept communicator committed to their team.

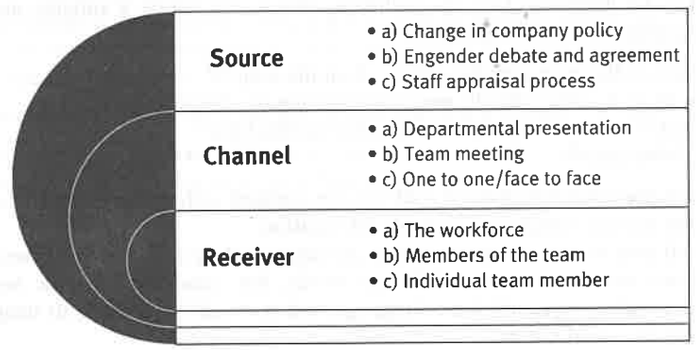
8.6.2 COMMUNICATION PROCESSES

Regardless of the type of team and the way in which a team was built, team members have to communicate to engender the team dynamic and team culture that enables the team to be successful. Therefore, the communication medium may vary quite dramatically, as can the time taken to effect the interaction. Shannon and Weaver (1949, cited in Chandler and Munday 2011) have deliberated upon this issue and, in one of their earlier and much-used versions of their theories, considered the process by which we interconnect. The process is also useful in facilitating any analysis of the communication, particularly if meaning has been misinterpreted, although it must be stated that this is considered a linear process. The process involves a consideration of:

- the source of the communication
- the method we use to encode the message
- the channel employed, which includes the symbols and signals
- the manner by which we decode the message
- a reflection of how a person receives the communiqué.

Figure 8.8 depicts how a communication can be employed.

Figure 8.8 Source–channel–receiver



From Figure 8.8, it is clear that each element becomes more focused as we near the receiver; undeniably, the whole communication process stands or falls on the receiver's interpretation of the message being conveyed. It is, however, essential we bear in mind the importance of:

- *encoding the message*: the manner by which the sender (source) translates their ideas into symbols
- *decoding the message*: the receiver construes the message they think the sender desires to convey
- the *symbols* (gestures, words, pictures)
- the *signals* (that is, the tacit signposts inherent in the message) that all interplay.

Of fundamental significance in our attempts to communicate in the workplace can be the accurateness, appropriateness or possibly the truthfulness of the sender's message; the sender's calculation of how the message will be received may also have bearing on the outcomes and on the quality of the interaction.

ACTIVITY 8.6

Using a communication process

Consider the a, b and c scenarios highlighted in Figure 8.8:

1. Discuss in your groups a process that would enable the receiver to interpret the message in the way that the source intended.
2. Discuss how the message may be misinterpreted – pay particular attention to the encoding, decoding as well as the symbols and signals employed.
3. Reflect upon an incident you have encountered where the receiver misinterpreted the message. What was the outcome?
   - Analyse why this occurred.
   - How could the communication have been improved?

8.6.3 APPROACHES TO TEAM COMMUNICATION

Approaches to team communication can consist of the following consideration: the *purpose* for communicating, the *audience* (the make-up of the team) and the available *resources*. In other words, the communicator must know their purpose for the communication but not assume that the team would automatically share it. The message must be specific to the issue at hand, enabling the vocabulary and the amount of detail expressed to be determined by the audience's needs. To ensure a suitable match, the following questions must be answered:

- How much do the team members know about the subject?
- Are they likely to agree with the presented position or advice?
- What kind of advice have they heard recently on this topic?
- How did they react?

The scope of the communication should then be confined within the resource boundaries, such as time, money, energy and available information.

Both oral and written communications are supported by non-verbal elements. Non-verbal communication is not coded into words, but consists of kinesic behaviour, proxemics, paralanguage and object language, and it would be difficult to imagine any type of interaction without it:

- *Kinesic behaviour* conveys feelings about discussed issues through body movements, posture and facial expressions.
- *Proxemics* refers to the impact that distance and space has on interaction. It varies from imposing degrees of formality or intimacy on situations.
- *Paralanguage* refers to vocal aspects of words, such as timbre, pitch, tone, laughing and yawning.
- *Object language* refers to the communicative aspects of the personal and physical environment, such as appearance, materials, furniture layout, architecture and similar.

