
UNIT 7 TEAM WORK: NATURE, EFFECTIVENESS, IMPEDIMENTS*

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Nature of Teamwork: Meaning and Importance
 - 7.2.1 Benefits of Teamwork
 - 7.2.2 Differences between Groups and Teams
- 7.3 Effectiveness of Teamwork
 - 7.3.1 Characteristics of High Performance Teams
- 7.4 Impediments to Effective Teamwork
- 7.5 Conclusion
- 7.6 Glossary
- 7.7 References
- 7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- Know the meaning, importance and benefits of teamwork;
- Understand the differences between groups and teams;
- Analyse the effectiveness of teamwork; and
- Identify the impediments to effective teamwork.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The movement towards teamwork was mostly an outcome of the Hawthorne studies, conducted in the late 1920s and 1930s, which highlighted the positive aspects of teamwork in an organisational setting. In recent years, teams have emerged as the most important group phenomenon in organisations. The term “team” is not new to organisations. In fact, the importance of teamwork has been stressed throughout the recent decades. Today, teams are becoming increasingly popular as a result of advanced information technology, concern for total quality management and the organisational learning processes. These organisational developments have shifted from a reliance on individual managers and workers to inter-functional management teams. Ifeanyi Enoch Onuoha observes: “Teamwork is the secret that makes common people achieve uncommon results”. An attempt is being made in this Unit to discuss important facets of teamwork in organisational setting.

7.2 NATURE OF TEAMWORK: MEANING AND IMPORTANCE

Teamwork is the collaborative effort of a team to achieve a common goal in a most effective manner. This concept is generally understood as the willingness and cooperation of a group of people to work together to achieve a common aim. This means someone has the interests of the team at heart, working for the good of the team. But teamwork is not exclusive to organised teams. For example, we can see evidence of teamwork in a committee, which might not necessarily see itself as a team. In this context, team work can be random co-operation, but not always.

A team exists when individual strength and skills are combined with team work in the pursuit of a common direction or cause, in order to produce meaningful results for the team members and the organisation team work adds to the collective endeavours and talents of team members. A team is more than the combination of individual strengths with a shared commitment to performance. The benefits of a team at work will be visible only when the skills and strengths of individual team members are joined with shared goals with a focus on collective performance. An organisation cannot have teams without teamwork, but it can have teamwork without having an organised team. This is the difference between a team and teamwork.

A team has the following important characteristics:

- Team members have shared goals in relation to their work.
- Team members interact with each other in order to achieve shared objectives.
- Team members have well defined and interdependent roles.
- Team members have an organisational identity as a team, with a defined organisational functions.

Teamwork suggests that people work in an atmosphere of mutual support and trust, where every team member's strengths are valued. A real teamwork tends to see the following positive attitudes and behaviour patterns:

- Trust in colleagues to deliver what they promise.
- Willingness to help when needed.
- Sharing of a common vision of the future.
- Cooperation and blending of each other's strengths.
- Positive attitudes, providing support and encouragement.
- Active listening.
- All members pulling their weight in the same direction.
- Giving the benefit of doubt to members
- Consensus building.

- Effective conflict resolution.
- Open communication.

The best way to define teamwork is “when a group of people work together cohesively towards a common goal, creating a positive working atmosphere and supporting each other to combine individual strengths to enhance team performance”.

Importance of Teamwork

Teamwork can be linked to two compounds which are almost essential to modern life. It keeps a team together, a bond which promotes strength, unity, reliability and support. It can also enable smoother movement towards the achievement of targets and can help teams to overcome obstacles. Teams and teamwork have become a central part in organisations. Teams do not work without teamwork. The following factors promote teamwork in any organisation:

1. Distribution of workload and tasks among members of a team lead to increase in productivity.
2. Teamwork promotes creativity, innovation, confidence and practical solutions to problems.
3. It brings a feeling of recognition and sense of belongingness among members that improve their morale and self-esteem.
4. It provides help, support and guidance to members in difficult times that reduce their stress and encourages them to focus on completion of goals in an efficient manner.
5. It contributes development of strong relationships among colleagues.
6. It enhances communication skills among members.
7. It enables flexibility among members in performing their obligations while respecting the norms of a healthy work-life balance.
8. It promotes leadership qualities.
9. It facilitates better career opportunities in future.
10. It expands the boundaries of professional work.
11. It improves service provided to clients.

