

# BUILDING THE TEAM

## OVERVIEW

Among the many changes that marked business transitions through the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the discovery of “teams” was one of the more exciting, positive and productive.

Today, the concept of “team” has permeated most workplaces and most of us will agree that teams are potentially a powerful tool. And yet the evidence we see does not convince us that teams are the standard panacea for all organisational problems. There is a risk that decisiveness can be undermined, that individual flair can be lost, that conflicts can be glossed over instead of resolved (or even worse, that they can become totally disruptive).

We work regularly with organisations in all business sectors in the field of “teams” and “team-building” and we constantly see two assumptions which appear to have acquired the virtual status of business law. They are:

1. “Teams” are a natural feature of organisational life and in the vast majority of cases can be counted on as the most effective – and cheapest – organisational response to any organisational or operational problem.
2. Bringing a group of people together and then putting them through a series of “team-building activities” effectively creates a team.

Both of these assumptions are suspect.

“Teams” are not the cheap and effective panacea for organisational and operational difficulties. They will not fix every problem and – properly implemented – are not cheap. Indeed, there are numerous circumstances where teams are an inappropriate – often simply wrong – response to a problem. Just because people work together does not make them a “team”. Calling them one doesn’t make it so either!

“Team-building activities” can play a useful role in developing a happy work group. Team-building can create “shared myths” or “traditions”. It can assist with positive motivation. It can assist the development of intra-group relationships.

But ultimately “team-building” is an individual skill. The creation and maintenance of a team is in the hands of the individual members of a group of people. It requires only one individual to refuse – or to be unable – to commit to the team, for that group to founder.

A decision to create a team, and approaches to the effective development of that team, actually requires full attention to a number of issues. Not exhaustively, these include:

- What organisational need do we plan to address in committing to the creation and building of “teams”.
- What alternative strategies have we considered to address this alternative need and why do we believe that “teams” are likely to be the effective solution?
- Does the concept of “teams” fit the organisational culture?
- How do we intend that the team(s) operate and with what level of autonomy?
- What processes should we put in place to ensure effective team involvement in goal setting and planning and decision making.
- How will the team measure its performance?
- How will the team (and its members) be rewarded?

Only when these issues have been satisfactorily considered and answers derived is it appropriate to move into the creation and building of “teams”.

Against that very cautionary background overview, we are proud to call ourselves experts in the field of teams and we would be pleased to tell you how we can support your teams initiatives.

## AIMS

The aim of our Team Building programs will vary in practice with the answers to the questions outlined above. In broad terms, however, they can be summarised as being to equip participants with an understanding of the nature of teams, the way in

which they function, and practical strategies to achieve the creation and effective maintenance of workplace teams.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the conclusion of the program, participants will :

1. Understand the nature of teams and their positive and negative characteristics.
2. Know how individual needs are reflected within the team and be able to ensure such individual needs are met.
3. Know and understand the implications of their own role as team leader or facilitator.
4. Know how to set about creating a workplace team and an environment within which it can develop and function.
5. Understand the team life-cycle, be able to diagnose the current state of the team and understand the implications of that diagnosis.
6. Understand the importance of the individual unit as the building blocks for any team.
7. Know and be able to use practical team building skills and strategies designed to create, develop and maintain effective workplace teams and have gained confidence in using practical team building strategies in the workplace.

## PROGRAM CONTENT

Programs will reflect specific organisational needs but will be structured generally around the following elements :

- a. What teams are; their benefits and shortcomings.
- b. The team life-cycle. Recognising where the team is and what that means in practice. The stages in team building.
- c. Roles within the team; individual characteristics and needs. Individual buy-in and managing individual buy-out.
- d. Team leadership; the challenges and implications.
- e. Communication and conflict within the team; managing it for maximum benefit.

- f. Practical team-building and -maintaining skills and strategies; the importance of variety and creativity in your approaches; source of new and innovative ideas.
- g. Group problem solving and decision making; using the team dynamic for maximum effect.

The program uses a blend of classroom sessions, interactive group work and experiential learning activities, including, where desired and agreed by clients, adventure learning strategies.

## EVALUATION

Aspects of the program best regarded as "performance indicators" are outlined generally under the heading "Learning Outcomes" above, although individual organisations will be encouraged to develop and commit to specific indicators relevant to their needs.. Actually measuring these desired outcomes is less easy.

Participants themselves are always invited to provide their responses to the program which provides an indication of participant "comfort level". However, over time the only real determinant of program success is the extent to which the program may be seen to have impacted upon participant performance.

Our approach is to provide the participant, or a nominated manager or supervisor with an evaluation instrument for completion several weeks after conclusion of the program. This is essentially an in-house tool for use by the client but we encourage organisations to return a copy of the instrument for use in the future review, development and general improvement of these programs.

## DURATION

Team Building workshops in differing formats have been conducted over periods from one half-day to six-day residential with a highly interactive adventure learning program.

The core program is designed to be delivered over a period of one day, but substantial benefits can be achieved with longer programs, especially if they are conducted as residential workshops.