CHAPTER 4: 
DEVELOPING TEAMWORK SKILLS

The purpose of this chapter is to present information and self-assessment, and skill-development exercises that will assist the reader to develop teamwork skills. Being an effective team player is one of the most important sets of behaviors in the modern workplace.

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND LECTURE NOTES

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.

I. TYPES OF TEAMS
All workplace teams have the common element of people working together cooperatively and members possessing a mix of skills.

A. Self-Managing Work Teams
The best known work team is a group of workers who take over much of the responsibility for managing their own work. A self-managing work team is a small group of employees responsible for managing and performing technical tasks to deliver a product or service to an external or internal customer. The vast majority of large- and medium-size firms make some use of self-managing work teams. Such teams perform a wide variety of manufacturing and service activities.

B. Cross-Functional Teams
A cross-functional team is a work group composed of workers from different specialties, at about the same organizational level, who come together to accomplish a task. The people from different specialties are supposed to blend their talents. Cross-functional teams are widely used in product development.

C. Virtual Teams
Some teams conduct most of their work by sending electronic messages to each other rather than conducting face-to-face meetings. A virtual team is a small group of people who conduct almost all of their collaborative work by electronic communication rather than face-to-face meetings.

II. THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF TEAMS AND TEAMWORK
Teams, as well as groups in general, should not be regarded uncritically; they have both advantages and disadvantages.
A. Advantages of Group Work and Team Work
A group of knowledgeable people can bring about synergy, whereby the group’s total output exceeds the sum of each individual’s contribution. Groups help gain acceptance and commitment. Team members often critically evaluate each other’s thinking, thus avoiding major errors. Working in teams and other groups also enhances job satisfaction and need satisfaction, such as the need for affiliation.

B. Disadvantages of Group Work and Teamwork
Groups and teams often talk too much and act too little. A major problem in groups is pressure toward conformity to group standards of performance and conduct which could hurt the organization. Social loafing is the shirking of individual responsibility in a group setting. At their worst, groups foster conflict, with people bickering about matters such as doing a fair share of work. Groups can become xenophobic, thus entering into conflict with other groups.

A key potential problem is groupthink, a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment in the interest of group solidarity. Groupthink is extreme consensus.

Two conditions are important for overcoming the potential disadvantages of teams and groups. First, the members must strive to act like a team. Second, the task given to the group should require collective effort instead of being a task that could be better performed by individuals.

III. TEAM MEMBER ROLES
A major challenge in becoming an effective team member is to choose the right roles to occupy. Frequently observed positive roles are presented here.

A. Knowledge Contributor
The Knowledge Contributor provides the group with useful and valid information, and shares technical expertise with team members. A person occupying this role pays enough attention to the human element to get the task accomplished.

B. Process Observer
The process, or soft side, of teamwork includes the transactions that take place among and between team members. The Process Observer forces the group to look at how it is functioning by confronting others about the transactions taking place.

C. Collaborator
The collaborator keeps the team focused on its goal and frequently reminds the group to do whatever is necessary to stay on track.

D. People Supporter
The People Supporter assumes some of the leader’s responsibility for providing emotional support to teammates and resolving conflict. He or she serves as a model of active listening, and is a model of etiquette and professionalism.

E. Challenger
The Challenger confronts and challenges bad ideas, yet has good interpersonal skills. He or she will criticize any decision or preliminary thinking that is deficient, including ethical problems.

F. Listener
Listening is part of other roles, yet it contributes so substantially to team success that it comprises a separate role. The team leader must shift frequently into the Listener role. The Listener provides summaries for the group.

G. Mediator
The Mediator attempts to resolve conflict by asking permission to interpret each position, then makes the interpretation. Each side is given the opportunity to edit or correct the statement of his or her position. Mediation can move a group away from being stuck, and on to more productive activity.

H. Gatekeeper
When the opportunity gate for speaking is closed for several members, the Gatekeeper intentionally opens the gate. The Gatekeeper will request that a specific team member be allowed to contribute, or that his or her past contribution be recognized.

Students should not be concerned about overlap in the above roles. Instead, they should pick and choose those roles most appropriate for the situation.

IV. GUIDELINES FOR THE INTERPERSONAL ASPECTS OF TEAM PLAY
Effectiveness as a team player can be enhanced by understanding the skills, actions, and attitudes required to be an effective team player. A convenient method for classifying team activities in pursuit of goals is people-related versus task-related.

A. Trusting Team Members
The cornerstone attitude of an outstanding team player is to trust team members including the leader. Working on a team is akin to a small business partnership. Trusting team members also includes believing that their ideas are technically sound and rational until proven otherwise.

B. High Level of Cooperation and Collaboration
Cooperation and collaboration are synonymous with teamwork. Collaboration at a team level refers to working jointly with others to solve mutual problems.
Achieving a cooperative team spirit is often a question of making the first move.

