

Building and Leading Teams

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For Liz, without whom this book would not
have been possible

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Preface

As I was proofing this book, the Euro 2016 competition was happening and, despite not being a football fan, I couldn't miss the clamour about the performance of both Iceland and Wales, both teams that were seen as having little or no chance of success yet proved to be giant killers. What was significant about their performance was that (with the exception of Gareth Bale in the Wales side) they seemed to lack the kind of top drawer players that were a feature of the sides tipped for success.

What both teams had was a level of commitment, self-belief, leadership and passion that enabled them to perform much better than any one had given them credit for. This happened shortly after the England Rugby team has beaten Australia in three test matches played there, the first whitewash in their history, yet they were essentially the same people as had ignominiously been kicked out of the World Cup in England after the pool stage, including having lost to Australia, only a few months previously. They too seemed to be a different team, committed, full of self-belief and driven to succeed.

This is what this book is all about - building the kinds of workplace teams that are committed to the team, driven to succeed, with the self-belief needed to make it happen. What's more, they are led by people who share their commitment, drive and self-belief and who have the qualities needed to provide the kind of leadership they deserve. If it succeeds in building that commitment, drive and self-belief in its readers then it will have achieved all that I could hope for it.

David Pardey

July 2016

Introduction

Welcome to *Building and Leading Teams*

I am passionate about the value of teams and the importance of leadership, after years of researching the topic, learning from other researchers and discussing it with people involved in team working and team leading. I also get angry when senior managers, learning and development professionals and commentators label any group of people ‘a team’ or anyone given responsibility for them as a ‘team leader’ without realising that both have to be built and developed. A group of people doesn’t become a team simply because they are called one - there’s no magic dust to sprinkle over them to turn them into a team overnight. Equally, the position of team leader may be filled but to be a true leader takes time and effort; ultimately it’s the team that allows the person to lead them and she or he becomes a true team leader. This book is all about what’s involved in making that journey.

I was first asked to write a book called *Leading Teams* in 2003 by the Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM). Although successful, it has been out of print a for the last two years and ILM is no longer publishing books. The idea for a completely revised and updated book appealed to me, but I decided that I wanted to do it myself, and to create not just the book that I tried to write then that, due to constraints at the time, I was not fully able to do. What’s more, it meant I could bring it fully up to date with the best ideas around and also to add in the things that I have learnt since I wrote the original book. This is the result. Unlike its predecessor it focuses on both building the team and leading it, because that’s what the feedback from customers said was wanted. It also aims to meet the needs of people on a wide range of development programmes, as well as working team leaders who are taking responsibility for their own development.

I have written *Building and Leading Teams* to be accessible whilst not shying away from discussing some complex but important issues. If you are not challenged to think about some of these concepts then you will never fully understand why they are so important. Although I have drawn on some valuable sources, including books and articles

in academic journals, I have avoided using formal academic references for the simple reason that if you want to read them then you can Google the names and titles and find them perfectly well. This is not meant to be an academic textbook, written by theorists for theorists, but a practical guide to building and leading teams.

I was involved with the ILM (and its predecessor) for a large part of my career, as a consultant and, for seven years, as head of research and policy. One result of this is that I have referred to some of the research projects I undertook there, all of which are available free of charge on their website. I should also, in the interests of fairness, say that there are some equally useful research reports available from the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), also freely available.

However, many of the ideas and practices that I talk about in *Building and Leading Teams* come from research and papers that have been around for a lot longer. One of the weaknesses of much leadership and management development is its craving for novelty; if something is new it becomes the latest fad until an even newer idea comes to the fore. Why is that? I think the big problem is that too many organisations and their senior managers are looking for the quick fix solution to their problems. Building teams and developing leadership capability takes time and (as you will see in this book) requires managers to let go - to give teams the autonomy to make decisions that will improve their working practices and the quality of the goods and services they produce.

This is why some research from the middle decades of the 20th century, by Elton Mayo, Abraham Maslow, and the people at the Tavistock Institute for example, is still worth learning about today. Their ideas have stood the test of time and, although they may be open to criticism, they have shaped our thinking today. By understanding them we can make sense of more recent ideas and see them as part of a chain of development, building up a body of knowledge that we can use to make decisions about the future.

The structure of *Building and Leading Teams* is relatively straightforward; the first seven Chapters are all about teams and their development, with the remaining nine Chapters focussing on becoming an effective team leader. However, there isn't a clear break between these two aspects - building a team requires leadership, so

much of the discussion about teams involves looking at the role of the team leader in ensuring that things happen. Equally, becoming an effective team leader means using the characteristics of teams to enable you to develop your own capability.

