

Essence of a good team



Teamwork, and its importance in a business environment, is a topic that has been extensively researched for many decades. Undertake any formal study of management, and chances are that teamwork will be on the compulsory study agenda. The importance of the topic is based on the principle that organisational goals are better achieved when employees work together rather than work as isolated individuals.

Managers, therefore, are often preoccupied in building teams where people pool their resources, that is their technical know-how and their experience.

Peter Stephenson of the Australian Management Academy said that people contribute to teams in two basic ways. Firstly, they perform a functional role that relates to their technical or specialist expertise. Secondly, they perform a team facilitation role in which they contribute to the internal workings and cohesiveness of the team. In any team, however, people do not contribute equally in this regard. Some team members provide technical knowledge, whereas others provide a problem-solving capacity, and still others provide decision-making skills.

Factors that are positively rated by managers searching for “good team people” include extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and emotional stability. The first two factors certainly lend themselves towards the team-facilitation role. It is relatively easy to think about a good team as one in which people get on together.

However, it is not necessarily the case that team behaviour should always consist of smiles and positive thinking. Diversity is generally seen as a potentially helpful factor in forging a strong team, but there are some reasons to be cautious. The type of diversity in a team that is positive is when there is a mix of skills, job roles, experience, organisational seniority and employment status. If team members were too similar in their job roles or level of seniority there may be a tendency for more competition rather than co-operation, or worse still, a syndrome of “too many chiefs and not enough indians”.

While some diversity of opinion and ideas is considered essential to ensure rational thinking within a team, too much diversity of opinion can be a problem. It can lead to less productivity and lower team cohesion if conflict arises between team members over their differences.

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