Nature of teams
There has been a major trend towards teamworking in many business organisations in recent years. It is most widely and effectively used in Japanese companies but its potential benefits are now recognised worldwide. Teams are created to undertake large units of work compared with complete ‘division of labour’ where each individual worker specialises in a small unit of work.

Composition The make-up of the team is an essential element to its success. Each team member must be committed to the work of the group and its eventual success in meeting goals. Appropriate workers must be allocated to each team and the actual make-up of each team will depend on its central aim or purpose. For example, if in a manufacturing business the team is a ‘production process improvement team’, it should have representatives from each stage of the production process. If a customer service organisation is aiming to set up a ‘quality circle team’ to improve customer service, then team members should be taken from each stage of the customer service process, from initial enquiry to after sales service.

Personalities must be considered too. It goes without saying that effective teams are made up of members who are able to work positively with each other. Personality or ego clashes should be avoided, as they will weaken the whole team. When composing a team, each potential member should be assessed for their ability to work co-operatively with other members.

Interaction Team members working together will need to interact frequently. Lines of communication must be both formal and informal and two-way. Interaction will only be effective if each team has clear objectives that are agreed upon and understood by each member, and if communication is clear and honest. Successful interaction will lead to members feeling able to bring a wide range of issues forward for discussion and any conflicts should be openly raised and sorted out.

Shared objectives A team can only work well if there are clear and agreed objectives to work towards. Senior managers should communicate clearly to each team the expectations for the team’s performance and for the outcomes. Team members must know why the team was created and how its success will be judged. If these conditions are met, then the chances of the team working together to achieve these goals will be much greater. Team members cannot work to ‘individual targets or agendas’ – the shared objectives of each team should be the focal point for all team members.
Characteristics of effective teams

Commitment  Do team members want to work in the team and do they feel that the purpose of the team is worthwhile? If the answer to either question is NO – then the level of motivation of some team members will be low and the work of the team will suffer. Other factors that will determine the level of commitment of team members include: Do team members expect to be recognised for their contribution? Are team members excited and challenged by the opportunity to work within the team and work towards its objectives? Without real motivation and genuine commitment from each team member, the work of the group will be less effective than it could be.

Participation  Teamworking is likely to work best with a participative management style and culture. Work-related problems often require the contribution and participation of all team members before an effective solution can be found and this is much more likely when workers are experienced in contributing to discussions. If workers have only ever been used to a directive style of leadership, then they will find it very difficult to adopt a very different approach when put into teams.

Trust  By creating teams, senior managers need to show trust in the groups and their members. There is little point in setting up a structure of teams if no authority is to be delegated to them and if the team members are not going to be empowered. This process requires senior managers to hand over some direct control to the teams and show trust in their ability to meet the agreed objectives that should have been clearly communicated. The ability to trust teams is also most likely when the senior management adopt a democratic or participative style of leadership.

Decision by consensus  The participative style of leadership leads to empowerment of teams and to the teams making decisions by consensus – i.e. agreements made with the support and active participation of the team members. This should lead to each team member feeling empowered and important and this will likely result in greater commitment from all members.

Flexibility  Teams will usually be more flexible and more able to respond to changed circumstances than an organisation that only uses a hierarchical structure, with no group involvement. Teams are smaller units than the organisation as a whole and this can lead to quick decisions and rapid responses to new circumstances. So, for example, if there is a hold up in supplies of a vital component from a supplier, team members could agree to work on another stage of production and return to the stage needing the component when it eventually arrives. The team could make such a decision very quickly.

Encouragement  Good teams will support and encourage each other. Team spirit can be a very powerful influence, and identifying with one’s team can lead to great loyalty and mutual support. Look at how members of successful sports teams support and encourage each other during periods of great success – or, during periods of stress. This is a very significant advantage of teamworking.

Support and growth  Teams need support from senior management. They not only need clear objectives and transparent forms of assessment, but also adequate training and resources to be able to complete their tasks successfully. Effective teams will often be given further, expanded opportunities to display their team spirit, and the chances of achieving growth in this way can be a motivating factor for all team members.

Causes of conflict and strategies to manage conflict

Conflict is a natural disagreement resulting from individuals or groups that differ in attitudes, values or needs.

