



Do you need to be a team?

MODULE 1: Teams and Teaming

(Taken from Hawkins, P. (2017) *Leadership Team Coaching*. London: Kogan Page. pp 32-35)

Although the world needs many more high-performing teams, they are not the panacea for all the problems of the world and they do need time and emotional investment. So, it is important to begin by being clear whether you want and need such a team and are prepared to commit the investment it will require.

It is important to distinguish a real team from other sorts of working groups - to know when each is needed and for all members to have a shared clarity about the nature of the group one is in. I believe it is useful to distinguish teams from:

- **Consultative advisory groups:** where a leader has created a group drawn from either inside the organization or an external advisory board that s/he uses to inform and check out his or her decisions
- **A reporting and information sharing group:** where divisional and functional heads report on what is happening in their part of the organization and share useful information with colleagues
- **A decision-making body where the work is carried out by others:** this would include some boards and committees, but not all
- **A task-focused work group:** where a group is brought together to deliver a specific task that requires separate activity and low degrees of interdependency.

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In my early days as a team development consultant, I would find myself with so-called teams who wanted to spend much of our time together debating whether they were a team or not. I never found that this led to any progress in their collective clarity or performance; so, I explored with colleagues how I could better facilitate such situations, and I developed some useful inquiry questions:

- A. Who does your team serve?
- B. What do your current and 'not-yet' customers and stakeholders appreciate, find difficult and want different from you going forward?
- C. What can we uniquely do that the world of tomorrow needs?
- D. What do we need or want to achieve that requires us to be more than the sum of our parts?
- E. What can we do together that we cannot do by working in parallel?

If the answer to E was predominately, 'We are only there to advise the boss,' then they were clearly a consultative group. If the answer was 'to share information or make decisions', then I would help them look at how to be an effective information-sharing or decision-making group. Only if the group could identify real tasks that the team had to achieve collectively did I move on to helping them decide where they needed to be on the continuum between being a task-focused group and a high-performing team.

At the task-focused end of the continuum is a group that needs to coordinate its varied activities for collective success, but most of the work is done independently. At the other end of the continuum is a team that, to be successful, needs high levels of interdependence and mutual accountability, where the team members are committed to and can represent the collective enterprise, not just their part of it.

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Richardson (2010: 86) defined a real team as:

“A group of people working together in an organization who are recognized as a team; who are committed to achieving team-level objectives upon which they agree; who have to work closely and interdependently in order to achieve those objectives; whose members are clear about their specified roles within the team and have the necessary autonomy to decide how to carry out team tasks; and who communicate regularly as a team in order to regulate team processes.”

West and Lyubovnikova (2012: 26) defined a pseudo team as:

“A group of people working in an organization who call themselves or are called by others a team; who have differing accounts of team objectives; whose typical tasks require team members to work alone or in separate dyads towards disparate goals; whose team boundaries are highly permeable with individuals being uncertain over who is a team member, and who is not; and/or who, when they meet, may exchange information but without consequent shared efforts towards innovation.”

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“Do you need to become a team” - Questionnaire

Building on the work of other researchers in the field of teams (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993a; Wageman et al, 2008; West, 2012), I distinguish this continuum (below) which represents the two ends of the spectrum. Team members can place their view of where their own team needs to be in order to be effective on a 1–5 scale between each of the items. Only if there is a collective average score of more than 3 or 4 would I believe that it is worth investing in becoming a highly effective team.

Work Group	1	2	3	4	5	Real Team
Strong individual clearly focussed leadership						Shared leadership roles
Individual accountability						Individual and mutual accountability
The group's purpose is the same as the wider organization's						The team's collective purpose is different from the organizational mission and the sum of individual objectives
Individual work products						A number of products requiring collaboration
Runs efficient agenda-based meetings						Creates generative dialogue, with open discussion and active problem solving
Measures its effectiveness indirectly by its influence on others (eg financial performance of the business)						Measures performance directly by assessing collective work products
Discusses, decides and delegates						Discusses, decides and does real work together
Members are only part of the group when they are together						Members still act as part of the team when they are not together
The group is task focused						The team is task, process and learning focused
Total Score						