

The Myths and Realities of Teamwork

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About the book

In this book, the author, David Wright, sets out to share 30 years of his team building experience in organisations both large and small. The book focuses on the key milestones that mark a team's journey to high performance, without being naïve to the challenges and the pitfalls; hence the title **The Myths and Realities of Teamwork**. The most common myth is that there is no 'I' in team; however, there is a 'me'. The reality is that the reader can never ignore an individual's needs, even within a strong team environment.

The myths and realities of teamwork will be told through a series of milestones (chapters) on a journey to high performance using 32 case studies, 37 illustrations and one joke, but it is a good one.

The milestones highlighted within each chapter, will aid the reader to check the team's progress. The initial part of the team journey will focus on basic steps in building the team and this may feel mechanistic; however, as the book unfolds, you will experience more challenging skills and processes that will enable you and your team to achieve high performance.

The myths and realities are visited throughout the book to assist the reader to be realistic in approach.







The book also aims to help mature teams recapture that early enthusiasm and respect you may have witnessed when the team was new. Building a really effective team is akin to taking a journey and members of the team must experience the journey together. I will refer to the team journey a lot throughout this book. In order for the team to have a fruitful journey, the following milestones must be reached:

- ✓ Burying the myths and raising the realities
- ✓ Understanding organisation culture and the team's potential starting point
- ✓ Establishing team goals and vision
- ✓ Establishing ground rules for effectiveness
- ✓ Meeting skills and positive contributions
- ✓ Recognising the team processes including the journey from 'Ritual Sniff' to 'Maturity'
- ✓ Developing team skills that will aid success
- ✓ Defining the team roles beyond pure functional roles and predicting future success or failure
- ✓ Understanding empowerment and its place, especially in self-directed work teams
- ✓ Having the level of openness and trust to share feelings and take responsibility for change
- ✓ Embracing high performance, celebration and fun
- ✓ Understanding the practice of leadership for all.

Chapter 1 Myths and Realities of Teamwork

The purpose of this introduction is to ensure the reader is not naïve about the challenges and the rewards that lie ahead. Teamwork, when introduced for the right reasons and managed in a challenging way, is one of most rewarding processes any manager or leader can experience.

Myths and realities of teamwork are examined under six headings:

The Myth	Teamwork	The Reality
Teams are harmonious people who compromise their needs for the sake of the team		<p>Good teams are made of diverse people with specific needs to be met. The team's diversity can be a strength</p> <p>There is no "I" in TEAM but there is a "ME" and ignore the ME at your peril</p>
Team conflict is unhealthy		<p>Conflict can be healthy and should be harnessed for the common good, rather than suppressed.</p> <p>Conflict is an energy source so harness it</p>
Most people like teamwork		<p>My observations suggest that about one third of the working population enjoy teamwork, one third are indifferent and one third prefer to work solo</p>
Teamwork is essential to business success		<p>Teams thrive on complexity; however, if a task or process is simple an organisation can cope without teamwork</p>
Teams are easy to influence and manage		<p>Teamwork requires courage and high levels of personal awareness from its leaders</p>
Senior Managers encourage teamwork		<p>Most senior managers fear teams and the potential loss of power or control</p>

To aid understanding, the six myths will be explored by focusing on the realities of teamwork in the paragraphs below.



Myth 1 - Teams are generally **harmonious people** who compromise their needs for the sake of the team

Good teams are made of **diverse people** with specific needs to be met within the team. When the diversity is recognised and utilised appropriately the team's diversity can become a team strength.

A starting point for working with any team is to understand the individuals that work in the team. There are many instruments on the market to help identify a team's profile. The key is not to label people or the team but allow the team to:

- Identify the range of talents within the team and encourage the team members to recognise and use that talent to help the team succeed
- Predict the team's overall performance and identify strengths and weaknesses
- Write a set of team ground rules for operating as a team that will aid success

Having a team of the same profile is often a barrier to future success. When any one profile type dominates a team, the team usually underperforms. For example, it is easy to predict what will happen when a team is dominated by any of the four main team profiles (see **Fig 1.1** under meth 3):

Task focused team: if planning is defined as quality of thought before action, the task dominated team will fail to do the right thing and a team's high level of activity is often confused with success.

