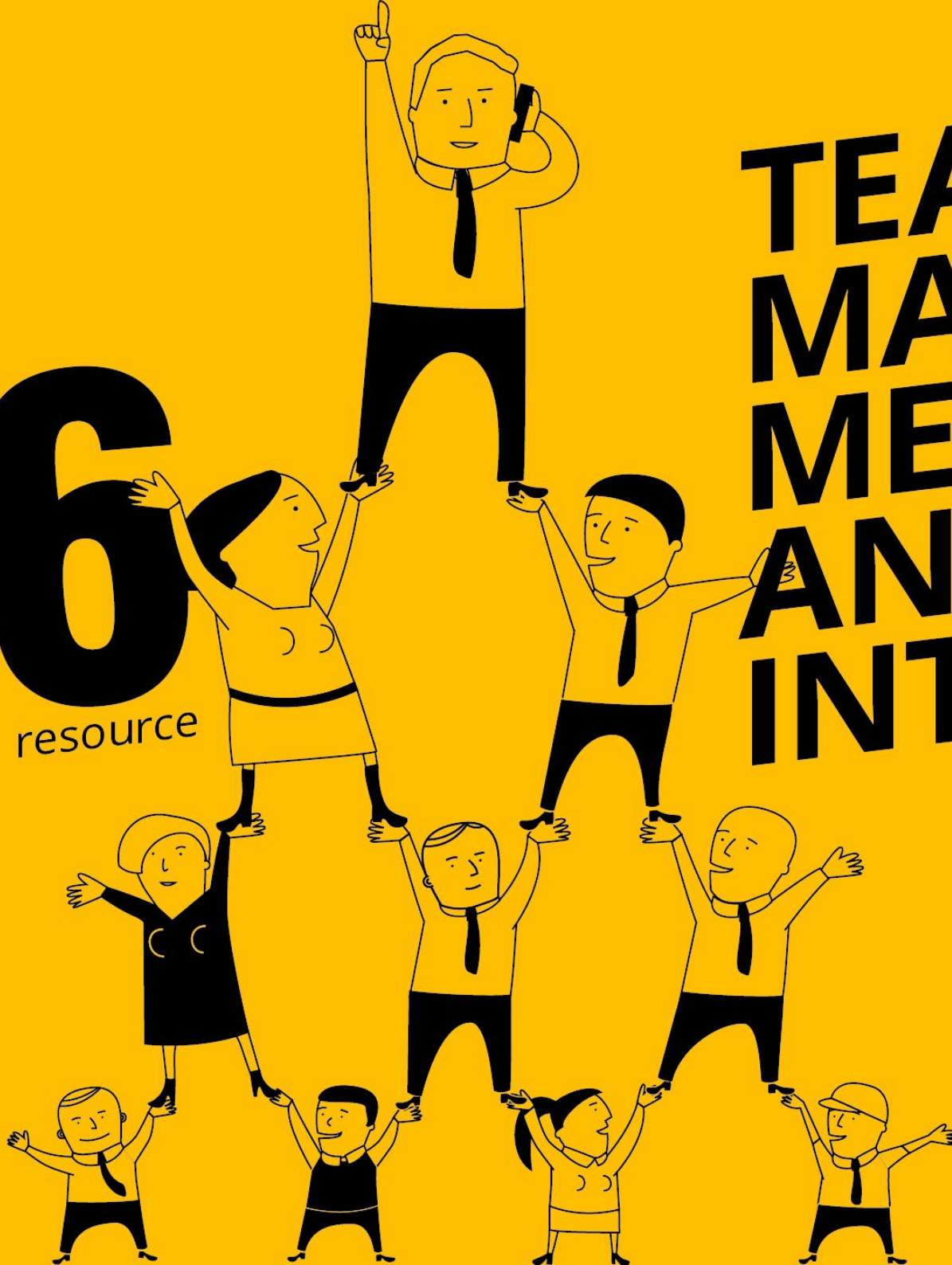


TEAMWORK MANAGE- MENT AND INTEREST

6
resource



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TEAMWORK MANAGEMENT AND INTEREST

Good teamwork is particularly important to get the best out of the potential qualities and abilities of everyone in the organization and to develop a spirit of cooperation.

This resource material includes:

- A list of questions and answers to identify some of the barriers to teamwork;
- Explaining the differences between informing people about solutions, advising them and engaging them directly;
- A framework for action when making decisions or dealing with difficult issues;
- A description of the advantages and disadvantages of voting and consensus and the situations in which they are or are not appropriate.

