



### Groups in governmental context

Government is the main agency for development and maintenance of interventions for people. It is divided into various parts and segmented as several sections, constituents, departments, ministries and other hierarchies. Due to its nature, it is required to provide specialist services through specialist departments. However the division of the government into different departments and sections requires it to find mechanisms and use them to integrate itself and perform its various functions effectively and efficiently. Many agents work for similar or same objectives. As a result, a lot of coordination is required.

No single individual can do all the work. In development sector and administration of people, there is a lot of work to be done; hence the need for teams. The team and its meanings change depending on the context. In the larger context, the Cabinet is a team and should work like a team. Groups of health centre staff or a group of teachers in the school, a group of policemen in a station, a group of revenue collection officials in a mandal, various groups in the district offices, etc. all constitute teams. If they are effective, they can accomplish their departmental goals and achieve the objectives with speed and efficiency.

When a group of people work together for the same cause, they form a team. The teams may start from two-person teams to large size teams. They may be close at physical proximity to virtual teams working at different locations and communicating through electronic media like e-mails, cellphones, video conferences etc.

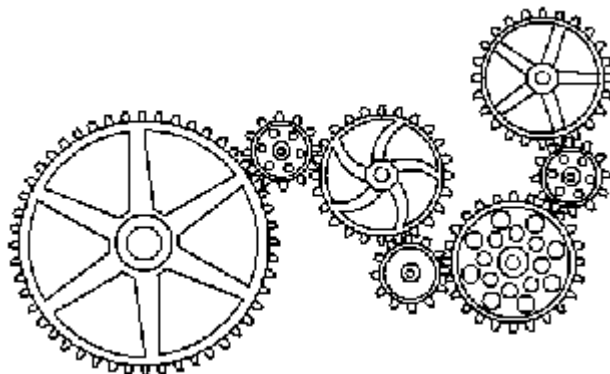
However, many dynamics interfere from getting the best out of the group of individuals who are supposed to work as teams. It is important and necessary to understand the various dynamics that operate and influence the members. A good understanding of the teams - the way they are formed, the dynamics that operate them, the



difference between functional and dysfunctional or effective and less effective teams - will help the government agents to build, manage and utilise teams and synergise their work. Teamwork and teambuilding at grass-root levels will help all agencies in achieving their objectives synergistically.

When teams work, the output may be equal to the sum of outputs they have produced individually, less than the sum or more than the sum. When teams work effectively, the output will be more than the sum total. If it is not, then the team is not effective.

In government, to ensure that the sum total effort of a few individuals (team output) is equivalent to or more than the sum of their individual outputs, a hierarchy is established and a senior officer is placed. An important role therefore of every senior officer is to ensure that the team effort is more than the sum of individual effort. Thus, the team leader has an important task of performing an integrative role and ensuring a smooth flow of work. Team outputs are determined, to a large extent, on how effectively every senior officer in charge of it performs this integrative role.



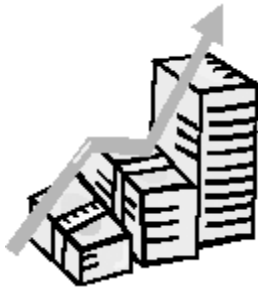
## 2 Importance of teamwork



Individuals may have learnt from their experience. This learning might be in the form of new ideas or insights that are valuable in coping better with the changing context. But, this learning may not get transferred to the team. If individual ideas and insights do not get translated into group ideas and insights, the final actions and initiatives do not get positively influenced.

