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## WHY TEAMS?

### TEAMS HAVE A LONG HISTORY OF SUCCESS

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People have formed work groups to accomplish goals and tasks since the beginning of human history. The small group, whose members work collaboratively for their mutual benefit or survival, is the oldest form of social organization. Groups have played a major role in both the survival of human beings and the development of human culture. Some would argue that our ability to work together was, and is, the key to human survival and advancement. Work groups have a long and remarkable track record of success. People have always used work groups to generate new ideas, get things done, and nurture individuals. In current day research on, and theory about, collaborating work groups, the term *teams* is used to distinguish collaborating teams from groups of individuals with individual tasks. This book is all about teams, even if we sometimes use the term *groups*. We define the term team in more detail in this chapter.

### WE NEED TEAMS EVERY DAY

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Many people participate in teams on a daily basis and have always done so. Imagine building a house or an airplane, putting out a newspaper, developing a strategic plan, or doing almost anything all by yourself. Of course, there are tasks that can, or should, be done by one person, but given the complex nature of work in the 21st century, more and more tasks require people to work in groups.

There was a time when people tried to get rid of the collaborative nature of work. We set up assembly lines and precisely defined each person's job so they could do that job without input from others. Often, this was effective. The industrial revolution was a success, after all. But this strategy worked best for repetitive tasks in which innovation, creativity, and problem-solving were not necessary. In the 21st century, there are few similar tasks that humans perform. Robots have most of those jobs.

Even in the early industrial period there were groups throughout the workplace. People made decisions together. Engineers created new products together. Managers determined schedules and hammered out workflow processes together. There was a need for teams then, and there is an even greater need for teams now.

## TEAMS INCREASE OUR KNOWLEDGE BASE

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The current emphasis on teams reflects our growing awareness that the complexity of work at this point in history necessitates collaboration. More work is conducted by groups of employees than by individuals because collaboration is the only way to accomplish complex tasks. Too much knowledge and too many different skills are needed for any individual to successfully accomplish such tasks alone.

The knowledge explosion led us to reevaluate the way we work. The assembly line model has lost much of its relevance. The individual contributor no longer can go it alone, and one way to combine knowledge and skills is in the form of working in teams. Teamwork is necessary for organizational success.

## WHAT IS A TEAM?

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The distinction between a group of employees with individual tasks and a team is important in this book. Researchers have formulated a set of criteria that define what a team is. For teamwork to emerge, there must be a need for teamwork. There must be one or more goals that are common to all members, which is important for external stakeholders in and often also outside the organization. The goal must break down into tasks that require people to collaborate, that is tasks that cannot be solved by individuals on their own.

There are different forms of interdependent collaboration in teams. One form of interdependent collaboration is that members first work individually on their own to produce a part of a product or service that the team is expected to deliver, and later combine the results of their individual work into a team product or service. Interdependence can also mean that members' work is linked temporally so that one member waits for another member to finish their work and then takes over, does some more work, and then leaves over to yet another member. Or it can mean that members work reciprocally in real time, a form of collaboration that is sometimes labeled *intense teamwork*. Hence, there are degrees of interdependence, and more interdependence means more actual teamwork.

Another criterion that defines a team is differential roles that require each member to contribute uniquely. When all members contribute uniquely a team becomes a rich source of knowledge and competence that in its integrated form constitutes new knowledge and competence at the team level. A real team also has a common history and a common future. This criterion is in line with the idea of team development. Coordinated and effective collaboration among interdependent members with differentiated responsibilities and competence doesn't materialize from one day to another. It emerges over time and requires reflexivity. Teams who regularly stop to reflect on their work processes develop faster and further than groups who don't. A real team, according to some researchers, is reflexive.

A real team becomes high performing when a shared understanding of the team's goals has been established and effective methods to accomplish those goals are in place. Teams develop their work processes in response to external demands. Clear, difficult, and important team goals that are built on an understanding of external demands in the form of external stakeholder expectations will help teams develop their processes and become high performing.

## WHEN TEAMS ARE GOOD, THEY'RE VERY, VERY GOOD

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Lots of people don't like to work in groups. Many of us don't like to go to meetings and think that they are a waste of time. Most of us have had some bad experiences working in groups. Some of us associate work groups with fighting, hurt feelings, and inefficiency. This is not surprising, because many groups have difficulty functioning effectively. Even teams that have developed and matured have periods that are stressful and unpleasant.

How teams develop is what this book is about. It chronicles how some teams develop into high performance teams and why other teams don't.

When a team has developed into a high performance team, there is nothing like it. Work doesn't feel like a chore. It's fun. Members of high performance teams feel involved, committed, and valued. Time flies, work flows, and people help each other meet goals and deadlines. There's nothing like playing on a winning team. Effective teams are more productive, which means that companies and organizations win, too. The trick to creating teams is to learn enough about how teams function so we can increase the chances that teams will become high performance teams.