This resource applies to groups that work collectively (in non-hierarchical structures) as well as those that are traditionally (hierarchically) structured, to formal and informal decision-making processes, and to meetings of all types, including those of the board, subcommittee, staff or team.

Barriers to teamwork

Ambiguity in the organization's long-term, medium-term and/or short-term goals.

- Members of the organization, the board, managers, staff and volunteers need to be clear about what they are trying to achieve and why.
- Inaccurate terms of reference for the teams, board, executive committees or working groups.
- Authority must be defined and agreed by the governing board and relevant staff.
- Vague individual roles with inaccurate or non-existent job descriptions for paid staff, inadequate characterization of volunteer roles, and inaccurately defined board member responsibilities?
- Job descriptions should be described or updated for paid staff and long-term volunteers; a list of board responsibilities should be compiled and distributed to all board members.

Unclear problem formulation

Are the problems to be overcome and the decisions to be taken presented in a chaotic manner?

- Each topic that arises during a meeting should be clearly presented with a statement of the facts of the problem or situation, why it is important, what type of action is required and how urgent it is. Discussion can turn first to the additional facts of the situation, then to opinions, ideas for action, the advantages and disadvantages of different options, and finally to the solution.
- Are the problems or solutions framed in a way that alienates some of the people involved, for example by blaming them or using provocative words?
- Care should be taken to present information as thoroughly and directly as possible, avoiding an emotional tone, the use of abusive names and other unproductive tactics.

Are problems and solutions framed negatively so that people struggle to offer constructive ideas?

- Presenting information in a positive way, allowing for equal engagement, is important in making quality decisions. People may try to block decisions that will lead to change. Helping the group become aware of their resistance to change and giving people a strong opportunity to voice their concerns often leads to acceptance of change. Resource material 16 looks at change management.

Lack of cooperation

Are there some (or all) of the people involved who don't know how or don't want to cooperate?

- It may be necessary to clarify what levels of cooperation are required or to identify personal differences or conflicts (see Resource Material 12). Better meetings (Resource Material 7) or supervisory processes (Resource Material 10) may be helpful.

“The boss obviously knows how to get us to reach a consensus!”

Do people really want to find an answer or make a decision?

- Often one or more people want to block decisions, sometimes without realizing what they are doing. There needs to be someone available to help the group and individuals understand what is going on. When the discussion is going around in a closed circle, the person chairing can help or ask each person individually, “Do you actually want this issue resolved?” If everyone says yes, then the chair can take the floor: “Okay then. Let's concentrate on concrete, positive steps that we can actually do and discuss them in terms of what we want to accept, not what we don't like about them.” If people answer that they don't want to look at this situation, that should be decided before the group goes on.

Inappropriate counselling

Do the people in charge of certain areas of the job manage to attract other employees?

- They may not know who should be involved at each stage of the work. It would be useful to clarify this before undertaking any task. Encourage people to be open and regularly share information about their work so that others understand the background and the issues.

Is important information being withheld so that others cannot participate in decision-making?

- People who think they have a right to information should perhaps ask for it directly. Again, it is useful to clarify at an early stage who is entitled to what information in the decision-making process.

Is it that so much information being presented makes it is impossible for the people being consulted to understand what is important?

- Resource material 8 may be useful on this issue.

Are you engaging people too late?

- Draw up a clear schedule right from the start.

Does it give the impression that the real decision has already been made and other people are just there to confirm it?

- People who feel they have the right to be involved should be assertive and demand improvements to the decision-making process.

Inappropriate information

Are the people who have to deal with the problems and find the solutions getting the right information? Is their information too voluminous, too scarce or out of date?

- A clearer articulation of the problem and the process by which to solve it would be helpful.

Is the information presented in a way that people cannot understand?

- A standard format for written and oral reports will facilitate understanding. Use clear language and explain anything that is not obvious to anyone who will receive the information.

Is there sufficient time to read and make sense of the information or is there an opportunity to ask for clarification or additional data?

- Usually, information should be sent in advance, clearly stating what will be discussed at the meeting. If documents are planned to be distributed at the meeting, time should be allowed for reading and the issues should be verbally identified.
- Do you make people feel stupid if they ask for clarification or additional details?
- There needs to be greater understanding of the fact that others have very different levels of understanding and commitment. Putting people down or highlighting their incompetence will alienate them and reflect badly on the organization as a whole.

Poor time planning

Is sufficient time provided for problem-solving and decision-making?