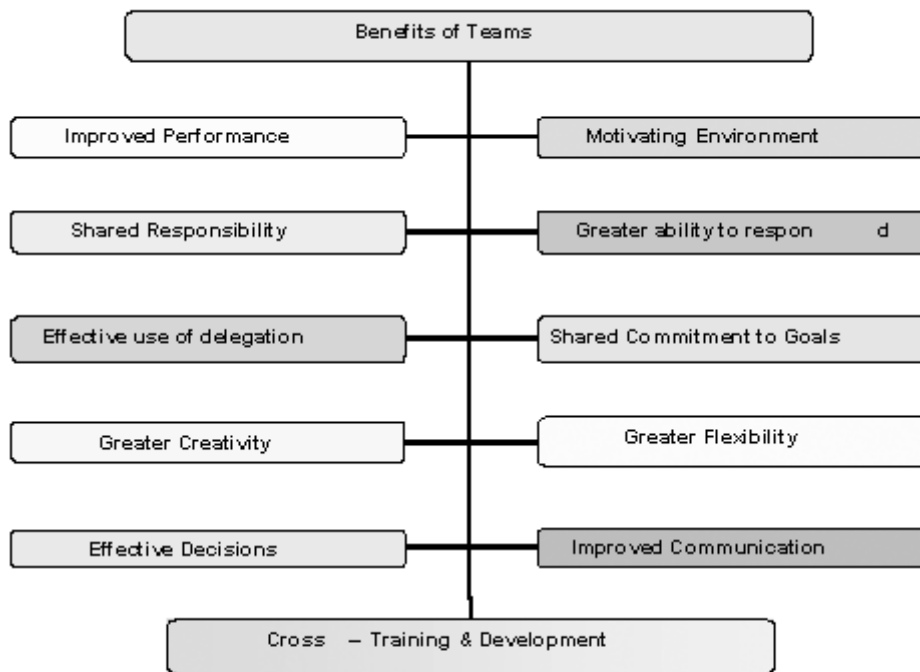
Skills developed need to be propagated to other individuals and to other teams. Teams should become the means for change, a means for individual growth and also for organizational learning. In other words, the team's accomplishment should set the tone and establish a standard of learning together for a large organisation.

Of late, there has been increasing emphasis on using the team approach. There are certain underlying reasons why organisations want to establish and promote teams. Firstly, there is a belief that productivity will increase when staff is involved in local problem-solving and decision-making. Secondly, teams involve employees, both in day-to-day and strategic planning and change implementation. Finally, there is an increased value of personal and professional learning with the team being viewed as a place to share knowledge, learn new skills and take risks.



Hence, modern learning organizations create and operate through learning teams to facilitate increase in productivity, assist in the process of change and develop collaboration. Concerted team work culture is a fundamental aspect of organisation development. This reflects the reality that much of the organizational work is accomplished directly

or indirectly through teams and the assumption that work team culture exerts a significant influence on individual behaviour. The benefits of teamwork are numerous. Some of them are depicted in the following diagram:



How do we distinguish between groups and teams?



A group is a number of persons, usually reporting to a common superior and having some face-to-face interaction. A group is also characterized by interdependence of people in the group in carrying out tasks for the purpose of achieving the organizational goals. Groups are usually assembled and they have a designated leader. The effectiveness of the group is measured by the influence it has on the organizational performance.

A team is a form of group, but has some characteristics in greater degree than ordinary groups. This includes higher commitment to common goals and a greater interdependency and interaction among the members of the group. Teams are built with specific intention and team leadership is sometimes shared and also rotated. Teams imply a sense of shared mission, and collective responsibility to a common purpose and performance goals.

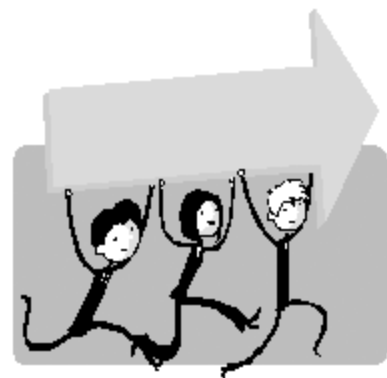
A team is a small number of people with complementary skills, who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves collectively accountable. This distinction is particularly relevant in conceptualizing the kind of teams desired, and in the creation of self-managed and high-performance teams.

