

Introduction to Teams

What is a team anyway?

Take a few moments and write down some examples of teams. While you are doing this, list features that would distinguish a team from an ordinary group of people.



Most people have encountered teams in various forms - whether as amateur or professional sports teams, the 'sales team' at a local car dealership, or the 'rapid response team' on a television medical drama. *Do you agree that these are valid examples of "teams?" Did you come up with better ones?*

As with the term "quality," a universal *definition* of "team" would be difficult to devise. Here is one that we believe is useful:

A team is a *small number* of people with *complementary skills* who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves *mutually accountable*¹

On first reading, this sounds reasonable to most people. To better understand the implications, however, answer the following questions for yourself.

What is meant by "a small number"? Is two too few? Is nine (e.g., baseball) too many? Is there something important about how a team works that can't happen with a "large number" of people? Why should team members (e.g., a sports team) have complementary skills rather than identical skills? Does every member of a team really need to have common goals? Will significantly overlapping goals serve just as well? What is the difference between purpose and performance goals? If team members have complementary (i.e., different) skills, isn't that inconsistent with a "common approach?" How is "mutual accountability" handled? Shouldn't there be one "boss" to set the team's goals, to define the rules of interaction, to evaluate the performance, and to give rewards or punishments?

The material in this and following sections of the Workbook are designed to introduce students to a set of 'tools' that will facilitate a team's 'common approach' developing the 'common approach'

Making Teams Out of Groups

We have introduced the idea of a team and begun with a definition of what a team is. Through the rest of this section we will discuss why and how teams are important in both the academic and work environments, learn what to expect during the formation and working life of a team, and learn strategies for maximizing a team's success.

¹ 1. Jon R. Katzenbach & Douglas K. Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-performance Organization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1993.

Introduction to Teams

What kinds of teams are there?

This lists some of the places teams are found and gives a rationale for *studying* how to become a team (It doesn't just 'happen'!).

In Industry / Business:

- Management teams (Team Xerox, San Diego Zoo)
- Continuous Quality Improvement teams (CQI)
- Design/Build teams (Chrysler H-car, Boeing 777)

In Academia:

- Cooperative learning
 - Short-term groups
 - Long-term groups
 - Base groups
- Project-based courses
 - Single-discipline teams
 - Multi-disciplinary teams
- Design Courses
 - Technical multi-disciplinary teams
 - Cross-functional teams (marketing, engineering, law, etc.)
- Other
 - A Department's Faculty

"The task for us at Boeing is to provide a massive change in thinking throughout the company - this is a cultural shift, and it isn't easy!"

**Phil Condit,
Executive Vice
President
Boeing Commercial
Airplanes**

**You will be *hired* for your technical knowledge (or your ability to learn).
You will be *promoted* based on the quality of your communication skills.
You will be *fired* because of your lack of 'people skills.'**

-An 'old saw'

Recent numbers being quoted indicate that as many as 90% of the employee dismissals in large corporations are because the dismissed employee lacks interpersonal skills - they have a hard time working with fellow employees.

How Teams Handle Tasks (and why students are wary of working in teams)

Most of the problems facing society today consist of divisible, optimizing, conjunctive tasks that will be solved only by teams of people, working together. [If these terms are unfamiliar to you, you should look them up in a dictionary before proceeding.] While it is true that there are disjunctive efforts (one person discovers a concept and all may share the insight) and additive efforts (e.g., brainstorming) that are a part of these major problems, full solutions will require the expertise of a number of people, all of whom possess different pieces of the solution initially (i.e., they are primarily conjunctive efforts).

Introduction to Teams

Classification of Tasks :

1. Can the task be **SUBDIVIDED**?
Is it Divisible,
or Unitary (Indivisible)?
2. What is the **GOAL** of the task?
Is it to Optimize quality,
or Maximize quantity?
3. How are **INDIVIDUAL EFFORTS** related to the team's performance?
Is it Conjunctive -All team members must contribute to the task
Disjunctive -If one gets it, then all get it (eureka/non-eureka)
Additive -Rope tug, stuffing envelopes
Compensatory - One person's extra effort makes up for another's reduced effort
Discretionary - Team decides how individual efforts relate to team performance

If you have ever worked in a group before, try to recall if you have ever worked in any or all of the styles listed under #3. Most students have experienced 'compensatory' effort in group work. *If you have ever worked in a group exhibiting 'compensatory effort' was it your reduced effort that someone else made up for, or was it someone else's reduced effort that you made up for? How did this make you feel about working in this group?* The experience of having to make up for someone who doesn't 'pull their weight' in group work makes most students are hesitant about group activity - in fact they may strenuously object to being asked to work in groups again.

For successful team operation in academia, it is the responsibility of the instructors to structure the team's objective so that it requires the effort of everyone on the team. In cooperative learning, this is called building group interdependence.

Do Employers Want Team Skills in their Employees? How Do We Know?

What do you think industry expects of its new hires? Do you think that employers expect new hires to have team skills, or do you think they prefer to "train them up right" internally? Write a list of expectations you would have for new hires if you were managing a team effort in a local technology firm.



The United States Department of Labor surveyed employers to find out what they were looking for in their employees². The study addressed their needs for all employees, not

² *Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want*, American Society for Training and Development and U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 1988.