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## *Working in a team*

The term 'team', and being able to work together with others on 'jobs', calls up positive feelings with many people. People usually find it fun to work in a group, to share the good moments and the bad, to exchange know-how and to join in celebrating successes. But working in teams is not only about the nice social aspects of being able to work together with other people. There can also be disadvantages: interwovenness of tasks and all kinds of different discussion platforms easily lead to delays. Or team members shirk their personal responsibility, because they think that another person will probably solve the problem. Teamwork also means, that it must be possible for you to solve interpersonal conflicts jointly, something that not everyone finds simple. What then are the advantages of working in a team?

### Why work in teams

There are two primary reasons, why organisations nevertheless choose to work in teams:

- possible commercial benefits in combination with customer advantages
- an improvement in the quality of the work.

#### **ADVANTAGES FROM A BUSINESS VIEWPOINT**

Market impulses continuously bring many organisations to continuously search for more cost-effective ways of working. They organise themselves to deliver a high quality product at a competitive price, so that they can maintain their competitive advantage. That is why they also critically look at how the tasks and functions of the departments can be integrated, so that customers can be served better and more quickly. An example of such a cost-savings is the merger of distribution centres of large companies into a single work team that can work autonomously.

By giving teams responsibilities, and the competencies for delivering performance and results to internal and external customers, they are positively motivated to build up co-

operative working relationships with one another. With regard to internal customers this refers to collegial teams, while external relations refer to customers of the organisation, for which the team is responsible. A multifunctional team will be able to react more quickly to customer requests, and can also make decisions. This is advantageous for customers, who no longer have to explain their needs at several different locations. Another operational advantage is that teams have much better capacities for adjusting to new skills and know-how, based on the questions and needs of internal and external customers. We predict that you will gain your competitive advantages and differentiating capacities in the coming years primarily through the degree to which your organisation is capable of continuously keeping your services at a level that is required by your customers. This is true both for profit and non-profit organisations. Working with highly capable teams will probably be the success formula in this regard.

### **IMPROVED QUALITY OF WORK**

Various motivational research studies have repeatedly shown that people are positively stimulated, when they are given the responsibility and competencies for organising their work independently within a team. Just take a look once at what it means for you, to be able to take executive decisions together with a colleague.

By bundling the preparation, execution and co-ordination of tasks, these processes are expanded and enriched. This increases self-reliance and personal responsibility (thinking and doing in one). And your team gains more insight into what its concrete contribution to the organisational goals is. You can promote team-learning by giving people the opportunity to learn from one another. This will mean that the talents of people are used more effectively. All of these measures together have a positive effect on the motivation, involvement and flexibility of everyone in the organisation.

Nevertheless, teamwork is not a replacement for individual work. An evaluation of their personal success will continue to be important for your employees. You must also remember that a team is not merely a group of people, who have been collected at random under the supervision of a manager. Teamwork gains special significance and power from the possibility of working jointly in achieving complex tasks, sometimes in very insecure and unexpected circumstances. You yourself will surely have pleasant memories of instances, in which you and your team were able to help a customer to his full satisfaction. These are called peak experiences by us: jointly wanting to achieve something with one another, by using the power of the team.

The added value of teamwork is also due to the development of a mutual vision with one another, and to realise these objectives by using the various capabilities and talents of the members of the team.

# Characteristics of 'real' teams

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) provide the following definition of the term teams: 'A team is a small number of people with complementary skills, who put their efforts into a common objective and specific goals, using a procedure for which they make each other responsible.'

A small number can be interpreted as 2 to 20 members, because larger groups may lead to logistical problems, such as space and the time required for discussions. In a larger group, it also becomes more difficult to achieve an open exchange of positions and opinions.

## *Complementary skills*

A good team develops the right mix of complimentary skills.

- 1 Technical and functional expertise. Skills that are related to the subject matter of the specialty.
- 2 Skills in solving problems and taking decisions. They must have the capability of individually indicating where the problems and opportunities lie, to select goals and to make choices on that basis.
- 3 Social skills. These are necessary for communication and co-operation within the group. Examples of these types of skills are: Actively listening, supporting one another, providing constructive criticism, being objective, giving someone the benefit of the doubt, taking risks, daring to experiment, learning from mistakes and recognizing the interests and achievements of others.

