



## **Do you have what it takes to work in a team?**

**by Diana Klein-Franke**

*"Effective teams require clearly understood goals which are compatible with the individual goals of its members. The way communication, leadership and tasks are structured should be appropriate to current goals and members should have personal qualities which enable them to convey respect to others and gain results through working collaboratively."*

Linda Miller, Chartered Occupational Psychologist MSc, Clin Psychol.

While the above quotation sounds simple, the problem today with teamwork is that most of us were never taught how to work as a team. Western society and culture tend to promote independence, self-sufficiency and competitiveness at the expense of shared goals and collaboration. It is therefore important to understand what teamwork consists of and what is required in order to work on a team before answering the question: "Do you have what it takes to work in a team?".

A team consists of 4 basic elements:

1. A group of people with a common interest/goal in mind.
2. A process of team-building that enables a group of like-minded people to achieve their goal.
3. The stages involved in clarifying the goal, identifying obstacles and removing them.
4. The nature of team-building variables in terms of scale and what they try to achieve.

<b>Team</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>What is changed</b>
Individual	1 person	Individual skills & perceptions
Small Team	2-12 people	Relationships between people
Team Islands	2 or more teams	Relationships between teams
Organisation	15+ people	The culture of the organisation

Adapted from: [www.teamtechnology.co.uk](http://www.teamtechnology.co.uk)

Having a clear team goal, understood and supported by all members is probably the most important difference between successful and unsuccessful teams [1, 2]. Teams without goals can easily become noncooperative, highly stressed, error prone and most importantly, are usually not successful. Teams with goals, on the other hand, tend to be highly cooperative, have a high morale, are highly trusting, are adjusted to the system, and most importantly are more successful. It is arguable whether a team that achieves its goals but alienates and frustrates all its members is a successful

## ***The Write Stuff***

---

team. One true test of a good team, which is too often ignored, is whether the team is willing to work together again after the goal is achieved.

The differences between successful teams and unsuccessful teams can be ascribed to a difference in their goals - whether they aim to succeed or avoid failure.

---

***One true sign of a good team is whether the team is willing to work together again after the goal is achieved***

---

When members of a team have a strong desire for the team to **succeed**, realistic goals are chosen. To say that an individual has a strong desire for team success means that they will feel satisfied if their group accomplishes its goal; a strong fear of failure

means that they will feel embarrassed if their group does not succeed.

When team members have a strong desire to **avoid failure** they choose either very easy or very hard goals and may not work as hard. Teams with a low desire to succeed do not perform as well as teams with a high desire to succeed. Teams with a strong desire to avoid failure do more poorly than teams with a strong desire to succeed. Members of teams trying to avoid failure tend to work longer hours, enjoy their job less, have less pride in their organisation, blame others to a greater degree and care less about success. These teams set very high goals and have little interest in reaching them. Since they could not meet their goal, motivation falls and efficiency drops contributing to another poor performance, another cycle of failures [3].

Negative thinking can be quite an addiction. If you are currently in a team and would categorize yourself as a member of a team trying to avoid failure the following advice may help you:

- Think positively
- Relax and try to distract yourself - take time off to go shopping or go to the cinema.
- Avoid the word "must".
- Don't fault find.
- Don't let your life be influenced by a failure. For example: A manuscript that was not accepted for publication or a poorly written clinical report. Accept the comments and learn from them.
- Treat other members of your team with respect. Respect has to be given in order to be received.
- Be disposed.[4] As a result you will be willing and inclined to assist your team members.

In order to reach your potential in a team you should be able to [5]:

- Identify with clear team goals which should not conflict with personal goals.
- Have the required technical and interpersonal qualities.
- Be able to adopt a team role(s) with which you feel comfortable.
- Feel mutual trust, respect and a collaborative climate.
- Be supported and rewarded for achievements both within the team and externally.
- Have your abilities stretched and developed

Team effectiveness [6,7] is likely to be maximised when these needs are satisfied as members are likely to:

- Work collaboratively without sacrificing personal goals.
- Communicate openly and effectively.
- Remain focused on team goals.
- Have confidence to trust and be trusted.
- Contribute more confidently and effectively, with increased motivation and success.
- Identify with and feel committed to the team.
- Set high performance standards.
- Be less anxious and defensive, focusing instead on learning from experiences.

When these requirements are satisfied, improvements are likely in productivity and quality of outcomes.

On a positive note (and being the author of *The Physical Side*) teamwork seems to be good for our health! It has been proven that people who work in a team are at lower risk for coronary heart disease [8]. Working in a team is not as easy and straightforward as it sounds. It is important to be able to accept honest criticism and use it constructively.

Whatever we think of teamwork, however, it seems likely that we will all find ourselves as part of teams for the foreseeable future.

#### **References:**

- 1) Hendrix G. (1996) The importance of goals to the success of work teams: CSWT reports
- 2) Katzenbach J, and Smith D (1994) The wisdom of teams New York: Harper Business
- 3) Zander Alvin F. Productivity and group success: Team spirit vs. The individual achiever. *Psychology Today* 1974; 8: 64-68
- 4) Klein-Franke (2000) *The Physical Side TWS* 2000; vol. 9, no.2: 22-23
- 5) Makin P.J, Cooper CL and Cox CJ (1996) Organizations and the psychological contract: Managing people at work UMIST, The British Psychological Society.
- 6) Larson CE and Lafasto FMJ (1989) *Teamwork: What must go right/what can go wrong.* Newbury Park, Calif: Sage
- 7) Hollingsworth A.T., Melingo BM and Shanner MC. Coping with team trauma, *Management Review* 1979; 68: 48-50
- 8) *The Lancet* 1997; 350:231-239.

Diana Klein-Franke  
Luxemburger Str. 467  
50939 Köln, Germany  
g.klein-franke@excite.com