C. Recognizing the Interests and Achievements of Others
A fundamental tactic for establishing oneself as a solid team player is to actively recognize the interests and achievements of others. Let others know that you care about their interests. Be prepared to compliment any tangible achievement.

D. Share the Glory
An effective team player shares praise and other rewards for accomplishment even if he or she were the most deserving. Shared praise is usually merited to some extent because teammates have probably made at least some contribution to the achievement that received praise.

E. Don’t Rain On Another Person’s Parade
We all have achievements and accomplishments that are sources of pride. Belittling the achievements of others for no legitimate reasons brings about tension and anger. Suppress your feelings of petty jealousy.

V. GUIDELINES FOR THE TASK ASPECTS OF TEAM PLAY
The task aspects of team play also make a key contribution to becoming an effective team player. A task aspect usually has interpersonal consequences.

A. Technical Expertise
*Technical* refers to the intimate details of any task, not just tasks in engineering, physical science, and information technology. To be used to advantage, the expertise must be shared. The technical expert must be able to communicate with team members in other disciplines who lack the same technical background.

B. Assuming Responsibility for Problems
The outstanding team player assumes responsibility for problems. If a problem is not yet assigned, he or she says, "I'll do it."

C. Seeing the Big Picture
Effective team players need to think conceptually, or see the big picture. The team leader who can help the group focus on the broader purpose plays a vital role.

D. Belief in Consensus
A major task-related attitude for outstanding team play is to believe that consensus has merit. **Consensus** is the general acceptance by the group of a decision, including a willingness to support the decision.

E. Focusing on Deadlines
People vary in their attitudes towards the importance of deadlines. Keeping the group focused on deadlines is valuable because meeting deadlines is vital to team success.

F. Helping Team Members Do their Jobs Better
A person’s stature as a team player will increase if he or she takes the initiative to help coworkers make needed work improvements. Identify a problem a coworker is having, and then suggest alternatives he or she might be interested in exploring.

ANSWERS TO DISCUSSION AND REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Part of being a good team player is helping other members. How can members of a workplace team help each other?

   Helping teammates can take several forms including giving assistance in solving problems, offering advice, and giving emotional support. Workload sharing when a teammate is overloaded is another important vehicle for help.

2. How do team members know when they have achieved synergy?
   Team members would know they have achieved synergy when it is apparent to them that something substantial has been accomplished that they could not have achieved working independently. Each member might think, "I could never have produced this myself."

3. What should the other team members do when they uncover a social loafer?

   A starting point would be for several, or all, the other members to discuss their perceptions of his or her social loafing with the loafer. If confrontation and problem-solving does not work, the manager to whom the team reports might be asked to intervene.

4. What is the potential downside of heavily emphasizing the Knowledge Contributor role?

   A team member who heavily emphasizes the Knowledge Contributor role can potentially annoy others by being a "know it all." If the group comes to depend on one person as a knowledge contributor, other members of the group may neglect to think for themselves.

5. Assume that you are a team member. What percent of your pay would you be willing to be based on a group reward? Explain your reasoning.

   A student who were highly committed to teamwork might be willing to go with
a high percent of pay being based on team performance. Companies that use a combination of individual and group incentives are likely to allocate about 10 to 20 percent of incentive pay on group performance, and the rest individual performance.

6. How can the Challenger role backfire for a person?

The Challenger might be perceived as a nag or needless critic who looks for the negative just to annoy teammates.

7. How effective do you think the trust fall really is in building trust among team members?

Many people are so enthusiastic about outdoor training that they uncritically accept all its techniques. It is possible that the trust fall helps people develop trust in the physical skills of team members. Yet this trust may not transfer to trusting others in intellectual and emotional areas. For example, the person who helps catch you in a group exercise might still steal credit for your ideas or feed you misinformation.

8. In recent years a number of companies have sent employees to a team building exercise in which they literally walk over hot coals. The participants receive appropriate training. (Caution, many participants in this exercise do suffer serious burns.) Why would walking over hot coals help build teamwork?

Walking over hot coals, as with other curious stunts, provides a shared experience of significance for team members. As a result they have something in common to relate, and are more likely to bond with each other.

9. The "little picture" in studying this chapter is learning details about teamwork skills. What is the "big picture"?

The big picture is acquiring knowledge and skills that will help one make a contribution to the modern, team-based organization.

10. How can a person achieve individual recognition yet still be a team player?

A strategy for achieving individual recognition in the context of being a team player is to be an outstanding contributor to the team. One approach would be to contribute outstanding alternatives during group problem solving. It also helps to tactfully inform key people outside the group of your accomplishments.
ANSWERS TO CASE QUESTIONS

*Showboat Brent*

This case illustrates the dynamics of what happens when one team member pushes hard for individual recognition at the expense of the welfare of the group.

