

# Groups, Teams, and Leadership

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## Abstract

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

Key words: group, team, leadership

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## Background

The word team is a convenient label for almost any collection of people who assemble together for whatever purpose or period of time and yet there is a vast difference between these groups and the world of a real team. Real teams have design features and characteristics that set them apart from groups. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) summed this up neatly with their definition of a team: A team is a small number of people with complementary skills, who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable

When Dumaine (1990) asked, "Who needs a boss?" in his Fortune article, he indicated that well designed teams may be the productivity breakthrough of the decade. This comment culminated in systematic interest in groups and their impact on productivity begun with the Hawthorne studies (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). Since that time, through intuitive responses to experience and systematic collection of empirical data, groups played an important role in the study of organization behavior and performance. Throughout the last half of the 20th century, academicians extolled groups while practitioners used groups more widely than ever before (Brown, 2000). The 21st century began with an even wider use of groups and concern for teamwork.

An increasing body of literature distinguishes between groups and teams suggesting that teams are more effective than groups. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) provide a clear distinction between work groups and teams. A work group is a collection of people working in the same area or placed together to complete a task. The group's performance is the result of people coming together to share information, views and insights. The focus of groups is individual performance and actions within are geared toward it. All teams are groups, but teams are a special subset of groups. Teams require individual and mutual accountability whereas groups do not. It is helpful to identify the characteristics of teams and groups, noting which are common to both.

## Groups vs Teams

One common characteristic is accountability. Based on the definitions above, however, group members are concerned with and are measured by individual accountability. Team members hold themselves to be mutually accountable. Likewise, both groups and teams have a sense of shared purpose (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). The group's purpose is essentially that of the organization while the team's purpose is jointly determined and planned with management (Zenger & Associates, 1994).

All groups have formal rules and norms. Leaders of work groups are most often managers based on hierarchical positions. Teams have a leadership role shared by team members (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Katz (1997) describes a high performing team as one that is empowered, self-directed, and cross-functional to have complementary skills. In addition, team members are committed to working together and achieving their agreed upon common goal. To accomplish this, they work collaboratively by respecting team members. Such high-powered teams result in on-going learning as team members collaboratively work on agreed upon problems. Moreover, these teams exude creativity in reaching their goals and producing their joint outputs. Teams performing at this level resemble communities of practice (Lesser & Storck, 2001; Stewart, 1996; Wenger, 1998). Teams have collective work products requiring joint contributions of members (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993) while typical work group members produce individual work outputs.

These characteristics suggest that groups are focused to accomplish imposed tasks under the strong management of a supervisor. Individual performance and evaluation is the basis for determining success. Thus, groups can be very useful and important to organizations as they can complete critical tasks. Teams are also important and can perform at higher levels than typical work groups. (Majchrzak & Wang, 1996; Mulvey, Veiga & Elsass, 1996.) This higher performance level is the result of a greater synergy resulting from collaboration and jointly produced outputs rather than a pooling of individual outputs (Katz, 1997). The more informal environment within which team members work, and which also allows for communities of practice to develop resulting in on-going learning and creative applications, enhances the vitality of teams.

Teams by their very nature can't be big therefore a real team has a definable membership, typically fewer than 12. Teams bring together complementary skills and experience that exceed those of any individual on the team. The different perspectives, knowledge, skills and strengths of each member are identified and used, by comparison most groups are extremely rigid, and members usually have assigned roles and tasks that don't change.

The actions of members are interdependent and coordinated. Members have a shared sense of unity and consciously identify with the team and each other. Individuals use "we" rather than "me."

## Respective Environments

Zenger and Associates (1994) suggest several differences in the environments of typical work groups and teams. In the typical work environment a manager determines and plans the work of his/her subordinates and the jobs (tasks) are narrowly defined, whereas in the team environment the manager collaborates with subordinates as peers and jointly establishes and plans the work. Thus, the skill set required is broader, providing for individual growth and development, often accomplished within the context of cross training and working directly with other team members. Moreover, this learning process is continuous and is part of the culture of the unit. Because joint accountability exists, people work together, rather than working individually on specific tasks as happens more traditionally. Rewards are based on individual performance in typical environments where the managers determine the best processes to be used. In team environments, however, rewards are based on both individual performance and the individual's contribution to the team's overall performance while all members are directly involved in continuous improvement.