## *Common objectives*

Every team must have a common objective and specific goals. The common objective must be something that transcends the team and, in the final analysis, determines the direction of the team. Often this target objective is derived from the common objective of the organisation, and it concerns a specific contribution that the team makes to this organisational objective. The specific goals correspond to results-oriented agreements that are made within the team, and the specific targets that are derived from these agreements for individual members. Such goals must be feasible and measurable, so that the team always knows where it stands. Successful teams evaluate how and in what way each of the members can best contribute to the common objective.

## *Common working procedure*

A common working procedure can be important for achieving the goals of the team. Every team member contributes according to their knowledge and skills, and on the basis of agreements made within the team. Furthermore, everyone must be agreed about who does what and when, and which skills the individual team members must develop. Important social roles also develop within a team, for instance in discussing, interpreting,

supporting, integrating and summarising the work of others. These roles are not a goal in themselves, but they are a part of the work.

### *Mutual responsibility*

There is a subtle difference between 'the boss makes me responsible' and 'we make ourselves responsible'. Without the latter, one cannot speak of a real team. Personal responsibility for the results of the team as a whole is meant here. Everyone makes promises about their input, and everyone trusts one another when it comes to contributing to the result. Performance and responsibility are the most important aspects in building up a 'real' team.

### *Effectiveness*

An effective team is one that wants to deliver top performance, and that jointly inputs all its energy in achieving these results. It is a team with self-confidence. The members know of each other where their strengths lie, and they use these strengths to realise their goals. They rely on one another for help, feedback and motivation.

#### An effective team:

- knows exactly what the reasons for its existence and its goals are
- works creatively
- is results-oriented
- makes sure that tasks and responsibilities are clear
- is well-organised
- is based on the power of the individual
- supports leadership and one another
- develops a positive team climate
- solves disagreements
- maintains an open attitude between members
- takes objective decisions
- monitors its own functioning
- gives feedback in the form of compliments and critique to each other.

Dyer (1995) gives an overview of those situations, in which the team formula can be successfully applied:

- 1 The organisation is looking for a flatter structure, with distributed leadership and joint decision-making. Here leadership is understood as the common understanding, regarding the joint responsibility of every team member for the results and co-operative processes. Within the organisation, one speaks of great interdependence between the different parts of the organisation for achieving the objectives.
- 2 The environment is dynamic, insecure and subject to quick changes.

- 3 The organisation is (constantly) confronted with major changes, which leads to quick changes in the structure and, which means that there is little or no possibility for standardisation of working processes (procedures, rules, task and functional descriptions).
- 4 Technological developments follow each other at top speed.
- 5 Very frequent discussions about objectives, decisions and problems are necessary within the organisation.
- 6 The atmosphere among the employees is co-operative instead of competitive.
- 7 The organisation is strongly dependent on the expertise of its employees, and therefore on their motivation and involvement.
- 8 The formal patterns of communication are insufficient for quick and efficient working.
- 9 The adaptation of the organisation to changes requires frequent use of project management, temporary task groups and ad hoc teams for solving problems.

## Types of teams

As a manager, you can be a member of various teams. Below we will describe the most frequently occurring types of teams and their objectives.

### *Work teams*

In most cases you will be the leader of a work team. This is a group of people, who work together in a department or operational unit. They are responsible for a partial process of the organisation, for instance in-house customer service, field service, financial administration, procurement or the research department, just to mention a few. The role of a team leader consists of stimulating and promoting the working process. Work meetings are planned to invite people to come up with new ideas, for an improvement of the work itself and of the co-operation, including improvements in the production processes, more effective and more efficient working, and improvements in mutual communication.

### *Middle management team*

Most managers are also a member of a middle management team. This team is usually led by someone with a position in the upper management of the organisation. The members of a middle management team report to this higher-level manager. Such a team has the task of synchronising working procedures between different departments. The team members are responsible for the operational processes. They assign resources, work with operational plans, and they monitor quality and progress.

### *Top management team*

A top management team is the most important link between the organisation and the

outside world. The top of the organisation is responsible for the development of the mission, vision and strategy of the organisation. Their focus is directed primarily to the outside world, including changes in markets, technologies, politics, legislation, et cetera. It is important in a top management team that one uses the different visions and competencies of the organisation, for assessing the world and the environment of the organisation. This is necessary for an ability to innovate, and for modifying or changing the direction of the organisation. The top management team is also responsible for the continuity of the organisation.