Building and Leading Teams starts by looking at what a team is and how it differs from an ordinary workgroup. It explores the distinctive characteristics of teams but also stresses that not every set of tasks is suited to team working. Teams work where the work is right for a team. The second Chapter goes on to look at how you can start to turn a group of people into a team; whilst not decrying team building exercises, *Building and Leading Teams* emphasises that building a team takes time and is never really finished. After all, teams involve people and people change; teams are living entities and need to be given the care and attention that any other social group needs if it is to prosper and succeed.

However, teams are made up of people and people perform different roles in their lives, as they do in teams. There are numerous ways of making sense of the roles people can perform, something that we look at in some detail in Chapter 3 as it will help you to make sense of the differences in the way that people behave in a team. This leads into an exploration of team dynamics, in Chapter 4, looking at the way that people interact with each other and how this affects the performance of the team as a whole. This involves exploring the complex pattern of implicit social rules that govern how people work together and the relationships that they have with each other. As we then see, in Chapter 5, this can also lead to conflict and, as a team leader, you need to be able to recognise it when it happens, understand what has caused it and do something about it, to restore the team to some form of equilibrium.

The final two Chapters focussing on the team look at the role that goals and plans play in ensuring that the team is focussed and organised, producing the goods or services it is responsible for and contributing to the organisation's success, and at ensuring that the team's members are all well motivated. Motivation is the driver that gets people to give of their best and the great value of team working is derived largely from the desire of its members to perform as well as they can, to do not just what is required of them but to do what

they know that they can do. What's more, they do this because of their commitment to the team and its success.

Which leads neatly into exploring what a team leader has to do to ensure that the team works well and that the team's members are committed to the team. Leadership is ultimately about followership - the willingness of the team's members to follow where you lead. The greater the challenge and the higher the degree of uncertainty, the more important it is for the leader to be effective in the role - team members must have the confidence in you that makes them willing to go where you want them to go, to do what you want them to do.

Your capacity to create followership is underpinned by four critical abilities, abilities that we explore in Chapters 9 to 12. The first (and probably the most important) is the ability to inspire trust. Trust is at its most essential when circumstances are most challenging and uncertain, as it is the only reason for people to follow you. As you will see, it relies on three critical attributes, the third of which is integrity, which leads neatly into Chapter 10, as this focuses on the ethics of leadership (and so is all about integrity). What makes something right? What moral values guide you in your behaviour? How do you make sure that you behave ethically, and why should you? Effective leaders are willing to ask these questions about themselves and their behaviour and find the answers that will guide their behaviour.

One of the simplest ways of asking if something is ethically right is to ask - does it feel right? And feelings are our emotional reaction to people and events. Emotional intelligence is important simply because humans are emotional animals and our emotions have a significant impact on how we think, behave and make choices. Chapter 11 is all about understanding how our emotions affect our own and others' behaviour, helps us to make sense of that behaviour and to influence people to do what, as an ethical and trustworthy leader, you want them to do. Finally, in Chapter 12, the fourth ability is communicating effectively, especially having the ability to listen and make sense of what others are saying. We all learn to communicate early on but, unfortunately, it's a skill we all too easily take for granted. This Chapter asks you to look carefully at how

communication works and what you can do to make it more effective.

The next three Chapters close the circle by going back to looking at the team and what you can do to help it become more effective. Chapter 13 looks at your role as trainer and coach, helping to develop individual team members to perform more effectively, whilst Chapter 14 looks at what you can do to create a high performing team, one that surpasses others expectations. Then, in Chapter 15 we look at your role in leading the team through continuous improvement, change and innovation, distinguishing between them but emphasising the importance of the team being actively involved in all three.

And finally - in Chapter 16 - *Building and Leading Teams* finishes by focussing exclusively on you and your responsibility for continuously developing yourself, your skills and your career. It's easy to see the team leader role as being all about the team and its performance but, in reality, it's all about you and what you can do to build the team and enable it to reach its goals and strive to do more, better, next time. But you can only do that if you are confident in what you want to be and how you are going to get there, so that both you and the team develop and grow together.

As well as the contents of *Building and Leading Teams*, you are welcome to visit the website www.davidpardey.com where you will find videos, papers and blogs to supplement the coverage of various topics in the book. Whatever you do, it's great to be able to talk to you and share my ideas and experiences about these exciting and valuable topics - teams and team leadership.