## Team, Working Group or Neither

Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith in their 1993 book *The Wisdom of Teams* provide excellent, very usable distinctions among the kinds of groups currently operating in organizations.

### Working group

No significant incremental performance need or opportunity that would require it to become a team. The members interact primarily to share information, best practices, or perspectives and to make decisions to help each individual perform within his or her area of responsibility. There is no call for either a team approach or a mutual accountability requirement.

### Pseudo-team

This is a group for which there could be a significant, incremental performance need or opportunity, but it has not focused on collective performance and is not really trying to achieve it. It has no interest in shaping a common purpose or set of performance goals, even though it may call itself a team. Pseudo-teams are the weakest of all groups in terms of performance impact. In pseudo-teams, the sum of the whole is less than the potential of the individual parts. They almost always contribute less to company performance needs than working groups because their interactions detract from each member's individual performance without delivering any joint benefits.

### Potential team

There is a significant, incremental performance need, and it really is trying to improve its performance impact. Typically it requires more clarity about purpose, goals, or work products and more discipline in hammering out a common working approach. It has not yet established collective accountability.

### Real team.

This is a small number of people with complementary skills who are equally committed to a common purpose, goals, and working approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. Real teams are a basic unit of performance. The

possible performance impact for the real team is significantly higher than the working group.

### High-performance team.

This is a group that meets all the conditions of real teams and has members who are also deeply committed to one another's personal growth and success. That commitment usually transcends the team. The high performance team significantly outperforms all other like teams, and outperforms all reasonable expectations given its membership. It is a powerful possibility and an excellent model for all real and potential teams.

## Leadership theories

From Mahatma Gandhi to Winston Churchill to Martin Luther King, there are as many leadership styles as there are leaders. The search for the characteristics or traits of leaders has been ongoing for centuries. Leadership has been described as the "process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task." (Chemers, 1997). Interest in leadership increased during the early part of the twentieth century. Early leadership theories focused on what qualities distinguished between leaders and followers, while subsequent theories looked at other variables such as situational factors and skill levels. Northouse (2007) defined leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal while many different leadership theories have emerged; most can be classified as one of eight major types:

### Great Man Theories

Great man theories assume that the capacity for leadership is inherent – that great leaders are born not made. These theories often portray great leaders as heroic, mythic and destined to rise to leadership when needed. The term "Great Man" was used because, at the time, leadership was thought of primarily as a male quality, especially in terms of military leadership.

### Trait Theories

Similar in some ways to "Great Man" theories, trait theories assume that people inherit certain qualities and traits that make them better suited to leadership. Trait theories often identify particular personality or behavioral characteristics shared by leaders. If particular traits are key features of leadership, then how do we explain people who possess those qualities but are not leaders? This question is one of the difficulties in using trait theories to explain leadership.

### Contingency Theories

Contingency theories of leadership focus on particular variables related to the environment that might determine which particular style of leadership is best suited for the situation. According to this theory, no leadership style is best in all situations. Success depends upon a number of variables, including the leadership style, qualities of the followers and aspects of the situation (Fielder, 1996).

Fiedler (1996) developed a contingency or situational theory of leadership. Fiedler postulates that three important situational dimensions are assumed to influence the leader's effectiveness. They are:

- Leader-member relations: the degree of confidence the subordinates have in the leader. It also includes the loyalty shown the leader and the leader's attractiveness.
- Task structure: the degree to which the followers' jobs are routine as contrasted with non routine.
- Position power: the power inherent in the leadership position. It includes the rewards and punishments typically associated with the position, the leader's formal authority (based on ranking in the managerial hierarchy), and the support that the leader receives from supervisors and the overall organization.

### Situational Theories

Situational theories propose that leaders choose the best course of action based upon situational variables. Different styles of leadership may be more appropriate for certain types of decision-making.

### Behavioral Theories

Behavioral theories of leadership are based upon the belief that great leaders are made, not born. Rooted in behaviorism, this leadership theory focuses on the actions of leaders not on mental qualities or internal states. According to this theory, people can learn to become leaders through teaching and observation.