- Plan well in advance of the event. Leaving it to the last minute creates management crises and stress and can lead to poor decisions. Resource materials 14 and 22 can help in this regard.
- Are possible consequences (good or bad) considered when a new activity or project is initiated?
- It is never possible to foresee all the consequences, but with time and the help of good risk assessment and decision-making processes, it will be easier to predict and plan for some of them.

Incorrect decision-making procedures

Are the people involved aware of how to deal with differences and conflicts within the group?

- Resource material 12 will help you with this.

Is reaching a consensus the most important thing everyone agrees on?

- Consensus does not mean that everyone has to agree. Different points of view are taken into account, but it is recognized that for the group to move forward, it must come to a decision that everyone wants to accept.

Does the group tend to hold hasty votes, with the difference of opinion being suppressed by the winning majority, and the minority left unsatisfied?

- More time will be needed for discussion, with greater openness to the possibilities for new solutions arising from the discussions.

Do people who have different opinions feel rejected or ignored?

- Good facilitation of the discussion is needed to allow everyone to speak and be heard.

Dominance

Do the people who have been involved the longest dominate the discussions and impose their opinions?

- They are probably too emotionally tied to the group. They need to step back and allow others to participate fully, even if it takes the organization in new directions.

Do the employees in the highest paid positions or the most prestigious positions or the council members, dominate the discussions and impose their opinions?

- This is one of the most difficult situations that arise as no one else has the power to control them. A good approach in such a situation is to support those in a weak position instead of influencing those in a strong position. If everyone were as well informed and confident as possible and took an active part in discussions, they would limit the influence of those who dominate.

Do people dominate for other reasons?

- Such behavior often arises from a fear of being rejected, so people who appear very strong may need more support (Resource Material 10) to overcome their fear. Or those who feel dominated may need support to attack such behavior.

Despotic behavior

Do despotic actions and opinions based on stereotypes prevent some people from participating fully in discussions?

- This needs to be examined in a constructive way to enable people to understand what they are doing without taking a defensive or negative stance.

Do certain positions or behaviors prevent some people, for example those who do not like to have their say, from participating fully?

- Every effort should be made to enable people with special needs to participate fully, for example by providing materials in electronic form, sign language interpretation (if needed), etc. This also means asking people what they need rather than making assumptions.

Lack of trust

Do people who have to solve problems or make decisions feel a lack of trust in the organization?

- The organization probably has unclear or unrealistic goals and dysfunctional procedures. Go back to the beginning of this list of issues and address these problems first.

Do people lack confidence in a group's (e.g. team or board) ability to solve problems or make decisions?

- For the short term, better information would help, and for the longer term, the group could be strengthened by training and bringing in new staff to the council or subcommittees.

Is there a lack of mutual trust in people's abilities to deal with problems or make decisions?

- Appropriate supervision procedures (Resource Material 10) would enable this to be discussed and overcome, although a new problem may arise if the person supervising is the one who has lost confidence. Resource Material 5 deals with this situation.

Do individuals lack confidence in their own abilities to deal with problems or make decisions?

- In this case, a supportive, teaching and learning environment where mistakes are accepted rather than criticized or stigmatized will be helpful.

Are people afraid of drawing the “wrong” conclusions and failing?

- With good information and deliberation, wrong decisions are less likely to be made, but no one is always right. People would be braver to take risks if there was an atmosphere of trust, openness and a willingness to learn from their mistakes.

Are they afraid to come to the “right” conclusion and appear successful?

- Fear of success may sound paradoxical, but success can cause a lot of tension because then one has to maintain the level achieved.

Lack of implementation control**Are the decisions taken ever implemented?**

- Each decision should be linked to a specific name or names so that everyone knows who is responsible for what. Good record-keeping and follow-up are particularly important (see Resource Material 7).

Even after a decision has been made and implemented, is there a procedure for looking at whether it was the right one?

- Reconsideration should be provided for any important or controversial decision at the time of its adoption. The agenda planner should provide for this in the future agenda (see Resource Material 7).

To inform, consult or decide?

Decision-making is often an unnecessarily difficult process as no one is clear who is involved and how. A few questions at the beginning can easily clarify this.

- Who needs to be informed that a problem is being discussed or that a decision needs to be made? Are people simply informed or are they expected to participate in the process in some way? If the latter, they should rather be involved in one of the following questions.
- Who should be consulted? This means asking people for their ideas and suggestions, making it clear (quite seriously) that they will be taken into account, but the final decision will be made by someone else.
- From whom should advice be sought? These are usually people with specialist knowledge or experience.
- Who has the right to make proposals based on research, consultation and advice?
- Who has the right to make recommendations from the proposals?
- Who makes the final decision?
- Who should be notified of this decision?
- Who will implement the decision? Will they be involved in the decision making it or at least be asked? If not, how would anyone expect them to engage with implementing the decision? Go back to the first question and think again.