1. What's in a name?

Calling it a team doesn't make it one

Everyone's in a team these days - from the senior management teams that run the business to the administrators, machine operators, delivery drivers and personal care workers who produce the goods and provide the services that the organisations exist for. How do they become a team? Simple, they are called one and, like a flower bursting from a bud, they miraculously become one. Or not, as the case may be, because a team isn't another (more attractive) label for any group of people who happen to meet together occasionally, it's a very distinctive way of working together and relating to each other. Just because the word 'team' has become a popular way of describing all sorts of workgroups, this doesn't mean that they are teams in reality. By the end of this Chapter you will see just why this is and what it is about teams that makes them so distinctive.

Let's start by looking at something completely different, at sport, because sports teams offer a great way of seeing what makes a team so distinctive, especially a rugby team. You don't have to be a rugby fan to know that rugby teams are made up of all sorts of different sizes and shapes of players, with very different abilities. Brian Moore, the former England hooker, said that rugby was the only sport where the fat kid was popular, because of the value of weight in some of the positions in the team. At the same time it's possible to find a role if you are short and relatively light, tall and fast, or tall and slow but relatively strong.

These very different physical qualities enable players to perform different functions in the team. However, they also need to be able to work together collectively to achieve the overall purpose of the game, to score more points than their opponents. If a team consisted of players from premiership teams who all played in the same position (say 15 hookers or 15 full backs), they would be vulnerable to a team made up of people with different abilities and physical qualities yet who played at a much lower level league - the strength of the team comes from the mix of players and not just their individual capabilities.

This is what a team is all about; combining together people with different abilities who are willing to work together collaboratively towards a common goal. Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith in their best-selling book *The Wisdom of Teams* described a team as being ‘a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable’. You can see how this would apply to any sports team (although how small the number has to be is a question that we will look at shortly) and it can apply to many (but not all) workgroups. However, calling a workgroup a team doesn’t mean it suddenly acquires any or all of these characteristics, and many of the groups that are called a team that I have had experience of have almost the opposite characteristics - being unco-operative with each other, working to their own, personal agenda, and deliberately undermining other ‘team’ members’ efforts. But then, perhaps I’ve been unlucky!

Teams can take different forms. There’s no standard form of team that every team should try to conform to, just this set of characteristics that, together, make a group of people who work together into a team. It could be the management of an organisation (the senior management or executive team) or all the managers at the same level (departmental or account managers, for example). Whatever their level, they have similar responsibilities for different areas of operations and, as a team, they co-ordinate decisions and ensure the smooth running of the organisation or a part of it. Or it could be an operational team, in a factory, on a production line or in a cell or zone, or in a sales or administrative office or call centre. They may be the crew of a fire engine, a tank or an aeroplane, the pickers and loaders in a warehouse, or the waiters in a restaurant. They make the goods or provide the services that an organisation exists to make or provide. Operational teams carry out the organisation’s main activities.

Finally, the team could be a group of people brought together for a specific project or task, set up for that specific purpose with a fixed lifespan which, once it has achieved its goal, will be dissolved. They can be formed at various levels, from groups of senior managers or specialists (supervising a major investment or a takeover, for example), through cross-functional teams with different types of

expertise (perhaps to develop new products), to operational or production groups (identifying and resolving quality problems, perhaps).

These three types of teams - management teams, operational teams and project teams - all share the same four characteristics if they are truly teams.

1. A team is a group of people

This is probably obvious, as you cannot be a team of one! But not all groups of people are a team. A team is a special type of group, one that has all the other characteristics as well. An important question is, how big a group should it be? Are there upper and lower limits on the size of a team and, if so, what are they?

In *The Wisdom of Teams*, Katzenbach and Smith say that there is an upper limit so that teams should consist of between two and 25 people, but ideally fewer than ten. Why? Well, they argue that as teams get larger, it becomes harder for people to meet and know each other, to discuss things and reach agreement. In fact, as teams get larger, they break into smaller groupings, so that the team divides (a bit like an amoeba) into two or more sub-teams.

This makes sense. Where in your workplace could you get 20 or 30 people together at any one time? Would it be easier if there were only ten or five of you? So keeping the group smaller rather than larger is one way of ensuring that people can physically meet from time to time, which is one of the things that teams need to be able to do.

Even if a larger team could get together, it would be hard for everyone to have a say in any discussions. Seven people could each speak for three or four minutes in a half hour meeting, but 25 would be lucky to have a minute each. And think about the problems of getting to know each other. You'd finish up knowing a few people well, and the group would break into cliques – people with similar ideas and attitudes. The result is more likely to be constant arguments as each clique tries to have its say.

If large groups are likely to be a problem, what about small ones? Having different people working together brings different ideas, different skills and different points of view. Very few of these

benefits are available with only two or three people, which is why it is unusual to find teams of fewer than five people. Ideally, a team is likely to be a group of at least five people but less than a dozen; that is our first principle about teams.

