



08 Teams and Groups

Whether or not you follow football, you'll be familiar with what a Team is - a number of people associated in some joint action (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*). Eleven players on the pitch co-operating together in the joint action of getting the ball into their opponent's net and at the same time keeping it out of their own. The team could be expanded to include the players sitting on the substitute bench, and then expanded further still to include the coaching team and other support staff. Clearly that model can be applied to the workplace.

A Group, on the other hand, is defined as 'a number of persons in a certain relationship, or having a certain degree of similarity. So our football team or any Team may be described as a Group. However, not all Groups may be described as a Team, because not all Groups are associated in some joint action. They may be contributing to a common goal, but not engaged in a joint activity - for example, each country's Davis Cup squad is a Group. Acknowledging this bit of hair-splitting is important, because it influences the management of the people involved.

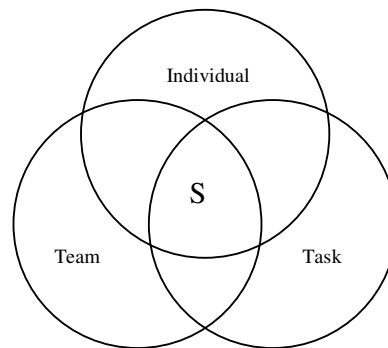
Against this background, one of the most frequent examples of misuse of the Team word is when a company refers to its management team. The Finance Director does not get involved in managing production, The Production Director doesn't run the Accounts department, so what the company has here is a Management Group - the members have a certain similarity (Directorships) and are in a certain relationship (Board members). Smaller companies, where people multi-task, may dispute my examples but hopefully the gist of the message is understood.

Managing Teams

This is usually the province of a team leader - someone who may become involved in delivering the team's purpose as well as performing a supervisory role

(sometimes referred to as an action-centred leader). The challenge to the supervisor is to maintain a good balance between maintaining a professional distance from team members (in order to be able to exert discipline) and encouraging a relaxed and productive team spirit.

In the role of the supervisor, three elements overlap to define the supervisor's responsibilities:



Because of the need to keep these three factors in balance, the best person in performing the task is not always the best choice to lead the team. Different skills are required – organisation, planning, people management – which stand apart from task-orientated expertise. In selecting an employee for the leadership role, we would also do well to note the Royal Navy's practice of never promoting an Able Seaman to be the Chief Petty Officer over his former shipmates.

Managing Groups

By my definition, the members of a group are convened for a specific purpose that has a high-level focus of common concern, for example:

- The regular board meeting to deal with company matters,
- Meetings of subordinate team leaders to deal with matters of mutual concern, such as staff management policy.



Transforming Business Performance

Management of such Groups is therefore mainly achieved by focused meetings. Individual members of the Group will be managed on a one-to-one basis and their Goals will be set at a departmental or team level. The individual will be held accountable for the output of the Team or Teams under their control.

Team and Group Dynamics

When a Team or Group is created, there are discernible stages in their development. Whenever a new member joins, those stages are experienced by both the joiner and existing members. The stages are:

- Inclusion – all members want the group to be safe, to be accepted within it and to share a common vision as to their task.
- Competition – members move into conflict as they establish a pecking order, rules are created.
- Cohesion – members begin to identify with one another, trust one another and feel a sense of belonging.
- Performance – whether in sub-groups or as a whole, members are at ease with working together and willing to take risks in problem-solving.
- Conclusion – this only happens when the team or group is closed down, for example when the project it has been working on has reached its end..

It is by no means an automatic progression from Inclusion to Performance, but recognition of what stage the group is at enables an appropriate management intervention.

Despite the best-laid plans, though, the Team doesn't always function in the way it is designed to do. This may be because of the formation of informal groups within the workforce.

Informal Groups

These will not appear on any organisational chart, because they are

unofficial bondings of employees that are not governed by formal structures.

They may well formulate their own work standards which may or may not meet those of the company. Informal groups will subtly exercise control over their members through unspoken peer pressure. If your workforce has more than two people in it, expect informal groups.

Such groups may act as a counter force to orders from on high, especially if those orders are considered to be unfair. On the other hand, they may well act as a benign influence on the formal team or the organisation as a whole.

Manage informal groups by exercising vigilance to become aware of them, deciding whether they are a force for good or ill, spotting who their leader is and taking appropriate action to influence them.

In Summary

- All Teams are Groups, but not all Groups are Teams.
- Teams tend to be managed by an 'action-centred leader' who participates in the task as well as being a supervisor.
- Groups tend to be managed by focused meetings, with individual members being accountable for the output of the Teams they are in charge of.
- Every new member of a Team or Group has to progress through the stages of Inclusion, Competition, Cohesion and Performance.
- Informal groups exist in most organisations and may usurp or support the authority of the company.

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