### *Project team*

A project team is a temporary group, which works on a specific assignment or problem. Such a team is usually responsible for planning, budgeting and implementing an improvement or change process. A project team may be started up for developing a new product, or improvements in production and quality, for increasing safety and for saving costs, and for anything else that you yourself may think of. The start-up and the termination of a project and project team are clearly defined.

Organisation within a team context is of course no guarantee for successful results. Ultimately the success is in large part determined by the way in which the team members work with one another. Do they have the capacity for integrating their individual qualities, both in the more pleasant and the less pleasant parts of the work, whereby the entire team becomes more than the sum of the parts?

This requires that management itself and the responsible managers have a clear vision of teamwork. This includes a vision of team organisation, whereby it must be clear what the added value of the team represents for the ambitions of the organisation, and what basic conditions apply. This not only concerns an assessment of the individual qualities of each team member. It primarily concerns whether each team member is willing and able to make a contribution to the team objectives, both at a personal and a professional level, and, with that, can make a visible contribution to the ultimate ambition of the organisation. This also makes it clear that the choice, of working or not working in teams, is a part of a strategic decision-making process.

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### **Questions for reflection**

- In what teams/groups are you a member?
  - What is the *raison d'être* of your team(s)?
  - What do you know about the effectiveness of your team?
  - Where do you see improvement possibilities for your team?
  - What is the added value for your organisation of working in teams?
  - Which vision in your organisation led to the establishment of teams?
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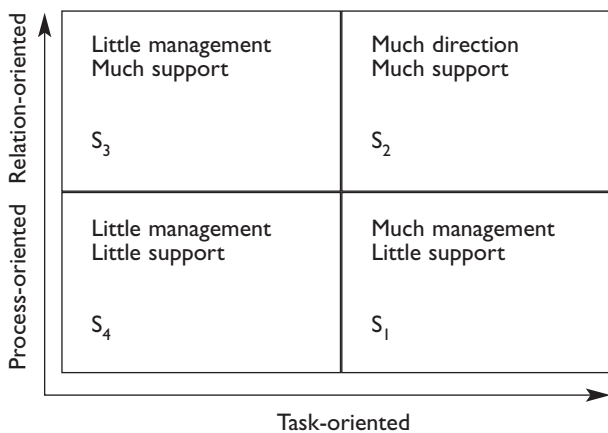
# Team development and leadership

Your most important assignment as a team leader is that you support your team in achieving maximum results. Your employees, the experts, will see to the content; your job is to direct, support, correct and co-ordinate. You are the coach that creates the climate, in which the team can grow towards a maximum of autonomy and independent responsibility. According to the model of situational management developed by Hersey and Blanchard, effective team leadership is based on two aspects:

- *Managing behaviour:* Your focus is on the realisation of the objectives and on the working activities of the team. This means that you define the direction, determine and clarify the objectives, define limits, guide the processes towards a decision, while giving and requesting information. You display a task-oriented behaviour that is designed to achieve results.
- *Supportive behaviour:* You focus on the process and the progress of the co-operation. You create a learning climate, develop group norms together with your team, you give feedback, build up relationships, stimulate mutual trust, expand the problem-solving capacities of your employees and you mediate in conflicts. In short, process-oriented and supportive behaviour.

## The four leadership styles

If we combine task-oriented and supportive behaviour, then we arrive at the following model of four different styles for giving leadership.



*Illustration 1: The four styles of leadership according to Hersey and Blanchard*

### *Style 1: Instructing (S1)*

Behaviour that provides much management and little support. As the team leader, you keep a tight hold on the reins. You define the goals, and you determine the procedures and the rules that must be followed within the team. All interaction runs via you and you also monitor the process. Frequently it concerns the exchange of information at this stage. The team members are rather passive and simply let themselves be confronted by events.

### *Style 2: Convincing (S2)*

Behaviour that provides much management and much support. You explain your decisions and you ask your team for suggestions. You invite the members of your team to think along, about what is going on in the team. You closely monitor the performance of the task.

### *Style 3: Discussing (S2)*

Behaviour that provides little management and much support. You take decisions together with your team, whereby you support the efforts of your employees in the performance of the task. Your primary focus is on the interaction between the members of the team, and on making sure that everyone can provide his/her contribution. Besides that you also provide feedback on the co-operation process, both in a positive and in a negative sense.

### *Style 4: Delegating (S4)*

Behaviour that provides little management and little support. You assign responsibility for decisions and the performance of the tasks to your employees. The team has, in the meantime, become mature and can function independently. As a team leader, you facilitate the co-operation process, wherever that is required.