7.2.1 Benefits of Teamwork

Teamwork in the workplace has the following benefits:

1. Fosters creativity and learning

Creativity thrives when people work together on a team. What one has learned from individual experience is entirely different from what the coworkers have learnt. Thus, teamwork maximises shared knowledge in the workplace and helps one to learn new skills for future. Working together lets employees build on the talents of their team mates.

2. Builds trust

Relying on other people builds trust, and teamwork establishes strong relationships with co-workers. An effective team enjoys working together and shares a strong bond. Trusting teammates provides a feeling of security that allows new ideas to emerge. It helps employees open up and encourage each other. Without trust, a team crumbles and cannot succeed in achieving positive results in assigned projects. Great teams build each other up and strengthen individual members to create a cohesive group.

3. Augments conflict resolution skills

Conflicts are inevitable in a group situation. Employees come from varied backgrounds and have different work styles and habits. While these unique viewpoints promote creativity, they can also generate competition resentment that turns into conflict. When conflict arises in teamwork situations, employees are compelled or sometimes encouraged to resolve the conflicts themselves instead of turning to management

4. Promotes a wider sense of ownership

Team encourages employees to feel proud of their contributions. Working toward achieving organisation goals allows employees to feel connected to the organisation. This strengthens organisational loyalty, leading to a higher level of Job satisfaction among employees.

5. Encourages healthy risk-taking

Working as a team allows team members to take legitimate risks as they have the support of the entire group to fall back on the case of glitches or failure.

6. Teamwork creates synergy

Synergy is by no means a given. It does not happen and it is difficult to achieve. Hackman argues that “teams that function well can indeed achieve a level of synergy and ability that never could be reprogrammed by organisation planners or enforced by external managers”. In a synergistic way of working the sum is greater than the parts.

7. Teamwork supports a more empowered way of working, removing constraints which may prevent someone doing their Job property.
8. Teamwork promotes flatter and leaner structures with less hierarchy.
9. Teamwork encourages multi-disciplinary work where teams cut across organisational divides.
10. Teamwork fosters flexibility and responsiveness, especially the ability to respond to change.
11. Teamwork pleases customers who like engaging with good teams.
12. Teamwork promotes the sense of achievement, equity and camaraderie that are essential for motivated workplace.

13. Teamwork when managed properly is a better way to work. Teamwork, if properly managed, maximises strengths, bringing out the best in each team member. Teamwork is an essential part of workplace success. Teamwork must have skills and habits like cooperation, contribution, communication, sense of responsibility, respect for different opinions, customs and individual preferences and a strong desire for participation to build effective and creative relationships.

7.2.2 Differences between Groups and Teams

The distinction between a group and a team is an important one. All teams are groups, but not all groups are teams. Johon R.Katzenback and Douglas K.Smith(1993) have identified the following specific differences between work groups and teams:

- a. The work group has a strong, clearly focused leader; the team has shared leadership roles.
- b. The work group has individual accountability; the team has individual and mutual accountability.
- c. The work group's purpose is the same as that of the organisation; the team has a specific purpose.
- d. The work group has individual work-products; the team has collective work-products.
- e. The work group runs efficient meetings; the team encourages open-ended, active problem-solving meetings.
- f. The work group measures effectiveness indirectly, the team measures performance directly by assessing collective work-products.
- g. The group discusses, decides, and delegates, the team discusses, decides and does real work together.

Teams do go beyond traditional formal work groups. Teams can be formed for any purpose. Broadly, teams can be categorise into four types:

- (i) **Advice teams** like boards, review panels, employee involvement groups etc.
- (ii) **Production teams** like manufacturing crews, maintenance crews, data processing groups etc.
- (iii) **Project teams** such as research groups, planning teams, task forces etc.
- (iv) **Action teams** such as negotiating teams, entertainment groups, military units etc.