8.6.4 COMMUNICATION FEEDBACK

When communicating, 'noise' is always present, threatening to distort the meaning of the message. The reasons for noise are many, such as the chosen medium, sender may poorly articulate and receiver may not be a good listener. Inserting feedback into communication is useful; it acknowledges that the message was sent and received. There are three types of feedback: informational, corrective and reinforcing:

- *Informational feedback* is a non-evaluative response indicating that a message was received and includes additional information.
- *Corrective feedback* challenges or corrects the original message.
- *Reinforcing feedback* is a response that a message was received.

For communication to be effective, a total listening environment must be created where a message is heard, non-verbal cues observed and hidden aspects of a message are not missed.

As organisations become larger and/or more complex, flattening of organisational structures becomes a necessity. This needs to be supported by integrated horizontal communications. Historically, horizontal communication was evident in informal networking activities such as socialising and politicking (see also Chapter 9), although there is need for integration into the formal organisational structure. Giving social support operates well within one level, but fails in upward or downward communications. However, organisations remain comfortable with such vertical, that is, 'downward' (management to employees) communication. Vertical communication is directive and purposeful, although for teamwork to be effective, communication must move to more horizontal interaction (Bell and Kozlowski 2002, Maznewski and Chudoba 2000, Graetz et al 1998).

There are four reasons for integrated interactive communication (Luthans 2005):

1. *Task co-ordination*: for teamwork to be effective and to stay on course, team members must regularly meet and discuss the work in progress.
2. *Problem-solving*: the team members use their problem-solving skills to approach a given problem or opportunity, and to know how to minimise potential crisis situations. A number of techniques can be used, such as brainstorming, the best and worst scenario, and so on.
3. *Information-sharing*: the team decides on how to access necessary information.
4. *Conflict resolution*: the team will meet to share feedback and develop techniques to resolve inherent conflicts arising from their activities.

ACTIVITY 8.7

Giving and receiving feedback

In order to practise giving feedback, write a short evaluation about yourself. Then select someone you consider as 'safe' and friendly, although not someone you are close to. Ask them to do the same. Place yourself in the other person's shoes (use empathy and ask yourself how it feels to be that person), and then read their self-evaluation. Arrange a joint session with the person at a place and time where you will not be disturbed. Swap your self-evaluations and give the other person feedback on it.

Consider the following:

1. Did you check that the other person was in the right frame of mind to hear your feedback?
2. Were you able to say what you wanted to say? What response did you get?
3. Did you have a clear idea of what you wanted to accomplish before the meeting?
4. How were you affected by the feedback you received?
5. Would you make any changes in the future?

Like other managerial skills, giving and receiving feedback requires self-awareness, and it is therefore not surprising that many organisations offer training in giving and receiving feedback, often as part of the appraisal process (see also Chapter 10). In addition to the knowledge of how to give and receive feedback, the giving and receiving of feedback requires constant practice, and we encourage you to take every opportunity to practise this vital skill.

8.7 CONFLICT IN TEAMS

As we have seen in previous sections of this chapter, teams do not just happen; they need commitment, investment and training as well as knowledge about effective team-building. It must be emphasised that teamwork is destined to fail in many organisations in which team activities are not rewarded and in which mistrust, negative feelings and unresolved conflicts are rife. The result of ineffective or failed teamwork is often conflict. Indeed, there is evidence that 20 per cent of management time is spent on resolving conflict (Haynes 2008).

