

# Chapter 3

## HR: The Team Builders

### ***Guidance Note For Students***

The activities that follow are designed to be used with *An Introduction to HRM: An Integrated Approach*. Read chapter three, which provides both the answers in easy to follow sections and guidance on other areas of the book that can help you with your studies.

- 1. The HR applications of teamwork in organisations.**
- 2. Appreciate the benefits of teamwork in completing work projects.**  
**Understand the role of HR trained people in developing team working in organisations.**
- 3. Recognise the stages of team development.**
- 4. Identify team roles.**
- 5. Appreciate the value of diversity in teamwork.**
- 6. Recognise the difficulties associated with groupthink.**
- 7. Apply the AKS integrated approach to team building.**
- 8. Present the case (individual or group activity) for effective team working in modern organisations.**
- 9. Critically evaluate the role of HR in developing organisationally effective work teams.**
- 10. Make practical use of the knowledge and skills gained from this chapter by performing teamwork activities more effectively.**

**Note to Students:****Can You Tell Me All The Answers Please?**

In common with the vast majority of students, you want to do really well in your study programme. There are grades to attain and employers to impress...

You may like to believe that there are perfect answers that can give you perfect grades. Indeed, if this were an elementary mathematics handbook you would be correct. However, with people simple sums do not always produce neat solutions.

So, can I reassure you that I do not have all the answers to everything, and neither does anyone else! What I would encourage you to do is engage in discussions with your fellow students, read different writers ideas and listen to your lecturers. Your lecturers have invested many hours, years in doing what you are setting out to do so they are excellent guides to help you succeed. Learn to think for yourself and integrate ideas across disciplines and subject areas. Think outside the boxes.

**Exercise:** *Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody.*

*There are four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. The team had an important project, which Everybody in the team was responsible for completing on time. However, Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody actually got on with the work.*

*Somebody got angry about the team's poor performance because it was Everybody's job.*

***Everybody thought they could have done better without Anybody else. In fact Anybody could have done the work, but Nobody realised that Everybody was waiting for Somebody to do the project for them. In the end Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.***

### **Discussion Questions**

Think about the teams you have been/are a member of and consider the following questions:

1. How well do you think the team organised itself from the start of the project?
2. Do you think the team membership's responsibility is to improve performance or is it somebody else, such as a manager, training facilitator or lecturer?
3. To what extent would you describe yourself as an active member of your team?
4. If some members are less active than you, what steps have you taken to encourage more involvement in the team's activities?

### **Guidance Note For Students**

Teamwork is a key contemporary management activity. It will be easier for you to learn how to interact within a team in a learning situation, with the guidance of your tutor, than later in the workplace. Remember that teamwork means collective responsibility, though sometimes individual members may contribute to different parts of the activity. In the final analysis it is the team result that counts.

**Exercise: Teamwork Attitudes Questionnaire**

Think about your attitudes to either a current team project or seminar group activity. Alternatively, use the questionnaire to reflect upon employment situations (full or part time) where you are required to work with a few colleagues. Try not to sit in the middle by using a lot of 4's as an answer.

- (1) Strongly agree; (2) Mostly agree; (3) Slightly agree;  
 (4) Neither agrees nor disagrees; (5) Slightly disagree; (6) Mostly disagree;  
 (7) Strongly disagree.

1. This team project is very important to me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. I want everybody in this team to do well.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. I like the people in my team.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I would be willing to put a lot of time into making this teamwork project a success.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. My own expectations for the project and those of my team-mates are very similar.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I am proud to be part of this team.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. I would prefer to be doing this project work on my own.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. I would prefer to be doing this project work with a different team of people.

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
9. The team's standards of work are unrealistically high.
- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
10. I have other, more important work to do than this team project.
- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
11. Other members of the team really value my contributions.
- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
12. I find it difficult to agree with other members of the team about the way we should conduct the project.
- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

### **Discussion Questions**

1. From answering the questionnaire do you sense that your team working experiences are mostly positive, neutral or negative?
2. What can you do to improve your team performance?
3. Do you enjoy/ not enjoy team working? Think about your contributions to your team and where these could be improved, both interpersonally and in work contribution.