### What leads to team synergy?

A team's purpose is defined by its mission. The team mission is something that the team intends to do. It is the object for which the team exists, as determined by the team leader and team members together. It is a clearly stated purpose that serves to direct and motivate the team in pursuit of its goals.

The team's mission is driven by the organization's vision.

The organization's vision provides a "big picture" perspective that serves to align people, ideas and attitudes. The organizational vision may be as vague as a dream, or as clear as a specific outcome. It must, however, be communicated to team members in such a way that they are inspired to be a part of it. To be successful, the team must align its purpose or mission to the organisation's vision.



A team goal is an end that the team strives to reach; it directly supports both the mission of the team and the organisation's vision. Teams that agree on their agendas can direct their energies towards task accomplishment.

Effective team goals are determined by all team members. When everyone takes part in establishing the overall goals of the team, individuals on the team have a clear understanding of what is expected and can develop a commitment to working with one another in pursuit of team goals. Common goals provide team members with purpose, clarity and direction.

The specific goals to be achieved by teams differ from team to team and organisation to organisation. The challenge in integrating the efforts of individuals in teams working on the projects is to ensure that they achieve the set organizational goals.

Innovation is a very important part of teamwork. Bringing together people having a variety of experience and expertise to address a common problem or task increases creative thinking, which is the bedrock of new productive ideas.



Some of the characteristics of productive teams are given in the box below:

- The team culture engenders trust, sharing, spontaneity and risk-taking.
- Members participate in setting-specific and realistic goals. They agree with the goals and are committed to them.
- Team goals are as important as individual goals.
- Members contribute a diverse, yet appropriate mix of skills and experience.
- Members clearly understand their roles and shift responsibilities as needed.
- The team has clearly identified norms for managing conflict.
- Intra-team competitiveness is managed.
- All members feel empowered.

- Members are honest, straightforward, supportive and tolerant of mistakes.
- Members are open to new ideas and perspectives, and are eager to do the right thing.
- Decision-making is by consensus rather than majority vote, when appropriate.
- Decisions are made on the basis of substance, not by the style or status of the individual proposing the idea.
- Communication includes all members and a range of opinions is encouraged.
- The team works constantly on improving its interactions as well as its performance.

### What factors weaken teams?



Teams consist of individuals and teams survive in different environments.

Teams may or may not function effectively due to a lot of internal and external factors: Typically, some of the key symptoms that are evident when the teams function poorly in a certain environment is:

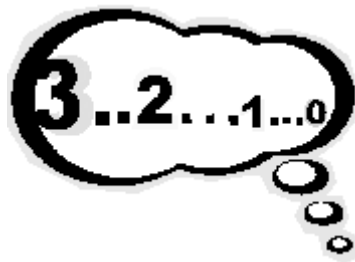
1. Resentment due to lack of resources: If the team does not have enough resources to do the job, it is inevitable that some will carry too heavy a load. Resentment, often unexpressed would result in lack of focus on targets.
2. Cost overruns: Often inevitable, cost overruns become a problem when proper measures are not taken. The whole team should know early on when cost becomes a problem, so the team can seek additional funding.
3. Schedules: When deadlines are not met, there are definitely issues within teams and there is an impact on the quality of the goal, and interpersonal relations get affected.
4. Members are not exactly aware of their responsibilities: Each team member must know what areas are assigned and who is accountable for them.

5. Attention is diverted to other areas: Sticking to the project at hand and avoiding being sidetracked into other things is extremely critical. Typically, when one or two essential members of the team lose their focus or get diverted, the team focus also gets sidetracked.

### Causes of poor team performance

When teams fail to perform as well as they are supposed to, there may be many reasons for their failure. Typically, the first thing that people think about is the internal process. Effective teams and their leaders consider whether their negative internal team processes are responsible for poor performance; but they do not stop there. Teams do not exist in a vacuum and their internal processes do not unfold in isolation. The external forces acting on a team may also be the cause of team performance problems. The external system comprises outside conditions and influences, that exist before and after the team is formed. Important features of the external system to consider include team design, culture, team member selection, team training and the reward system.