One view of conflict, the *unitary perspective*, considers an organisation to be a happy family, with loyal employees that pull together in harmony to achieve the organisation's goals. Conflict tends to be explained in terms of poor communication, personality clashes or the work of troublemakers. Managers who claim that their work units run smoothly and without conflict are either: exceptionally self-aware, skilful communicators or, more likely, they suppress conflict. Due to their very nature, suppressed conflicts do not allow resolution and therefore stifle any meaningful interaction between individuals and groups with often major impact on overall staff morale and productivity. Conflicts may arise from a variety of reasons, such as differences in personal communication styles, levels of inarticulateness, hidden agenda or status. Workplace norms and patterns of communication (values, assumptions, self-image) can lead to individuals' or groups' insecurity and fear, which in turn may result in a variety of defensive types of behaviour (Argyris and Schön 1996).

Another view of conflict, the *pluralistic perspective*, accepts conflict as an inherent part of the organisation. Conflict situations can and do arise from the organisational structure, the size of the workforce, standardisation of jobs, and increased levels of hierarchy. The

word 'conflict' conveys negativity and things being out of control, although conflicts can and often bring benefits by fostering creative thinking in seeking resolution. Hatch (1997), for instance, argues that a low level of conflict is often associated with poorly focused, unmotivated and ill-integrated teams, while a high level of conflict leads to a lack of co-operation, distraction from the overall goal and hostility. Hence, the trick for managers and team leaders is to find and encourage a healthy level of conflict that can produce cohesive, productive and co-operative teams. Such an approach requires all parties to jointly identify the sources of a problem, to agree on what the problem is and to seek different solutions.

Teams do have minor disagreements that over time may have led to conflict (Open University 1985, as cited in Senior and Fleming 2006, p221). Many conflicts begin with a simple misunderstanding, followed by different values, viewpoints and interests of the parties involved, which can lead to interpersonal differences when emotions such as irritation, anger and frustration come into play. There are different conflict-handling styles, ranging from the avoidance of conflict through competing, compromising and collaboration to accommodating (Thomas 1976). Each manager or team leader will have their own style, and different situations and context will require different styles of dealing with conflict.

ACTIVITY 8.8

Team behaviour and attributes

1. Reflect upon a team with which you are familiar or have been a part of and review their behaviour and attributes:
   - Do they have complementary skills?
   - Are they committed to a common purpose?
   - Do they share performance goals?
   - For what does each individual hold themselves accountable?
   - Do all members participate fully in the team's activities and team meetings?
   - Who offers team members feedback on their contributions?
2. Discuss which behaviours and attributes are more conducive to a harmonious and productive team environment.

8.8 CONCLUSION

Team-building can be enthralling, enjoyable and even exasperating at times. The theoretical and practical situations discussed in this chapter were assembled to assist you in developing the necessary skills to participate and bring together individuals effectively under the banner of 'teams'. We have emphasised the need for an enlightened view of team roles and an individual's self-worth within the team. We have highlighted the need to be more sensitive to the nuances of co-ordinating a virtual team. We have discussed the vital role communication has in teamwork and discussed conflict in teams.

Groups and teams have long intrigued scholars of management and organisations as well as management practitioners, but there is still a long way to go to create effective teams reliably and consistently. One reason for this may be the sheer complexity of human interaction to which team members bring their personality, life stories and prior experiences, which often results in complex group, team or organisational dynamics. The challenge for managers and team leaders is to turn a group of often diverse individuals into cohesive and functioning teams; team leadership is discussed in Chapter 11 of this book.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

Identify at least three things that you have learned by studying this chapter and engaging with the activities. How will your newly acquired knowledge and skills support your continuing professional development? What value do you expect your learning to have for your daily routines and your further career? In what area have you identified a need for further development and how are you planning to fill that gap? Address these issues in your learning journal and/or CPD log. You may also wish to discuss them with a peer, colleague, mentor or coach to aid your further development.

EXPLORE FURTHER

See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOai178ZiiQ for an excellent YouTube video clip in which Meredith Belbin discusses team role theory in an international context

BELBIN ASSOCIATES: http://www.belbin.com or http://www.belbin.info

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