Ideas focused team: experience low follow-through on ideas or innovations and become distracted by the excitement of the next new idea, rather than relevant outputs.

Analytical focused team: often demonstrate poor differentiation between important and unimportant tasks leading to poor decision making and inflexibility.

Socially focused team: demonstrate great fun and concern for each other; however, they can lack a sense of urgency leading to low output and missed deadlines.

If the diverse profile within a team can be recognised and utilised appropriately, the team members will deliver team success. This diversity is to be seen as a strength. Failure to recognise the diversity can lead to team chaos.



Myth 2 - Team conflict is unhealthy

Conflict within teams needs to be recognised as a positive energy source, especially if the whole team can embrace the team's primary goal or mission rather than individual goals.

A good definition of a team is: **A group of individuals who are passionate about a common goal.**

The word passionate is important, because it is the passion for the common goal that is the 'glue' that keeps the team together. The passion for a common goal allows conflict to be seen in a positive light, as the 'fight' is about achieving the objective and not with each other.

Choosing the right goal is important to success. Also the goal should be challenging so that the team recognises that it will only be achieved with the engagement of the full team.

There are a number of ways teams can anticipate conflict and deal with it early and appropriately:

- As a first step we encourage teams to write a set of ground rules for how the team will operate. Inevitably the word 'respect' will appear, however, in support of respect the team needs to learn the skills of giving and receiving feedback and take responsibility for their actions.
- Regular and open reviews of how the team is progressing on its goals and adhering to its ground rules must be put into place.
- Direct and unambiguous language is also important. For some teams in their early stages of formation I recommend only using the word 'we' when celebrating success, use the words 'I' and 'you' when talking about their own and the team's performance.
- Personal conflict around individuals should not be tolerated as it breaches the respect ground rule and possibly the passion for the common goal.

Conflict within a team should be seen as positive. Examples of reasons why conflict should be seen as good for the team progress and growth are:

- Conflict is an energy source of excitement and it should be harnessed for the common good. The opposite of conflict is apathy and this is the real danger to a team.
- Conflict helps the thinking within the team, removing the blinkers and on occasion leading to creativity.
- Conflict increases the level of engagement of individuals and releases the true feelings of team members

Occasionally a team member will no longer be passionate about the team or its goals. This is no different as to why people leave organisations and is a natural process. New team members adopt the culture and values of the established team very quickly, so some turnover can be healthy for the team.



Myth 3 - Most people like teamwork

About one third of the working population enjoy teamwork, one third is neutral and one third prefers to work solo (source: Wright Consultancy).

It is obvious to say that not everyone will respond to teamwork in the same way; each person is different and should be recognised as such. Some people have a preference for working by themselves and the team needs to accommodate this without compromising the team objectives or values. It is possible to create a team environment that caters for the work preferences of each individual.

It is best to illustrate this with a simple team profile model. The four segment model (Fig 1.1) based on a combination of Meredith Belbin's *Management Team* and Carl Jung sets out to:

- Identify those people who have a preference for expressing themselves (tell) and those who have a preference for listening/reflecting (ask) or extrovert and introvert
- Identify those people who generally suppress their feelings (deadpan) and those who are comfortable expressing their feelings (demonstrative)