1. Which team player roles is Brent attempting to occupy?

   Brent is attempting to be a Knowledge Contributor, as shown by his PowerPoint presentation. He is also attempting to be a Challenger, as shown by his questioning of the usefulness of a wellness center.

2. Which team player roles is Kristine attempting to occupy?

   Kristine wants to be a Knowledge Contributor as she lends her professional expertise about wellness centers, and mentions an appropriate Web site. She is also somewhat of a Process Observer in that she reported on how the group was performing the task.

3. What actions, if any, should the other task force members take to make Brent a better team player?

   During their next team meeting, the group might share their perceptions about Brent’s showboating using suggestions for stressful conversations, especially being temperate in their statements. At the same time, the task force members might compliment Brent on what he has done well.

COMMENTS ABOUT QUIZZES AND EXERCISES

*Team Player Attitudes*

A benefit of this self-assessment quiz is that it may point toward areas for development if one is to become an outstanding team player.

*Team Skills*

This quiz is useful in specifying a representative set of skills that senior managers think are important for contributing to a team.

*Team Player Roles (Quiz)*
A benefit of this self-assessment quiz is that it may help sensitize the student to the importance of playing positive roles within the group.

**Team Member Roles (Exercise)**

An important feature of this exercise is that it challenges the diagnostic skill of students. To be successful in this exercise, students should carefully study the various roles before watching the role players and making observations about the roles.

**The Trust Fall**

Although this exercise appears physically dangerous, students can be counted on to conduct it safely and with emotional maturity. My experience is that the exercise leads to sensible comments about trust, but does not lead to great revelations. It is helpful to discuss jobs for which trust in the physical capabilities of teammates is extraordinarily important. Examples include mountain climbers, divers, and fishers who take out after dangerous prey while being tethered to the boat.

**Habitat for the Homeless**

An advantage of this activity is that it showcases the importance of teamwork. Many students will enjoy the activity. However, they may need prodding to make astute comments about the level of teamwork displayed.
EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Multiple Choice

(a) 1. With a true team, the skills of members
   a. are complementary.
   b. duplicate each other’s.
   c. are developed after the team is formed.
   d. are opposite to those of the leader.

(d) 2. A distinguishing feature of a self-managing work team is that the
   a. team is appointed a leader.
   b. team has two or more members.
   c. members cooperate with each other.
   d. members manage their own activity to a large extent.

(c) 3. A cross-functional team is composed of
   a. three different project groups.
   b. two supervisors along with other team members.
   c. members from different departments.
   d. members from the same department.

(a) 4. A cross-functional team is particularly well suited to
   a. developing a new product.
   b. working on an assembly line.
   c. several specialists from the same field collaborating.
   d. the members performing independent work.

(b) 5. A typical work process of a virtual team would be for members to
   a. take refreshment breaks together.
   b. send messages to each other by e-mail.
   c. meet once per day in a conference room
   d. argue over who gets the best cubicle.

(c) 6. A key communication challenge for virtual teams is to
   a. find a nickname for the team that all members accept.
   b. motivate team members to check their e-mail.
   c. ensure that team members have precise information about work
      responsibilities.
   d. minimize team members surfing the Net most of the workday.
7. A group has achieved synergy when
   a. all members agree on a course of action.
   b. each member agrees with a problem solution.
   c. members are solving problems at an above-average rate.
   d. the total output exceeds the sum of individual contributions.

8. Group decision-making is particularly helpful in
   a. gaining acceptance and commitment for a decision.
   b. avoiding conformity in thinking.
   c. arriving at quick decisions.
   d. ensuring that everybody makes a fair contribution.

9. Groupthink takes place because group members
   a. dislike individual problem solving.
   b. strive extra hard to achieve consensus.
   c. attempt to avoid conformity.
   d. want to minimize the time spent solving problems.

10. Which one of the following is the most likely to contribute to the effectiveness of a team?
    a. team goals linked to organizational goals
    b. members working independently of each other
    c. traditional thinking on the part of team members
    d. group size of 15 or more

11. The Knowledge Contributor role in a group emphasizes
    a. achieving harmony.
    b. challenging faulty ideas.
    c. conducting research.
    d. providing useful information.

12. The Process Observer role in a group emphasizes
    a. helping the group to look at how it is functioning.
    b. observing how competitive groups are performing.
    c. providing valid information to the group.
    d. doing what is needed to achieve group goals.

13. The person who occupies the Collaborator role in a group is likely to
    a. carefully examine the group process.
    b. seek ways to hog recognition.
    c. keep the group focused on its goal.
d. form alliances with the group leader.