Conflict means disagreement that can be counter-productive. Some disagreements can be positive – open and honest discussions about different views can result in a final and agreed solution that is acceptable to all groups. Conflict applies to those disagreements that lead to lack of understanding of each others views and that can result in negative differences of opinion that cannot be resolved.
Possible causes of conflict

Management style  An abrasive, directive management style can result in disagreements that cannot be resolved because teams or individuals have no way of expressing their views and feelings to senior management.

Competition for scarce resources  Functional departments and work teams will not be able to receive all of the resources they believe they need to achieve their objectives. If senior managers allocate resources to one division or department at the expense of others, then this will lead to conflict, disagreements and misunderstandings.

Lack of communication  Poor communication channels – often associated with directive styles of management – can often lead to conflict. Misunderstandings caused by lost messages, confused messages or the absence of two-way communication channels can all lead to unnecessary conflict within an organisation.

Clash of personalities  Successful organisations need people with strong and distinctive personalities to accept risks, take decisions, market products in competitive environments and deal with customers’ complaints. On occasions, these personalities can clash over important – or petty – issues and the inability to back down or even see the other’s viewpoint can lead to bad relationships and lack of progress for the whole organisation. A typical case of personality clash can be between senior managers and senior trade union representatives and these can contribute to conflicts and disputes between workers, their representatives and management.

Strategies to manage conflict

Avoidance  When the issues causing conflict are quite trivial then the strategy of ‘avoidance’ might be most appropriate. Both parties agree to ignore the conflict and hope that it will go away. If the conflict is pursued, instead of being avoided, then the losses to both parties involved could outweigh any gains from ‘winning or compromising’ the conflict. Another possible reason for avoidance is that both parties lack the negotiating skills to reach win–win resolutions (which would benefit both parties).

Smoothing  One of the people or teams involved in the conflict adopt a ‘me last’ approach to the problem and they make every effort to accommodate the other person/team. Smoothing, therefore, takes the heat out of the conflict and avoids damaging the relationship between the parties involved. In effect, one side is prepared to ‘back down’. This approach to dispute resolution might be most effective when the issues involved are quite minor, when there is a danger of permanent damage to the relationships between the people involved and when tempers are too enflamed for any other form of resolution to work.

Compromise  Both parties will gain something by accepting a ‘mid-way’ solution that does not fully satisfy either group. The principle behind this method of conflict resolution is that ‘some gain is better than none’. This approach is most likely to be employed when both sides have equal power and influence and no overall ‘winner’ is likely. It could also be most effective when an ideal solution is not essential, when both parties need to be seen to gain something or when a temporary solution to a complex problem is needed for any work at all to continue.

Collaboration  This approach, or co-operation, can lead to the conflict actually proving to be beneficial, as it leads to an improved working relationship in the longer term. By working together to find a solution both sides will win. Collaboration can lead to the cause of the conflict being handled in an open and honest manner and equal consideration will be given to peoples’ needs and the need for results. This method is most likely to be adopted when both parties have similar objectives, when they are both trained in problem-solving methods and when the original conflict arose from a simple misunderstanding or lack of communication.

Confrontation  This is the most competitive of the ways to approach a conflict. Both parties consider that reaching their goals is more important than showing concern for other people. One group will win and the other lose if this is the only method used to tackle the conflict. It is most commonly adopted when both parties need to reach a quick result, when they are prepared to use the power and influence that they possess and when there is a struggle for power between the teams involved.
Advantages and disadvantages of working in teams

**Advantages**

- Workers are likely to be better motivated as social needs and esteem needs (see Maslow) are more likely to be met. By empowering workers within teams job enrichment can be achieved (see Herzberg).
- Better motivated staff should increase productivity and reduce labour turnover – both will help to reduce business costs.
- Teamworking makes fuller use of all of the talents of the workforce. Better solutions to problems will be found as those most closely connected with the work participate in suggesting answers.
- Teamworking can reduce management costs as it is often associated with delayering of the organisation – fewer middle managers will be required.