Decision-making framework

Where the decision-making process seems murky, a decision framework can make it easier to approach problems and difficult situations.

Understanding

- Understanding the problem or situation and adhering to its definition. Do not complicate the problem.
- Find out exactly who should be involved in the process and how (see above “To inform, consult or decide?”)
- Find out what time or deadline to set, at least for conditional decisions.
- Find out what information is needed to solve the problem and who will provide it. Information includes opinions and facts.
- Keep clear notes or minutes of everything that is decided and make sure the people responsible for implementing it get a copy.

Exposure of information

- Acquire the information without evaluating anyone's views of the problem or suggestions for solutions.

Broad understanding

- Make sure that everyone involved in the decision has and understands the necessary information.

Justification of proposals

- Consider all possible solutions: frivolous and serious, absurd and rational. Use creative problem-solving techniques such as brainstorming and small-group discussions instead of simple whole-group discussions.
- Save all suggestions to a file or flip chart.
- Decide if you need more information to evaluate these ideas. If so, go back to the beginning.

Options

- Accept that there is no solution or proposal that will satisfy everyone. Be prepared to compromise.
- Evaluate suggestions in a clear, calm manner.
- Decide by vote if that is your choice or if it is necessary or advisable to come to an agreement that everyone is prepared to accept.
- Check that everyone directly involved in the decision wants to see it implemented, even if they disagree with it. If there are those who don't want this, decide whether to go ahead anyway (and risk sabotage) or repeat the exercise.
- Clarify who will follow up on the decision or implementation of the proposal, when and how this should happen, and when it will be addressed.
- Determine who will be responsible for informing the necessary people about the decision, who is responsible for implementing it, and when and how it will be implemented, tracked, and addressed.

Activity and opinions

- Inform the right people and put the proposal or solution into practice.
- Assess whether the problem has been resolved or whether there are now other aspects to consider.

Consensus and voting

When the time comes to make a decision, voting is quick and easy, with clear results. However, this so-called democracy is not necessarily so democratic.

- it can lead to tyranny of the majority, where a powerful group always has the upper hand over powerless people who remain in a weak position;
- it does not allow the minority to express their wants and needs;
- it can let the disgruntled minority sabotage the decision, leave the organization or stay but be negative and destructive.
- Consensus, on the other hand, tries to take everyone's views into account. It takes into account the ideas of all participants, then selects the best points of view to arrive at something that reflects everyone's contribution. A consensus solution does not necessarily satisfy everyone's needs, nor does everyone need to accept it as the best solution. The main point is that everyone agrees to work on it because they know why that decision was made. But it also causes problems:

- Consensus is often interpreted as something that everyone must fully agree with, putting pressure on people to silence their concerns and creating another kind of tyranny of the majority;
- a minority can continually refuse to accept a solution until it fully meets its demands, thus creating a tyranny of the minority;
- making a decision by consensus takes a long time and requires the full attention of everyone involved;
- it is not suitable for situations that require “either/or” decisions.

If decisions are to be made, everyone needs to be aware of how this is done.

Certain decisions, such as elections or the passing of formal resolutions, must always be achieved by voting. The organization’s constitution (bylaws) should list the decisions that must be made by vote of the general meeting (in a member/associate organization) or the board of directors and specify the percentage of votes needed for a decision to be taken.

The statutes must also specify the procedure for counting votes at general meetings and meetings of the board. In some cases, the chairman is given the opportunity to have a casting vote. It is usually considered good practice for the chair to use his/her vote in a way that maintains the status quo (the existing situation). Where there are no defined procedures for reaching consensus, the status quo must prevail. In new problems where there is no “status quo”, the question of the casting vote is usually dropped.

List of Questions for Better Teamwork

1. Is everyone aware of what the organization and each group within it is trying to achieve and how their work encompasses that?
2. Does your board and staff teams know how to listen to and respect each other's opinions, as well as make and implement decisions.
3. Do people in the organization think they are appropriately engaged in decision making or do they feel disengaged (or overwhelmed by too much engagement)?
4. Does each group working as a team have a good mix of skills, strengths and personal attributes (see section on Belbin's roles in Resource Material 4)?
5. When decisions are made by the board, executive committees or teams, is it clear when, how and by whom they will be implemented?
6. Are there effective procedures in place to check whether decisions have been implemented and have a good outcome, and if not, to take corrective action?