(b) 14. Which one of the following roles is most likely to prevent complacency and groupthink?
   a. People Supporter
   b. Challenger
   c. Listener
   d. Mediator

(c) 15. A major contributor to the Gatekeeper role is to
   a. screen new members for the group.
   b. spark the creativity of group members.
   c. bring about a balanced contribution by group members.
   d. challenge the thinking of the group.

(d) 16. The cornerstone attitude of an outstanding team player is to
   a. make sure he or she gets individual recognition.
   b. have competitive attitudes toward other groups.
   c. aspire to be the team leader.
   d. trust team members.

(a) 17. ______________ and ______________ are synonymous with teamwork.
   a. Cooperation, collaboration
   b. Independence, initiative
   c. Competition, conflict
   d. Assertiveness, satisfaction

(c) 18. An important suggestion for criticizing another person on the job is to
   a. disguise the criticism so it appears to be a compliment.
   b. make declarative statements rather than asking a question.
   c. criticize the work, not the person.
   d. criticize the person, not the work.

(c) 19. The team tactic, sharing the glory is usually justified because
   a. team-based pay has replaced individual pay.
   b. glory sharing fits the WIIFM principle.
   c. most team accomplishments require input from several members.
   d. most team members are self-centered.

(a) 20. An example of "raining on the parade" of a teammate would be to
   a. tell the person that his recent accomplishment really wasn’t a big deal.
   b. invite the person to jointly solve problems with you.
   c. tell the person he or she should replace the team leader.
d. refuse to cooperate with him or her.

(b) 21. A suggestion for making outstanding use of technical expertise as a group member is to
a. keep your expertise to yourself.
b. share the expertise.
c. impress other members with how smart you are.
d. make your best suggestions at the end of meetings.

(d) 22. A key behavior of an outstanding team member is to
a. keep technical expertise to oneself.
b. focus on the small details of team activity.
c. perform tasks within a specific area of responsibility.
d. assume responsibility for problems.

(a) 23. Seeing the big picture in a group setting involves
a. understanding what the group is attempting to accomplish.
b. assigning work roles to team members.
c. taking on major assignments.
d. criticizing group members who step out of line.

(b) 24. Consensus comes about when
a. every member agrees completely on the decision.
b. group members generally accept a decision and then give it their support.
c. group conformity reaches a peak.
d. group members practice individual decision-making.

(c) 25. Differences in perception about the importance of deadlines influences the group's
a. willingness to accept incentive pay.
b. creative problem-solving skills.
c. ability to meet deadlines.
d. willing to accept different roles.

True/False

(F) 1. An important requirement for a true team is that all members possess virtually the same skills.

(T) 2. A common characteristic of all workplace teams is that the members cooperate with each other and have a complementary set of skills.

(F) 3. Self-managing work teams are groups that come together for a brief period of
time to solve a problem, then disband.

(T) 4. A cross-functional team is composed of members from different parts of the organization.

(F) 5. Members of a cross-functional team usually represent the same functional specialty such as manufacturing or information technology.

(T) 6. A virtual team gets almost all of its collaborative work done by staying in touch with the other members electronically.

(T) 7. A challenge in relying on virtual teams is to ensure that communications among team members are precise.

(F) 8. A characteristic of an effective team is when each member checks the quality of the work produced by all the other members.

(T) 9. The size of an effective work group is usually around 6, rather than 10 or more.

(T) 10. Social loafing within a group means about the same thing as being a free rider.

(F) 11. Groupthink comes about because many of the group members strive so hard to preserve their individuality.

(T) 12. An important contributor to groupthink is when the group loses its power of critical analysis.

(F) 13. The Knowledge Contributor typically ignores the human element in a team setting because he or she is so obsessed with task accomplishment.

(T) 14. The soft side of teamwork is mostly concerned with the transactions that take place between and among the team members.

(F) 15. An important contribution of the Process Observer is to contribute to a steady flow of useful information to the group.

(T) 16. As a team player, the Collaborator is not held back by his or her official statement of responsibilities.

(T) 17. The Challenger plays an important role in preventing groupthink because he or she will challenge bad ideas.
18. One part of the mediator role is to interpret the position of each side in a dispute, and then ask both parties if the interpretation is correct.

19. A key part of the Gatekeeper role is to pass judgment on the soundness of ideas contributed by team members.

20. Part of trusting team members is to be willing to submit an unproved idea to them for their inspection.

21. When criticizing a teammate it is generally better to make a declarative statement than to ask a question such as, "Do you think that your idea could use some more research?"

22. Sharing the glory is considered a primary tactic for enhancing the task aspects of team play.

23. In order to implement the tactic, *Don’t rain on another person’s parade*, it may be necessary to suppress your feelings of petty jealousy.

24. Part of believing in consensus is to believe that an ideal solution is not always possible.

25. Meeting deadlines in a group takes place naturally because the vast majority of workers regard deadlines as a moral necessity.