### Participative Theories

Participative leadership theories suggest that the ideal leadership style is one that takes the input of others into account. These leaders encourage participation and contributions from group members and help group members feel more relevant and committed to the decision-making process. In participative theories, however, the leader retains the right to allow the input of others.

### Management Theories

Management theories, also known as transactional theories, focus on the role of supervision, organization and group performance. These theories base leadership on a system of rewards and punishment. Managerial theories are often used in business; when employees are successful, they are rewarded; when they fail, they are reprimanded or punished.

## Relationship theories

Relationship theories, also known as transformational theories, focus upon the connections formed between leaders and followers. Transformational leaders motivate and inspire people by helping group members see the importance and higher good of the task. These leaders are focused on the performance of group members, but also want each person to fulfill his or her potential. Leaders with this style often have high ethical and moral standards.

According to Bass (1985, 1990) transformational leadership occurs when a leader transforms, or changes, his or her followers in three important ways that together result in followers trusting the leader, performing behaviors that contribute to the achievement of organizational goals, and being motivated to perform at a high level. Transformational leaders:

- Increase subordinates' awareness of the importance of their tasks and the importance of performing well.

- Make subordinates aware of their needs for personal growth, development, and accomplishment.
- Motivate their subordinates to work for the good of the organization rather than exclusively for their own personal gain or benefit.

### Leadership and Organisations

Leaders emerge from within the structure of the informal organization. Their personal qualities, the demands of the situation, or a combination of these and other factors attract followers who accept their leadership within one or several overlay structures. Instead of the authority of position held by an appointed head or chief, the emergent leader wields influence or power. Influence is the ability of a person to gain co-operation from others by means of persuasion or control over rewards. Power is a stronger form of influence because it reflects a person's ability to enforce action through the control of a means of punishment. (Knowles & Saxberg, 1971)

A leader is a person who influences a group of people towards a specific result. It is not dependent on title or formal authority. (Bennis, 1989; Ogbornia, 2007) defines an effective leader as an individual with the capacity to consistently succeed in a given condition and be viewed as meeting the expectations of an organization or society. Leaders are recognized by their capacity for caring for others, clear communication, and a commitment to persist. An individual who is appointed to a managerial position has the right to command and enforce obedience by virtue of the authority of his position. However, she or he must possess adequate personal attributes to match this authority, because authority is only potentially available to him/her. In the absence of sufficient personal competence, a manager may be confronted by an emergent leader who can challenge her/his role in the organization and reduce it to that of a figurehead. However, only authority of position has the backing of formal sanctions. It follows that whoever wields personal influence and power can legitimize this only by gaining a formal position in the hierarchy, with commensurate authority. (Knowles & Saxberg, 1971)

### An Up-to-Date Understanding of Leadership

Good leaders are made not born. If you have the desire and willpower, you can become an effective leader. Good leaders develop through a never ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience (Jago, 1982).

Within all of these theories, frameworks, and approaches to leadership, there's an underlying message that leaders need to have a variety of factors working in their favor. Effective leadership is not simply based on a set of attributes, behaviors, or influences. You must have a wide range of abilities and approaches that you can draw upon.

Having said this, however, there's one leadership style that is appropriate in very many corporate situations – that of transformational leadership. A leader using this style:

- Has integrity.
- Sets clear goals.
- Clearly communicates a vision.
- Sets a good example.
- Expects the best from the team.
- Encourages.
- Supports.
- Recognizes good work and people.
- Provides stimulating work.
- Helps people see beyond their self-interests and focus more on team interests and needs.
- Inspires.

In short, transformational leaders are exceptionally motivating, and they're trusted. When your team trusts you, and is really "fired up" by the way you lead, you can achieve great things!

Having said that Transformational Leadership suits very many circumstances in business, we need to remember that there may be situations where it's not the best style. This is why it's worth knowing about the other styles shown below so that you have a greater chance of finding the right combination for the situation you find yourself in.