### Factors responsible for team differences:



Poor team performance arises from differences. When individuals come together in work teams, their differences in terms of power, values and attitudes, and social factors all contribute to poor performance. Quite often, these differences do not reveal themselves and tend to work surreptitiously. These causes can arise from numerous sources within a team setting and generally fall into three categories:

### **Communication factors:**

Barriers to communication are among the most important factors and can be a major source of misunderstanding. Communication barriers include poor listening skills; insufficient sharing of information; differences in interpretation and perception; and nonverbal cues being ignored or missed.



**Structural factors:**

Structural disagreements include the size of the organization, turnover rate, levels of participation, reward systems, and levels of interdependence among employees.

**Personal factors:**

Personal factors include things such as an individual's self-esteem, personal goals, values and needs. In order for conflict to be dealt with successfully, managers and team members must understand its unpredictability and its impact on individuals and the team as a whole.

To lead to effective teams, it is essential to be able to identify the key causes of poor team performance and be aware of the same.

1. Team size: If teams are structurally very large or lean in size, they may not be able to give the desired output due to improper division of task, lack of adequate knowledge and interpersonal issues. Hence, identifying the suitable number of people in a team is important.
2. Team design: Team design implies the mix of people who constitute the members of the team. The kind of people with the required skills for the established purpose and with the needed attitude to be included in the team defines good team design. The lack of it would create issues in a very short time span.
3. Lack of communication: Both formal and informal communication channels, at all times, are very important for the success of any function, team or organization. The lack of it would give no clarity to any member and the goal cannot be achieved.
4. Clarity of purpose: If the team members are not clear or have differences on the goal/purpose for which they have come together, it will lead nowhere. The team cannot perform effectively, since they would not know which direction to proceed.



5. Leadership: Lack of good leadership would also lead to poor performance in teams. All teams at all points of time would need someone they can look up to, especially at times of crisis.

With more and more research being done, it is evident that a successful organization is one characterized by effective teamwork and leadership, rather than management. Organizations are realizing the importance of developing teams that can work in a coordinated, efficient and creative manner.

### **Broad principles of team building**

Team Building has a few fundamental principles:

#### ***1. Vision:***

Vision means being able to excite the team with large, desired outcomes. Large outcomes mean devising goals that attract missionaries. The first step in vision is to project such a goal. This goal must be bigger than a pay check. It must contain challenge, appeal to personal pride, and provide an opportunity to make a difference and know it. Then the goal can become a powerful vision. Next, team leaders position the goal by picturing success. Initial questions might be, “What will it look like when we get there?”, “What will success be like, feel like?” “How will others know?” When a large, mission-friendly goal has been pictured and clearly communicated, the vision is complete.

#### ***2. Commitment***

Commitment can be a dangerous concept because of its attendant assumptions. Some may assume, for example, that commitment means long hours, while to others it may mean productivity. When expectations are defined, success rates soar. When leaders assume that everyone “should” be committed, as a matter of course, we overlook the difficulties many have with certain commitments. If people cannot initially commit, it does not mean they don’t care. More often, it means they do care, and they are caught up in a process of doubt. This process precedes every meaningful commitment. Effective leaders catalyze

this process, so that the critical mass of people can pass through this stage efficiently on their way to genuine commitment and innovative strategies.

This pre-commitment process is the same for team leaders and members. When we ponder a new commitment, we climb up to a kind of mental diving board. Commitments contain unknowns, and some warn of possible failure. It is common for people to neither jump nor climb back down the “ladder,” but rather to stay stuck at the end of the board, immobilized in pros, cons, obstacles, and worries. In this state of mind, the obstacles begin to rule, obscuring the vision, blunting motivation. When leaders do not understand the commitment process they tend to seek accountability without providing support. Without the means to process doubts and fears, people often feel pressured to commit, but cannot. One option, often unconscious, is to pretend to commit, to say “yes” and mean “maybe” at best. The pretended commitment is a form of wholly unnecessary corporate madness. The solution to this set of problems is two fold: establish an atmosphere of trust, and within that atmosphere encourage inclusion.