**Disadvantages**

- Not everyone is a team player – some individuals are more effective working alone. When teams are formed this point must be considered and training may need to be offered to team members who are not used to working collaboratively in groups. Some workers may feel ‘left out’ of the team meetings unless there are good efforts to involve and encourage all team members.
- Teams can develop a set of values and attitudes that may contrast or conflict with those of the organisation itself, particularly if there is a dominant personality in the group. Teams will need clear goals and assessment procedures to ensure they are working towards the objectives of the organisation at all times.
- The introduction of teamworking will require training costs to be incurred and there may be some disruption to production as the teams establish themselves.

Benefits of team management to the organisation

- Team spirit should improve motivation of staff.
- Teams are more flexible than hierarchical systems.

- New teams can be formed and redundant teams disbanded as the needs of the organisation change.
- Management costs may be reduced as fewer middle managers and supervisory staff are required.
to changing needs and events. It recognizes the fact that people feel a need to belong to a working group, take pride in contributing to the group and want it to achieve a high performance level.

Charles Handy recognized that formal work groups or teams are established to:

- solve problems;
- improve decision making;
- manage and control work (work that is best carried out as a group task, for example);
- distribute work (in autonomous work groups members allocate tasks);
- process tasks and thereby increase efficiency and effectiveness;
- increase commitment and involvement;
- resolve conflict;
- test and ratify decisions;
- develop new ideas.

Among the benefits of teams are:

- improved performance in terms of quality, productivity, flexibility, speed and customer service;
- better job design;
- increased motivation and commitment;
- lower costs;
- increased learning;
- increased ability to attract and retain the best people;
- reduced duplication of effort;
- increased cooperation;
- improvement in the quality of decisions;
- greater flexibility;
- easier adaptation to change;
- improved relationships;
- reduction in destructive conflict;
- an opportunity for employees to perform to the best of their abilities.

### Stages in the evolution of teams

In an important article published in 1965 (‘Development Sequence in Small Groups’, Psychological Bulletin) B. W. Tuckman identified stages in the evolution of teams (see also Figure 43.1).

- **Forming** In this stage, the group members get to know one another. They discuss objectives and the composition of the group and begin to establish roles within the group. Relationships are characterized as polite but guarded and watchful.

- **Storming** This is an uncomfortable stage in which there is conflict, resistance to the demands of the task and possibly challenges to the leadership of the group. Conflict resolution will result in a redefinition of aims and roles within the group.

- **Norming** This is the stage at which members begin to fully cooperate with each other. Norms are established and individuals are more open with each other. Constructive criticism built on trust leads to enhanced performance.

- **Performing** The group is now mature, with a strong sense of shared objectives. Despite any remaining differences, group members work in a cooperative manner with a resulting improvement in performance. This is the stage at which the group becomes self-managing. Tasks are allocated, leadership is established, everyone understands their role and is prepared to contribute.

- **Adjourning or mourning** This presupposes that the group only needs to exist for a limited time period and can be disbanded after achievement of the objectives. This stage should be characterized by an evaluation and review of the group’s performance. Disbanding should be marked by a ceremony, such as a farewell party.

Tuckman’s work teaches us lessons about:

- selection of group/team members;
- the development of group norms;
- leadership styles in relation to the stage of development;
- the need to give space for groups to go through the stages and not to bypass any of them;
- the problems associated with change within the organization – with the breaking up of work teams we have to go through the procedure again to establish new teams.
Figure 43.1 Stages in group formation (adapted from Tucker: Group and Organizational Studies, 1977)
Figure 1: The roles of individuals in groups

**The chairperson**
- presides and co-ordinates; balanced, disciplined, good at working through others.

**The shaper**
- highly strung, dominant, extrovert, passionate about the task itself.

**The plant**
- introverted, but intellectually dominant and imaginative; a source of ideas for the group.

**The monitor-evaluator**
- analytically (rather than creatively) intelligent; dissects ideas, spots flaws; possibly aloof.

**The resource-investigator**
- popular, sociable, extrovert, relaxed; source of new contacts etc. but not an originator.

**The company worker**
- practical organiser, turning ideas into tasks; scheduling, planning etc.; trustworthy and efficient; not a leader, but an administrator.

**The team worker**
- most concerned with team maintenance; supportive, understanding, diplomatic, popular but uncompetitive.

**The finisher**
- 'chivvies' the team to meet deadlines, attends to details etc. and follows things through; not always popular.