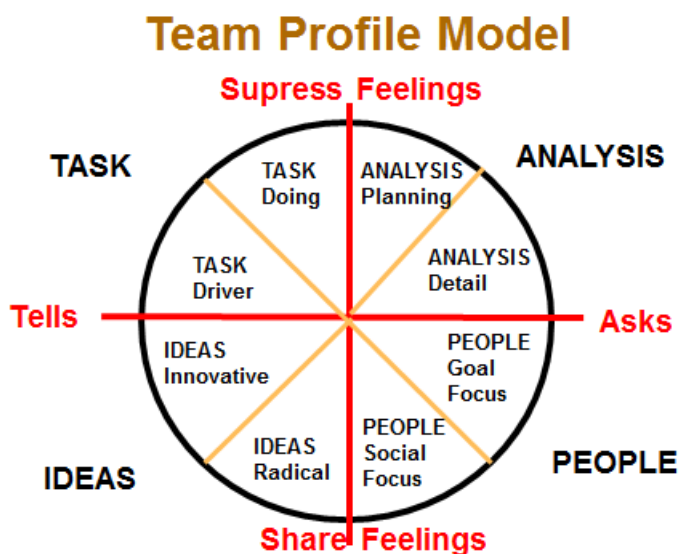


Fig 1.1

By examining the eight profiles highlighted here, we can identify those who in all probability will like, be neutral or dislike team environments.

People who like to work in teams

- People Focused** - ----- Positive supporter of teams and the people who make up the team
- Team Social Focused** --- Strong supporter of the team concept, especially the socialisation
- Ideas Innovative** ----- Likes teams, as the team is a source of stimulation and networking


People who are neutral to working in teams

Task (Do) – ----- Can take or leave teams depending on role and challenges
Analytical (Planning) - Has vision but can work solo or in a team environment

People who dislikes the team environment

Task Driver ----- Only likes teams if they are in control of the team ('Solo Leader')
Analytical (Detail) - Preference for working on their own
Ideas (Radical) ----- Becomes bored with the team and only needs the team as an audience

The glue for most teams for such potentially diverse people is the passion of a common goal, the opportunity to express themselves and be recognised for their strengths within the team.

	<p>Myth 4 - Teamwork is essential to business success</p>
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Teamwork is not essential to all businesses. Teams thrive on complexity; however, if a task or process is simple an organisation can cope without teamwork and continue to be successful working in silos or a task environment.

Fast-moving organisations, where the product life is short or where the market rapidly changes, need a team environment if they wish to stay in business. It is this complexity in these types of companies experience that demands teamwork and gives sufficient challenge to the individual members of the team. When the individual feels quite overawed by the task they really appreciate the help and support from other team members. This includes appreciating the diversity of talent and ideas that comes from the team.

Give teams unchallenging tasks and they become bored, allowing individual needs to come to the fore and over time the teamwork will disintegrate to working in silos.

There are teams which work well on simple tasks, where the high morale and motivation of the team is the goal; this is particularly true of customer service environments. While the task is simple the focus of the team leaders is on team communications and empowerment of the team if the teams are to be successful. To illustrate this I have briefly outlined two short case studies.

Case study 1 – Failing to challenge the team in terms of complexity

The company hired consultants to advise them on how to use teamwork to increase the level of productivity in the manufacturing plant. After a significant investment the company decided to test the teams by asking each team to undertake simple tasks not directly related to the manufacturing issues, of which there were many. They wished to continue the cosy feeling that emerged from the team training programme. One example of a chosen task was to ask the team to re-design the layout of the employee car park to increase safety and ease the traffic flow.

The challenge had little relevance to the major issues facing the business and a great opportunity, including the initial investment, was lost. Real, complex tasks build strong teams.

Case study 2 - Quality System in a large multi-national hard and software organisation

The organisation had outsourced many of its tasks and had insisted on very high internationally recognised quality systems from its supplier. However the organisation itself did not have the quality systems in place that it demanded of its suppliers.

To address this anomaly, a volunteer team from across the whole manufacturing site was set up and given the task of embracing the same high quality standards as they demanded of their suppliers. The team had to achieve this without plant disruptions and within a twelve month time scale, while maintaining productivity in their full time jobs. The task seemed an impossible ask given the 'part time' nature of the assigned team. However, with some basic team training in teamwork and quality systems, the team which had bonded extremely well, set about its task. The whole team became enthusiastic through the training programme and would meet early morning for 'breakfast' to plan activities and to avoid significant interference with their regular full time roles.