### **Group Activity: Team Working Action Plan**

#### **Setting agreed goals and monitoring progress**

How a team is set up in the initial stages can have a considerable influence upon how it progresses later. Remember that even if you are working with people you already know it is still very important to set an agreed set of objectives before the project commences. According to West (1994) it is important to establish team goals in the initial stage of the team formation (p 98). My experience of working with numerous student teams would also

support the view that those who fail to plan from the start may fail to achieve their full potential.

Remember to include *everyone* in the tasks allocation then create a simple diary of what needs to be done and by whom. For example:

<b>Action</b>	<b>By whom</b>	<b>Date</b>
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		

## ***Guidance Note For Students***

It is important to establish a plan of work before you begin a team project. This is even more important if you are working with people you know well. The responsibility and authority for a teamwork project is with the team members, not your lecturer. Establish your ground rules early on. Remember it is not enough to say you would all like to get a top grade. The team also has to establish the level of effort and commitment required to achieve your agreed aim. Follow your tutor's guidance and be prepared to work hard to be successful.

**Practicing HRM: The Titanic scenario**

It is often helpful to use a situational model to understand a concept such as groupthink in action. For this purpose I shall describe group think behaviour as the *Titanic scenario*. The famous early twentieth century ship was regarded as being the most technologically advanced of its day. According to historical records the *Titanic* was divided into sixteen watertight compartments and by fifteen transverse bulkheads that extended far above the water line with watertight doors. Those doors could also be closed from the bridge by an electrical switch. This would 'make the vessel practically unsinkable' according to official pronouncements (From a Public Records Office documents). The technological excellence of Titanic encouraged heightened confidence in the ship's officers who, in the pursuit of greater prestige and success, thought it expedient to drive this powerful ocean liner at full speed through an area known for icebergs. The telegraph warnings of ice, falling temperatures and weather conditions that would make spotting floating ice difficult, did not deter the captain from pursuing a fast maiden voyage time to New York. Indeed, Captain Smith was a highly regarded and experienced officer of the White Star Line. The officers on the bridge at the time of the collision, first officer Murdoch, (lost) fourth officer Boxhall, (survivor) sixth officer Moody, (lost) and quartermaster Hitchens at the wheel (survived) (from United States Congressional sub committee hearing, 1912, p. 1150) did not prevail upon their captain to slow down the ship's speed. The deference, or unwillingness of the other officers to request a reappraisal of the Captain's decision to continue current course and speed indicated that elements of group think may have had a role in the disaster.

For today's organisations, the constantly changing environment in which they operate allows little place for policies formed around 'continuing current course and speed'. *Titanic*, is arguably a classic example of where a combination of external and internal factors, can lead to a team making the wrong decisions because alternatives are given too little credence. If an organisation/

department/ team has a record of success and a strong management culture/ structure prevails it can be difficult for people to raise concerns or offer alternative policies. This is not to devalue the importance of strong leadership qualities, but rather to emphasise the value of listening to other viewpoints. While it is difficult to innovate in a risk adverse environment, risk taking needs to be tempered by counterbalancing evaluation and reflections upon the potential downside. In the case of the Titanic, the potential gain in prestige of arriving in New York a few hours earlier should have been balanced against the possible losses cause by the possibility of a collision. It is therefore evident that team roles and the diversity which, different people can bring to a team (Diversity is discussed in chapter 6) can be a substantial asset to performance. Furthermore, 'storming' (Tuckman, 1965) if conducted constructively can avail teams of valuable opportunities to consider different approaches. Thus it can be said that groupthink becomes more likely if:

1. Members of a team have an illusion of invulnerability.
2. Assessments of performance are over optimistic.
3. Normal precautions are ignored and a high risk taking approach is adopted.
4. The team tends to ignore warning signs.
5. Opposition or dissent to the accepted viewpoint is dismissed.
6. Team members who persist in challenging accepted values are regarded as disloyal.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What do you understand by the term *group think*?
2. Why do you think teams can become overconfident?
3. What initiatives/ steps can be taken to lessen the occurrences of group think?
4. Consider whether a team you are working with may have group think tendencies. What can team members do to challenge group think complacency?

**Practicing HRM: Team Builder's Action Plan****Preparation**

It is constructive to begin with a short appraisal of potential team member's key areas of knowledge, interests and dispositions (Appraisals are discussed in chapter 8). Following from the attitudes and knowledge sections it is helpful to construct teams, which are inclusive of diversity, thereby lessening the potential occurrences of groupthink, yet appreciating that people with differing perspectives need to be tolerant of each other.