## NOT ALL GROUPS ARE TEAMS

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Lyubovnikova and colleagues discovered in their research that many workgroups in health organizations in the UK were called teams but did not work as teams. In fact, they could not work as teams because they were not based on a need for teamwork. The members had individual tasks, no common goals, and didn't contribute uniquely to the groups' work. The researchers call these work groups *pseudo teams*. The definition of a pseudo team is that they are *called* teams but don't have common goals or tasks that require collaboration among the members. Pseudo teams don't meet regularly, and when they do meet the purpose of the meetings is unclear. Pseudo teams also don't reflect together over their team processes to learn, adapt, and improve.

The researchers also found that health organizations with a high ratio of pseudo teams had problems such as higher mortality rates or more ill-health in general. Employees who were members of real teams witnessed fewer errors and incidents, experienced fewer work-related injuries and illness, were less likely to be victims of violence and harassment, and were less likely to intend to leave their current employment as compared to employees who were members of pseudo teams.

From this we can conclude that it is as important to clarify whether a group of coworkers is a team or not, because it helps real teams develop. When a group of coworkers who don't work interdependently is called a team, it can trigger an expectation in members that they will receive support from each other. When this expectation isn't met, it creates frustration and disappointment in the members of the group. The term team can also create the idea in the leader's head that they are leading a team, which is different from leading individuals with individual tasks. The leader will focus on gathering the members as a group and on developing the group as a team that will then work interdependently and support the members. The leader runs the risk of failing to provide leadership to the individual coworkers who need guidance in their work with individual tasks.

## CREATING EFFECTIVE TEAMS

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In recent years, researchers have been able to establish correlations between a number of different intervention methods and positive effects on work groups' processes and performance. This is very good news, since members and leaders need to know not only how teams develop across time but also what are the most effective ways to become a high performance team. High performance teams can help organizations improve their customer service scores, do more work in less time, and generate more revenue for the company.

Determining what to do to help teams perform effectively is difficult and spurs questions such as, "Which strategies work? Which strategies are based on solid research evidence? Which strategies are the least time-consuming and most cost-effective?" These and similar questions are on the minds of many people charged with ensuring the effectiveness of organizational teams.

We don't yet know everything there is to know about groups, but we know enough to be helpful to people working in groups. We know enough to answer the difficult questions previously posed. That's what this book is about. The goal of *Creating Effective Teams* is to translate what we've learned about teams into straightforward, user-friendly, practical guidelines for members and leaders. This book also provides guidance for those who interact with a particular team and for those who manage them.

Together we bring to this project nearly 100 years of experience with groups, and we are still curious. Studying groups and working with their members and leaders is endlessly fascinating and challenging. Beyond that, we believe that helping teams become high performance teams is crucial not only to the bottom line but also to the creation of humane, interesting, diverse, and challenging workplaces. We hope this book continues the work of the first six editions in furthering the achievement of those goals.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

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Originally, this book grew out of a number of requests from organizational members for a jargon-free how-to book describing how groups function and what to do to help teams become high performance teams. *Creating Effective Teams* has been read by thousands of team members and leaders, in a number of countries, and by team consultants charged with helping teams become high performance. This seventh edition was written to keep the ball rolling and to add new information that has emerged since the sixth edition was published.

As was the case in the first six editions, whatever we write is based on research evidence, and if we are speculating, we let you know. We do not overwhelm you with references in the text; they appear at the end of the book. If you want more information, the references are there for you.

We've included some recent and some not-so-recent research throughout the book and also things we've experienced as researchers, consultants, leaders, and team members over the years.

This book is meant to be used, not just read. Members of newly formed teams could begin by reading the first six chapters and discussing them together as a way of getting off to a good start. Chapter 2 describes what the larger organization can do to help teams be successful. Chapter 3 describes how teams develop and function. In Chapter 4, the characteristics of productive teams are outlined. This will help the members of a new team know what they are shooting for. The characteristics of effective members and effective leaders are outlined in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively.

Talk with one another about what you've read. Use the information as a way to begin to organize your group. Use the book as you would use a manual for a computer program. When you get stuck, refer to the appropriate chapter. There are a few checklists scattered throughout the text. Use the checklists to monitor your group's progress.

Once the team gets underway, refer to Chapter 7, which describes typical situations that arise in the first stage of group development. The chapter outlines ways members and leaders can be helpful during this stage. Chapters 8 and 9 do the same thing for groups at Stages 2 and 3, respectively. Chapter 10 outlines how to reach and sustain high performance at Stage 4. The topic of Chapter 11 is changes in the organization of work that are or will be affecting teams and how they function. Chapter 12 covers recent research related to work teams.

Reading this book once won't be enough. Like other changes in attitudes or behaviors, learning to use this information in the groups you belong to will take time. Attitudes and behaviors don't change overnight. If you read and work with this information, however, it will happen. And you, like others before you, will find your teams transformed into high performance teams.

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