

HOW CAN TEAMS BENEFIT ORGANISATIONS? OUTLINE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TEAM AND DISCUSS THE CONDITION NECESSARY IN ORGANISATIONS IF PEOPLE ARE TO WORK EFFECTIVELY IN THEM

Team working means working in groups rather than in isolation, switching tasks as necessary and discussing ways of working more effectively. (Adapted from Ian Macouse, Pg 412)

Team working is an attempt to maximise staff satisfaction and involvement by organising employees into relatively small teams. These teams may be functional or geographical.

There is a certain amount of evidence to support the idea that individuals' behaviour is influenced by the teams'. The Hawthorne Studies showed that teams' behaviour can influence workers' motivation. (Adapted from

<http://www.projectalevel.co.uk/business/teamworking.htm>)

From a theoretical point of view, team working fits in well with Mayo's finding on group norms. It can also be traced back to Maslow's emphasis on social needs. In practical terms, modern managers like team working because of the flexibility it implies. If worker A is absent, there are plenty of others used to dealing with the job. Therefore there is no disruption. (Adapted from Ian Macouse, Pg 412)

Team working also gives scope for motivating influences such as job enrichment and quality circles.

Professor Charles Handy suggest in his book "Inside Organisations (BBC Books, 1990) that "a good team is a great place to be, exciting, stimulating, supportive and successful. A bad team is horrible, a sort of human prison". It is true that business will not benefit if the group norms within the team discourage efforts.

Nevertheless, team working has proved successful in many companies in recent years. Companies such as Rolls Royce, Trebor, and Komatsu have reported large improvements in absenteeism and labour turnover and significant shifts in work force attitudes.

A study by W. Dyer (1994) found that many companies said they believed in team building. However, only 22 percent actually carried out any team building activities. The main reason suggested for this were that:

- Managers did not know how to do team building
- Managers did not understand the benefits of spending time on team building and thought it would take too much time
- Team building efforts were not really rewarded in the company
- People felt their teams were alright
- People felt it was not supported by their superiors

Many organisations now expect employees to undertake their work in teams. This is because they believe that team working leads to more efficient and effective production and ultimately yield to higher productivity. People often respond positively to working with others because this satisfies their social needs. The fact that managers are willing to delegate responsibility to teams also meets employees' ego and self actualisation needs. (Adapted from Ian Macouse, Pg 413)

Teams also allow individuals to gain from the strengths of others. There may be some areas which you are relatively weak but someone else is strong and vice versa.

Imagine you are trying to solve a crossword, for example. It's usually much quicker and more fun sharing the tasks with others. Working in teams also allows individuals to change jobs which can provide some variety at work.

However, some people do not particularly enjoy working in teams. This may be because of their personality or because they think their own performance would be better than other members of the team. They are worried about being dragged down. (Adapted from Ian Macouse, Pg 426)

Also, Meredith Belbin (1981) found that successful teams consisted of a mix of individuals, each of whom performed a different role. According to Belbin each person has a preferred role and for a group to be effective all the roles need to be filled. So a business might select people to ensure that they fill one or more of the roles which a group lacks. For a group to work efficiently the business must be aware of the roles people prefer. These may become apparent through observation. People should be given tasks which allow them to operate in their preferred roles, whether in a sporting team or in a team of medical staff in a casualty department.

If a business is to try and improve the effectiveness of team working it must be able to identify the characteristics of an effective team. Usually there is high commitment to the achievement of targets and organisational goals and a clear understanding of the teams work. There is also a free and open communication between members of the team and trust between members. They also try to help each other out by offering constructive criticisms and suggestions.

Furthermore, there are also a number of factors which determine how effective teams are when making decisions and one of them is communication. Communication can in teams influence how a team decisions are made.

There are also a number of advantages in allowing teams to make decisions for a business. Teams can pool ideas and draw on a variety of expertise. This makes them particularly good at finding errors. Teams can handle a great deal of information and individual involved tasks in a shorter period of time than an individual would take and teams members can support, motivate and help other members when making decisions. Teams provide a basis for accountability within firms. They can also be used as the basis for a bonus system to increase productivity. (Adapted from Business studies Dave Hall, Pg 512-5)

Despite these benefits, there are sometimes problems in team decision making. Team decision may take time. When a decision needs to be made quickly, such as a re-order stock, individual may be more effective from a business point of view. There will be no debate, which may delay any decision that is made. There could be conflicting views of personalities within teams. This can lead to lack of cohesion, with no shared aims or objectives. The result is that the team becomes inefficient in carrying out a task. There may be a possibility of “risky-shift” decisions. Teams may take riskier decisions than individuals would, due to too much team cohesion. For example a board of directors might decide as a team to take over a potentially profitable, but inefficient, firm. An individual entrepreneur might have considered this decision too risky to take. (Adapted from Business studies Dave Hall, Pg 512-6)

Moreover, one problem that may result for the business from team activity is a conflict between team members. Many managers would agree that some inter-team competition is inevitable and perhaps useful. If there was no competition the business may become stagnant, with few pressures to make changes. This could lead to inefficiency. The other extreme, of very high levels of competition and conflict may also cause problems. It could lead to anxiety and tension in the workforce which are counter productive. Some of the reasons which usually cause inter-team relations and conflict are teams are often in competition with each other over resources. For example non-graduate entrants to a bank may be restricted because of the promotion or higher pay for graduate entrants. Conflict can result when teams' members have different goals. For example that when there is divorce of ownership and control managers may attempt to satisfy their own aims, such as market leadership by series of price cuts. At the same time they would attempt to make a satisfactory profit for shareholders, who may have wanted the business to maximise profits. (Adapted from Business studies Dave Hall, Pg 512-24)

Managed effectively employees can provide better quality and more innovative work at a lower cost and a lot faster rate. To achieve such improvements in performance employees must be involved. They must have the ability to contribute and feel they are listened to. Greater participation can help a firm to gain a competitive advantage. This is why managers in all kinds of successful organisation claim that their success is due to their people. Nevertheless, despite the potential gains from participation this does not mean every manager has embraced the idea. After all the more that employee participate in decisions the more that manager have to explain their actions to them. Despite the growth of participation in the UK employee representation is still relatively low especially when compared with countries such as Germany where employees are often represented at a senior level. Nonetheless, although this system appears to work well in Germany this does not necessarily mean it will work as effectively in the UK. (Adapted from Business studies Dave Hall, Pg 512-6)

In addition, the Workers Employment Relations survey of the late 1990s found that up to 65 percent of work places in the UK operate team working at some level, although autonomous work groups are only found in 3 percent of organisations. Businesses introduce team working for so many reasons and I will explore them below.

Team working motivates employees. Edwards and Wright (1998) and Wilkinson (1997), for example suggest that employees in team situations tend to be more satisfied and motivated than those who are working under more traditional regimes. Businesses can use team work as a method to gain a competitive advantage over rivals. Team working appears to have a positive influence on employee commitment and identification with the business. Cotton (1993) suggested that self directed teams have a strong effect on employee attitudes.

In conclusion team working is not always possible and may not work effectively, however. This may be because work cannot be redesigned for a team. Managers may also fail to implement team work properly. Also, certain employees may see team working as simply giving them management responsibilities without the pay or power.

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