**Group Activity: AKS Team Working Review**

1. Review/ discuss the work on the AKS of teamwork.
2. Consider your answers to the attitudes questionnaire and any implications this might have to how you work in a team.
3. Think about the team roles and reflect upon which of these you tend to feel most comfortable with. In general people are capable of fulfilling more than one role.
4. If you are working in a team already consider how what you have learnt can improve the way you work together.
5. Form a small group to discuss the place of team working in organisations.

**Practicing HRM: Shackleton**

If the idea of being part of a team sometimes appears daunting, imagine what it might be like if your life depended to it! In 1914, an explorer named Shackleton led an expedition bound for the Ross Sea, which is part of the South Pacific. The weather that year was particularly poor and his ship became stuck in ice and was crushed. Shackleton then led his party across the ice flows, hauling small boats over the ice. When the ice melted Shackleton got his team to row the boats to safety on Elephant Island. In such

difficult conditions it is less than surprising that some of the team expressed different views as to the best course of action. Shackleton listened to advice, but was firm in focusing the team on common goal of survival.

The Island was too isolated for the explorers to be found quickly so it was agreed that a small group would leave it's relative safety to find help. Shackleton selected a team of six crew to sail to the nearest inhabited island. They travelled 800 miles in a 22ft rowing boat, and successfully navigated their way to the tiny island of South Georgia. The team then had to cross the island's mountains to alert rescuers. After they had reached safety Shackleton accompanied another rescue team back to the group who had been set ashore on Elephant Island.

It is worth noting that the men on the expedition were not selected from a special elite army regiment of exceptionally physically fit soldiers, but ordinary sailors and explorers. Hence, a lot can be achieved with 'average' people and good teamwork. Writing about the relevance to modern organisations Kinnes (2001) has observed that the adventurer's leadership skills are now studied in business schools. In the film by Channel 4, broadcast on 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2002, Shackleton is shown leading a team of men in atrocious conditions. In fact all 28 men survived the expedition. Their survival was arguably, in a large measure, due to Shackleton's effective leadership and teamwork.

The party of explorers faced real dangers to life yet there are significant parallels to organisations. To survive in a difficult and rapidly changing organisational environment, leaders need to be able to adapt their plans, bring out the best in the people, yet remain focused on the longer-term objectives so that the organisation survives and goes onto greater successes. The most successful teams are therefore not necessarily the ones with all the most able people, but rather those that can work effectively together.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What do you most like about working with other people?
2. What do you least like about teamwork?

3. Make a list of the attitudes; knowledge and skills, which you think are most useful to successfully working in teams.
4. List the attitudes, knowledge and skills you believe you can bring to a team project.

Make a note of at least one area, which after personal reflection or discussion with someone who knows you well, you need to develop in order to improve your performance in a team-working situation. Looking at the case study above it might be interesting to think about the team work problems Shackleton may have faced.

### ***Chapter summary***

The modern organisation requires flexibility and cooperation between people who can form and reform into high performances teams. Therefore a key HR initiative should be to encourage and assist the development of attitudes, knowledge and skills that enable people to achieve more, by working with others. There are challenges for organisations as well as advantages to team working. The encouragement of diversity within organisations can broaden the range and richness of experience available to team projects and reduce the possibilities for groupthink. Conversely, people with differing personalities and opinions should follow the team builder's guidelines to avoid unnecessary negative conflict, while recognising those differences can be advantageous, if harnessed towards the achievement of common objectives.

The HR professional can promote more effective team working within an organisation by recommending initiatives, which create an environment where cooperation between colleagues is more likely to flourish. Hence, factors such the distribution of rewards can assist (team based rewards) or detract (individual performance related reward), from the teamwork performance. Furthermore, a secure employment environment is likely to be more conducive to collaboration and creativity than organisational environments where people are less secure. Thus, as with other HR activities teamwork

development should be seen as part of an integrated programme of employee developmental initiatives.

## **Guidance Note For Students**

The references are a useful guide to seek out other sources for background reading and ideas for your course work. Universities and colleges expect you to read more than just the set text. Although HRM An Integrated Approach provides a complete course for you, it is important to recognise that there are many other opinions, ideas on HR and management in general. In your assignments and activities you will be expected to refer to a range of literature. Go to you Learning Resources Centre and read/ view academic literature and expand your knowledge of HR and Management.

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