With the increasing importance of teams in today's organisations, there is an increasing recognition given to the informal team roles. According to Glenn M.Parker, team members play the following four roles:

1. **Contributor:** He is a task-oriented team member. He enjoys providing the team with good technical information and data and pushes the team to set high performance goals.

**Organisational
Behaviour: Major
Facets**

2. **Collaborator:** He tries to remind others of the vision, mission, or goals of the team, but is flexible and open to new ideas. He is willing to share glory with other team members.
3. **Communicator:** He is a positive, people-oriented team member; is process-driven; and is an effective listener. He plays the role of facilitator of involvement, conflict resolution, consensus building, feedback etc.
4. **Challenger:** He questions the team’s goals, methods and even their ethics. He is willing to disagree with the leader and encourages well-conceived risk-taking.

Teamwork is often a crucial part of a business, as it is often necessary for colleagues to work together very well, and try their best in any circumstance. Team work means that people will try to cooperate, using their individual skills and providing constructive feedback, despite any personal conflict between individuals.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1. Write the benefits of teamwork.

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2. Discuss the roles of team members.

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7.3 EFFECTIVENESS OF TEAMWORK

Teams do not become effective overnight. Team building is a process that requires due attention and care .To build, lead, or participate in a team requires an understanding of the stages of team development. The most effective teamwork happens where individual contributors harmonise their efforts and work toward a common goal. Teams need a leader who is accessible, who listens and values their input, deals with problems promptly and who recognises them for the job well done. It is important to have a clearly defined set of roles and responsibilities for each member of a team. In a good team all members take responsibility for their own respective obligations as well as for the overall completion of organisational goal. Effective teams are willing to try a new solution to an old problem. Besides, they conduct regular team meetings to

discuss about on-going activities and fresh assignments. The differences of opinion should not be discouraged because new ideas and solutions are likely to crop up from these differences. The following are important characteristics of effective teamwork:

- i. An effective teamwork creates unified commitment for goal achievement.
- ii. In effective teamwork every team member participates in the process of exploring solutions to problems.
- iii. There must be open communication, that is face-to-face communication among all members of the group.
- iv. A team should have a built-in-decision making system in order to address all situations promptly and effectively.
- v. An effective team is able to gather information from each member and formulate that information into a response.

7.3.1 Characteristics of High Performance Teams

Effective teamwork is an important aspect of an organisation's success. Successful teams have the following characteristics:

- Develop strong relationships and incorporate effective group processes.
- Work together to establish and meet the agreed upon goals.
- Have relationships that are based on commitment, cooperation and trust.
- Foster team members' participation, satisfaction, learning and growth.

The development of high-performance teams takes the combined efforts of visionary leaders and motivated team members. The following lists the characteristics that comprise high performance teams:

- The team has a common focus including clear and understandable goals, plans of action, and ways to measure success.
- Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined for each team member.
- Each member has clearly defined expectations of other members.
- The team fully utilises its resources, both internal and external.
- Members value each other's differences in healthy and productive ways.
- Each member is able to give, receive and elicit necessary feedback.
- The team members manage their meetings in a productive way.
- The team is able to reach goals by achieving the necessary results.

To build an effective team, a leader needs to establish an organisational environment in which individual team members can reflect upon and analyse relationships with other team members. A leader should encourage the resolution of any conflicts through healthy, professional interactions, and willingly and openly negotiate necessary conciliations.

Several factors within an organisation influence team effectiveness, including its organisational culture, level of autonomy and types of feedback mechanisms. But the factors that influence the effectiveness of a team most stem from its internal structure and processes:

- o **Structural factors:** These include team or group type, size and composition of skills and abilities.
- o **Team processes:** These include stages of team development, cultural norms, roles, cohesiveness, and interpersonal processes such as trust development, facilitation, influence, leadership communication and conflict resolution.

In an effective team, the members need to exhibit skills like openness, trust and respect. Team members should be willing to get to know each other and open up about themselves. Constructive feedback and mutual respect rather than blaming one another will help a team to achieve results much faster.