The team achieved the quality system targets within six months. This was the fastest and most successful implementation across all the organisation's international plants.

In conclusion, teams thrive on a challenging tasks and it is this complexity businesses should tap into by embracing teamwork.



Myth 5 - Teams are easy to influence and manage

Leading teams requires a very different skillset to that required for normal day-to-day management. In fact there is, for some managers, significant unlearning of habits and processes. To illustrate this I the contradictions between ‘normal’ leadership and team leadership, in the illustration below from Meredith Belbin author of *Managing Team* (**Fig 1.2**)

SOLO LEADERS V's TEAM LEADERS



1. Plays unlimited role
(interferes)

2. Strives for conformity

3. Collects acolytes

4. Directs subordinates

5. Projects objectives

1. Chooses to limit role
(Delegates & Empowers)

2. Builds on diversity

3. Seeks talent

4. Develops leaders

5. Creates mission

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Fig 1.2

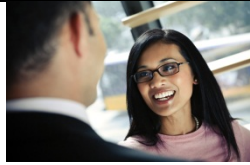
On many occasions managers and supervisors frustrate teams by failing to share relevant information with the team and directing the solution without engaging the team members.

Case Study 3 - Giving Control to the team

A large multinational manufacturer of electronic boards. The company had introduced self-directed work teams. The plan I had established for a continuum of empowerment was going well, until the first unforeseen crisis hit.

The crisis was a major recall of defective boards, the senior managers wished to step in and sort out the crisis. The team supervisor (now called team facilitator) objected and asked for time to help the team to come to terms with the problem. The team set about defining the problems and allocating responsibilities among the team members for delivering solutions.

As a result the team demonstrated almost 40% better performance than previous re-call crisis managed under the old management process.



Myth 6 - Senior Managers encourage teamwork

Senior Managers encourage teamwork

Far from encouraging teamwork, senior managers are uneasy with the loss of control that teamwork appears to bring with it. An old European study of senior managers in the 1990s discovered that while senior managers outwardly supported teamwork in their organisations; they were uncomfortable with the process and the potential for exposing their own weaknesses and loss of control.

Teamwork is a continuous process, there needs to be constant learning from the process accompanied by a high level of openness among team members. This will inevitably require strong review processes to aid learning and may include 360 degree feedback. In true teamwork there must be transparency and there is nowhere for senior managers to hide their weaknesses when leading teams. Weaknesses can be overcome by tapping into the strengths of the team members.

One Chief Executive Officer/Vice President of a software multi-national became so frustrated with his line managers, he felt that the managers were blocking real productivity by being territorial and playing “who is in charge” games. In part he is right; however, there is a major team role for managers in defining the future and its challenges and to resource the teams to meet the new demands of teamwork.

For the overworked manager there are three questions to be posed:

- Are those who report to you or service your team’s needs working as hard as you are? If the answer is ‘no’, then you are failing as a leader to manage your team or suppliers
- Are you aware as a manager of the individual working styles and talents within the team?
- Are you devoting time to thinking about the future and developing strategies to grasp future business opportunities for the company and the team? If the answer is ‘no’ or ‘not enough time’, then who is? Remember this becomes more critical in businesses that work in complex markets or with products that have short life cycles

Senior managers have little to fear if they focus on the important things. This includes seeing yourself as someone who empowers individuals and teams to generate exceptional results. In our experience many organisations have too many layers of managers, who compete for limited resources.

With teamwork there needs to be collaboration, sharing resources and high levels of empowerment, rather than duplicating or fighting about resources. It is little wonder there is unease within many organisations around teamwork.

Summary

This chapter is just the first of seven chapters to help you come to terms with teamwork in your organisation. The purpose in chapter one is to ensure you are not naïve about the challenges and rewards that lie ahead. Teamwork, when introduced for the right reasons and managed in a challenging way, is one of most rewarding processes any manager or leader can experience.

To read and download the whole eBook please go to

<http://bookboon.com/en/the-myths-and-realities-of-teamwork-ebook>