### Cross-Functional Cooperation and the Project Manager

Most projects have long required a team that includes members of different functional groups or members with diverse backgrounds. The cultures of their departments and differentiated manner in viewing the world often combine to make it extremely difficult to achieve cross-functional cooperation. Because cross-functional teams can greatly facilitate the successful implementation of projects, it is critical to better understand the mechanisms and motivations by which members of different functional groups are willing to collaborate on projects. Research suggests that four antecedent constructs can be important in accomplishing cross-functional team effectiveness (Pinto, Pinto, and Prescott, 1993):

- Super ordinate goals. The need to create goals that are urgent and compelling, but whose accomplishment requires joint commitment and cannot be done by any individual department.
- Accessibility. Project team members from different functional departments cooperate when they perceive that other team members are accessible, either in person or over the telephone or e-mail system.
- Physical proximity. Project team members are more likely to cooperate when they are placed within physically proximate locations. For example, creating a project office or "war room" can enhance their willingness to cooperate.
- Formal rules and procedures. Project team members receive formal mandates or notification that their cooperation is required.

Cross-functional/multifunctional members of the project team can present a challenge for harmonious and enthusiastic teamwork, but able leadership can overcome the challenge (Rao, 2001). Cross-functional teams have been found particularly useful the greater the novelty or technical complexity of the project (Tidd & Bodley, 2002).

### Project Teams and the Project Manager

Organizations of the future are relying more and more on project teams for success. This movement implies that the team-building processes themselves may be a sub objective of the project (Bubshait & Farooq, 1999). One important discovery in team research in recent years has been the work of Gersick (1988; 1989), who investigated the manner in which groups evolve and adapt to each other and to the problem for which they were formed.

Her research suggests that the old heuristic of forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman, 1965) that has been used to guide group formation and development for decades does not stand close scrutiny when examined in natural settings. Rather, coining a term from the field of biology, punctuated equilibrium, she found that groups tend to derive their operating norms very quickly, working at a moderate pace until approximately the midpoint of the project, at which time a sense of urgency, pent-up frustrations, and a desire to re-address unacceptable group norms lead to an internal upheaval.

### Leadership and Team Building

Leadership, management and team building, while all closely allied, are sufficiently different in the project environment that they require special study. The old image of a powerful project personality with a burning vision of the future state rounding up the troops and charging off to Nirvana is hardly consistent with modern management thinking.

The concepts of how best to function while in charge of an organization or enterprise have steadily evolved over the last fifty years. According to Dilenschneider (1991) over the decades may be there has been a progression from administrative command to "team leadership, a change driven by an enlightened work force and need to be fiercely competitive. Several authors attempts to actually define leadership, they agreed that vision is a primary ingredient. After that it may be variously: passion, integrity, curiosity, daring, practical values, awareness, timing, objectivity, empowerment and motivation, articulation (Batten, 1989; Bennis, 1989; Dilenschneider, 1991).

In the interests of maximizing competitive productivity, the presumption is that those who are being led are being motivated to follow rather than coerced to do so. Interestingly by way of contrast, the European view on leadership is simply that whoever is at the head of the pack is a leader, regardless of whether the pack is motivated to follow voluntarily. Good managers do the things right whereas Good leadership does the right thing. Therefore, in the interests of effectiveness or efficiency, consensus will remain a vital tool for dealing with visionary and strategic issues, requiring more effort spent in gathering intelligence. However, an increasing number of performance issues will be determined by consent-style opinion voting within the team.

A number of the characteristics of a leader fall into a greater category that many of the leading executives of today refer to as Emotional Intelligence. Achieving this level of leadership will inspire those around them and lead their teams to great heights.

### Conclusion

Teams are flexible, performing different task and maintenance functions as required. Roles and tasks may change depending upon the expertise and experience most pertinent to the work being performed. Members share the common task and have clearly defined objectives for which members are individually and collectively accountable. A team has a sense of shared purpose with a clear understanding of what constitutes the team's mission.

While leadership is learned, the skills and knowledge processed by the leader can be influenced by his or her attributes or traits, such as beliefs, values, ethics, and character. Knowledge and skills contribute directly to the process of leadership, while the other attributes give the leader certain characteristics that make him or her unique. Good leaders often switch instinctively between styles, according to the people they lead and the work that needs to be done. Establish trust – that's the key to this process – and remember to balance the needs of the organization against the needs of your team.

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