7.4 IMPEDIMENTS TO EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK

Problems can arise in any team that will hurt its effectiveness. There are impediments to developing an effective team atmosphere, hence, organisations need to identify barriers to teamwork. Significant barriers to teamwork are two. One, the absence of trust among team members and second, failure to deal with conflict within a team. In addition, the following factors are critical impediments to team effectiveness:

- Lack of relevant team expertise in composition of team.
- Lack of clear instructions to guide team dynamics.
- Lack of shared vision and purpose.

Poor communication, unclear goals, lack of managerial involvement, ego problems, bad leadership and personality clashes are some other impediments to effective teamwork. Research on teamwork highlights the following seven barriers to effective team functioning viz.

- Lack of team purpose and tasks;
- Lack of freedom and responsibility;
- Too many members or the wrong members;
- An individual-focused organisation;
- Team processes are neglected rather than developed;
- Directive instead of facilitative leaders; and
- Conflict with other teams.

In addition to the above institutional barriers, teams generally face the following problems:

- Team members are not willing to give up past practices or overcome attraction for power and position.

- Not all team members have the ability, knowledge or skill to contribute to the organisational performance.
- As team members, employees often face conflicts or challenges to their own personal beliefs.

When the above institutional and individual barriers are effectively addressed by the teams, they become more successful. It is possible only through the application of effective behavioral training and constant evaluation. Teams need to overcome some of the real problems that encounter them. There are five key areas of the team that should be closely monitored and periodically measured. These are: 1. team mission 2. goal achievement 3. empowerment 4. open and honest communication, and 5. positive roles and norms. Control of the above functions makes teams effective and contributes to enhance organisational performance.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1. Explain the important characteristics of effective teamwork.

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2. Explain the impediments to effective teamwork.

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7.5 CONCLUSION

Teams have emerged as the most important group phenomenon in organisations. Today, teams are becoming increasingly popular as a result of advanced information technology and the concern for total quality management and the organisation learning processes.

Teamwork is the collaborative effort of a team to achieve a common goal or to complete a task in the most effective and efficient way. The movement for team work commenced due to the Hawthorne Studies, conducted in the 1920s and 1930s, that highlighted the positive aspects of team work in organisational setting. Teams do not work without teamwork. A real teamwork has positive attitudes and behavioral patterns. Teamwork involves building relationships and working with other people using a number of important skills and habits. Teamwork provides a host of benefits at workplace.

An effective team can help an organisation achieve incredible results. Team building is a process that requires great attention and care. Successful teams develop strong working relationships by ensuring defined roles, accountability and clear and proactive communications. The development of high performance teams takes the combined efforts of visionary leaders and motivated team members. Despite the significance of teamwork in organisations, there are some impediments to effective team atmosphere. Therefore, organisations need to identify the impediments and adopt behavioral training and evaluation system in the organisation.

7.6 GLOSSARY

- Team** : A group of people who are united under a leader to achieve common organisational goals.
- Group** : A group consists of people who work together, formally or informally within or outside an organisation, with flexibility and for achieving broader objectives.
- Teamwork** : It is the collaborative effort of a team to achieve a common goal or task in the most effective and efficient way.
- Contributor** : He is a task-oriented team member.
- Brain Storming** : It is one way that groups come up with the solution to problem. It brings effective ideas and solutions for teams issues.

7.7 REFERENCES

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7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Your answer should include the following points:

- Fosters creativity and learning
- Blends complementary strengths
- Builds trust
- Teaches conflict resolution skills
- Promotes a wider sense of ownership
- Encourages healthy risk-taking
- Teamwork creates synergy

2. Your answer should include the following points:

- Contributor
- Collaborator
- Communicator
- Challenger

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1. Your answer should include the following points:

- It develops strong relationship and group processes.
- It establishes and meets the agreed upon goals.
- Teamwork is based on commitment, cooperation and trust.
- It encourages team members' participations, satisfaction, learning and growth.

2. Your answer should include the following points:

- Lack of relevant team expertise in composition of team.
- Lack of clear instructions to guide team dynamics.
- Lack of shared vision and purpose.
- Barriers to effective team functioning.
- Individual problems of the teams.