The degree to which you, as a team leader, give more or less directions or support is dependent on the development stage of the team.

During the start-up stage of a team that is still in development, your focus will be primarily task-orientated. With a more advanced team, you will be active in both a task- and a process-oriented manner. In the case of a team, which has all the required competencies, you are primarily process-oriented and, in the case of a mature team, you will have transferred the greater part of your responsibilities and competencies to the team, which can function autonomously.

## Stages of group development

Groups all pass through a number of predictable stages during their life cycle. Thorough research into group development was done by Lacoursière (1980), who has developed a



model that includes five stages. Tuckman (1979) developed a 4-stage differentiation – see Illustration 2. Both models foresee a change in the development of groups during each stage, and therefore also in the ‘need’ for leadership.

Stage	Lacoursière	Tuckman
1	Orientation	Forming
2	Dissatisfaction	Storming
3	Cohesion	Norming
4	Productivity	Performing
5	Termination	

*Illustration 2: Stages of group development*

Below we will describe these five stages as completely separate entities that progress autonomously, while they actually overlap in practice.

**I ORIENTATION AND GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER**

When you start with a new team, there is still uncertainty about the objective, the working procedure and the leadership of the team. The members of the team have to get to know one another; they do not yet precisely know the role that they will fulfil and where they stand. Some members will show their strengths, while others will remain in the background and await developments, and still others will be intractable from the start. The members have not had much contact with one another; everyone is still busy with his own concerns.

The objective at this stage is to explain and clarify the team goal and rules, at the same time creating a bond.

You can recognize a newly created team by the following behavioural patterns. The team members:

- will have an obedient attitude vis-à-vis the leader and the leadership will be accepted
- will express few feelings
- will talk, but will not be listening very much to one another
- will not present proposals for improvements or change
- will look for a guilty party when errors occur, instead of using the errors for learning
- are strongly focused on their own part of a task
- have little mutual understanding.

Your primary task at this stage is to offer a safe structure and clear leadership. This includes: Making it clear what the task of the team is, defining realistic and realisable goals, and making plans for how required skills are to be acquired. There will be some need for supportive behaviour, which is primarily focused on a mutual acceptance of the

members of the team. The accent will, however, have to lie on task-oriented behaviour. When the process side is up for discussion, then you can invite the members to express their feelings, to indicate their worries, point out qualities; and you should have some fun together, get to know one another in different surroundings (take a walk, have dinner, go on a small trip).

## **2 DISSATISFACTION AND POSITIONING**

In this phase, the members of a group often experience disappointment and a discrepancy between the original expectations and the reality of the situation. It can then happen at that they will contest the objectives, be dissatisfied with the leadership (that gives too much or too little direction), or be unhappy with the progress or the applied standards. Within the group you will also immediately be confronted with mutual positioning, competition and dominant behaviour. During this stage, political games and power plays will also occur. The differences and the contrast between the members of the group become more distinct. Situations of attack, defence and withdrawal will occur. This is also a period in which limits are tested, and in which the morale frequently sags. At a task level, you will see a slow rise in performance and the development of skills, which can, however, also be disturbed by negative emotions.

In this stage you will have to try and manage through a coaching approach, namely by finding a balance between giving directions and supportive behaviour. You will focus strongly on handling the differences between the team members, on dealing with the resistance members express towards you as a leader and the manner in which you give directions.

Task-oriented behaviour in this stage includes: the redefinition of the objectives, continuation with the development of skills and know-how about the task, and clarification of the structure. Supportive behaviour consists of: actively listening, recognizing dissatisfaction and problems, giving explicit attention to the group process and the mutual relationships, getting conflicts on the table for discussion and solving them, seriously discussing proposals, celebrating small successes, encouraging openness about emotions, including giving and accepting criticisms.

Your greatest trap at this stage is denial or taking a defensive position, because this can lead to an escalation of negative feelings or hidden resistance by the employees.

*Peter works in a municipality. The management team has decided that his department for urban planning will be merged with the department for construction and environmental protection. He is given leadership over the new department that is to be formed. Peter wants to transform the new department into a well-functioning team, which is also capable of working autonomously. He has just followed a course on coaching leadership, and the concept has charmed him. He has been given permission by the management team, to organise a so-called kick-off meeting for the new group. The objectives of that day are:*