2. ... performing a range of tasks needing different skills

What the members of any team bring to the team are their different skills which, if they are used constructively, enable a wide range of tasks to be completed. By contrast, in a work group, each person tends to keep to his or her own area of specialism, focussing on one task or group of tasks. In a team the tasks are approached collectively, each person contributing what he or she can, prepared to help and to learn new skills from others in the team.

The skills people contribute tend to be of two main types:

1. *task-related*
2. *team-related*.

Task-related skills are those that are needed for the main tasks the person undertakes. This could be financial or marketing skills (in a management team), engineering or design skills (in a project team), or customer relations or administrative skills (in an operational team).

Team-related skills are the skills that the person contributes to the smooth working of the team. We'll look at these in more detail later, but they include things like making sure that the members of the team all get on well together ('the social secretary'), making sure that a job is finished off before moving onto the next (the 'monitor') and setting goals (the 'team leader').

Team members may have the same set of task-related skills, but not always to the same standard. Recognising who is best at which task or part of a task means that people can play to their strengths. The most successful or high-performing teams tend to have team members who have developed new skills by learning from each other.

This *multi-skilling* helps the team to be flexible, so that team members can turn their hands (and brains) to more than one task. The level of skill is obviously important as well — being multi-skilled

doesn't just mean being capable of doing tasks, it means being highly capable. When this is coupled with an individual's flexibility in being able to help or substitute for another team member, the benefits of teamwork really start to shine through.

3. ... working together collaboratively

Teams have to be organised. Team members each have specific roles and responsibilities that enable other members of the team to perform theirs. Without some sort of organisation, the work of different team members would not be co-ordinated. However, collaboration is more than simply being organised. It means that the members of the team share their responsibility for getting each task done even if they aren't doing it themselves. As well as this, they are willing to help to make sure that members can do their job effectively and efficiently (and that they have the skills, the resources and the time they need to do the job).

A team is like a machine, where each cog fits into the next, ensuring the whole thing works properly. A work group may not need to collaborate because the members work on their own, but a team does, because the members are inter-dependent; what one member does affects other members of the team. After all, there is no point having people with complementary skills if they are not making the best of them.

For a team leader, organising the team is a major responsibility, although the team leader does not have to do all the organising. The more developed the team is, the more able it is to organise its own work collaboratively. The team leader's role is not necessarily to do the organising, but to make sure that the team members collaborate together so that they are organised.

4. ... with their own goals, for which team members are jointly responsible

This is probably the most important distinction between a work group and team. A work group contains individuals with their own particular goals, or objectives. Although team members may also have their own individual goals, these are all based on the team's collective goals, and meeting the overall team goals is more important than individual goals.

For example, a team may have the goal of halving the number of faulty products on a production line. Individual members may have specific individual goals such as checking each component before fitting it, or monitoring the temperature of a particular process. Each of these individual goals contributes to the overall goal that the team members are collectively responsible for achieving. Goals help to focus the team on its responsibilities; they provide a mechanism for reviewing how well it is performing and they can encourage the team to perform to a higher standard. Later on we'll look at team and individual goals in more detail.

And in the end

These four characteristics:

1. a group of people,
2. performing a range of tasks requiring different skills,
3. working collaboratively, and
4. being jointly responsible for achieving the team's goals...

...are what makes any group of people who work together into a team. But now, right at the end of this Chapter, I want to add a fifth, one that Daniel Levi in his 2001 book *Group dynamics for teams* talks about and which is probably the hardest to identify and create, yet is fundamental to effective team working:

5. the team's members have to be conscious of being a member and committed to making the team work.

Without that sense of belonging, the collaboration and the shared responsibility for goals won't happen.

This book is all about how you make these five characteristics a reality and how you then lead such a team. Teams generally don't happen by chance, they have to be created, and the organisations in which they operate have to want them to exist. What's more, having created them, they have to be sustained and cared for. They require the support of the team members, the team leader and others in the organisation if they are to function effectively. With that help and support they can develop and become high performing teams - teams that achieve far more than would normally be expected of them. But, to get there, they have to be set up and that's what we'll look at next.

Reflection

In this Chapter we have started looking at how to build and lead teams by identifying five key characteristics, that a team consists of a group of people with different skills, performing different tasks, who work together collaboratively to achieve shared goals and who are conscious of being part of a team and committed to it.

- A. How does this concept of a team compare to your own ideas and experiences?
- B. Having learnt the definition used in *Building and Leading Teams*, has this changed your ideas about what a team is, or have they been confirmed?
- C. How does your organisation use the word 'team'? Does it match the ideas outlined in this Chapter?