### *3. Trust*

Trust is the antidote to the fears and risks attendant to meaningful commitment. Trust means confidence in team leadership and vision. When trust prevails, team members are more than willing to go through a difficult process, supported through ups, downs, risk and potential loss. Trust is most efficiently established when leadership commits to vision first, and everyone knows those commitments are genuine. The process for leaders to commit is the same as for everyone else: assess pre-commitment doubts, questions, unknowns and fears. This involves three simple steps:

- List the unknowns.
- Assess worst case scenarios and probability of overcoming them.
- Research the unknowns.

The list of unknowns reveals some answers and raises further questions. Some of these questions lend themselves to research (others’ experience, a small pilot plan), and some have no apparent answers from our pre-commitment position. These latter comprise the

bottomline or irreducible risk. We learn the outcome only after commitment. Every major commitment contains some irreducible risk, some lingering unknowns. We, therefore, make every major commitment constrained by partial ignorance. Leadership now understands the potential loss and gain involved in the new vision. At this point, leadership can commit itself, and prepare to include other team members. That preparation must include a plan for leadership to share visibly both risk and reward with the other team members who will be coming on board. With leadership's commitment to a clear vision, and a genuine plan to share risks and rewards, the atmosphere for trust is in place. We are now ready to include others in our team effort.

#### **4. Inclusion**

Inclusion means getting others to commit to the team effort, helping others through their "diving board doubts" to genuine commitment. Since leaders now understand this process first hand, we need only communicate with the potential team members to complete inclusion. The best setting to obtain buy-in and build trust is in small groups that facilitate thorough give and take. The basic tasks are to communicate the vision, make sure it is understood, communicate leadership's commitment (including sharing risk and reward, and how), and elicit and address peoples' doubts. Leaders will need three communication skills to achieve inclusion. These are non-assumptive questions, good listening, and directed response.

1. Non-assumptive questions ("What do you think?", "Can you tell me what is happening with this report?") invite real answers because they are inclusive, not intrusive. Questions containing assumptions ("Why are you skeptical?", "Why is this report so incomplete?") invite defensiveness. When converting an atmosphere of change and possibly skepticism to trust, added defensiveness is counter-productive.
2. Listening means separating the process of taking in information from the process of judging it. Kept separate, both processes are valuable. Mixed, especially when the receiver is a designated leader, the sender is invited to stop communicating or to change the message midstream.

3. Directed response. Effective team leaders demonstrate responsiveness. Since leaders have already processed their own pre-commitment doubts, many questions can be answered on the spot. Some require research and a time line for response. And some, which relate to the bottomline, irreducible risk, require a truthful “I don’t know. I’m in the same soup as you.”

### *5. Help Exchange*

The final step in creating the team is to establish a corroborative, balanced strategy for reaching the committed vision. This plan will consist of all of the tasks and efforts necessary to realize the overall vision. Your team-mates themselves are in the best position to supply this information. Since by this time you have laid the groundwork for trust, and established good buy-in, your team-mates are likely to be enthusiastically cooperative.

At this point, the leadership role is to catalyze consensus, not to issue orders. Consensus means that team members agree to, whether they necessarily agree with, a particular approach. Consensus occurs easily when most feel their ideas were heard and considered, whether or not the team ultimately chooses those ideas. Obtaining consensus again requires use of leadership communication skills: non-assumptive questions, good listening, and directed response. Effective teams often produce lively discussions of divergent viewpoints before reaching consensus. Diverse views can mean unresolved argument, or they can mean increased team intelligence and ultimate consensus. The difference is a well built team.

*Teams are not ends in themselves; they are a means by which to achieve other organizational goals.*