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Teamwork – Does It Always Work?

By Anna Johnson

Visit the business section of your local bookstore and you'll probably find a section on "teams" or "team building".

Listen to executives, professionals, consultants and academics, and they'll inevitably gush about the wonders of teams and teamwork.

And why not? Companies are teams, or at least they're made up of teams. A "team" being a group of people that works together to accomplish a common goal. So it only makes sense that business writers should devote attention to building, motivating and getting the best and most out of teams.

But when we talk about teams, we're not just talking about any old group of people working together to accomplish a common goal, are we?

We're talking about Teams with a capital "T" -- tightly focused groups of interdependent individuals using their distinct yet complementary skills to tackle projects and problems. Whew -- that was a mouthful!

These Teams do the same work as individuals or small-"t" teams, but in a more effective way. While in the past one person might have done it all, or a small-"t" team might have worked in "production line" fashion -- where each person did his or her little bit, before handing the project on to the next person -- Teams work together at the concurrently.

As such, they not only get the work done quicker, but if problems arise, they can more readily share solutions and overcome such stumbling blocks.

But as we embrace Teams and Teamwork... as Teams are heralded as the answer to all workplace ills... you might pause to ask, does Teamwork always work?

And the answer is: no!

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Structuring work around Teams... or Teams around work... will not always lead to the best possible results -- whether in terms of productivity, sales, profits or any other measure of "results".

Now, I'm not going to go into some obvious potential problems with Teams -- like people not getting along with each other. Frankly, there's no faster way to hamper workplace performance than people fighting! However, this can negatively impact non-Team work environments too.

My real objection is to companies (read: managers) rushing to deploy Teams, when one or more individuals -- working largely independently -- could more quickly and effectively do the work.

In fact, you need to be very clear about when to use Teams and when to use teams or individuals. There are three factors to consider:

-- Type of work

-- Scope of work

-- Kinds of people attracted to this kind of work

Let's consider each...

1. Type Of Work

When it comes to the type of work, ask yourself:

-- Can it, must it, be done at the same time? If so, the greater the need for a Team. If not -- if it is sequential -- the smaller the need.

-- Does knowledge need to be acquired from one task in order to do another? If so, the more likely that one person or a group of independent people should perform the work.

-- Does the work require diverse talents, skills or knowledge? The more varied the talents, skills and knowledge required, the less likely that one person will be able to, or should, do all the work.

2. Scope Of Work

How big is the project? How complex is it?

The bigger and more complex the work, the more appropriate it is to divide up the work among two or more people. Hence, the need for a Team.

Even if the work is sequential, the sheer enormity of the project might mean that you need more than one person with the same talents, skills and knowledge to work on each element. Again, you might need a Team.

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And if the work is particularly complex, you might simply need more brainpower for brainstorming, problem solving and "doing". A Team in other words.

3. Kinds Of People

Who does this kind of work? Specialists or generalists? Lone rangers or team-players?

This is a bit of a chicken-and-egg scenario in that the type of work generally attracts certain kinds of people, while certain kinds of people like to do certain types of work!

For you, the question is whether or not an individual is attracted to doing everything or only some parts of the work. And remember, what someone likes doing will have an impact on how he does it.

Therefore, it's desirable to put specialists into teams tackling large projects, where they can concentrate solely on their area of specialty.

Likewise, all-rounders or generalists would do better taking charge of smaller projects, that they can look after from start to finish.

As for lone rangers versus team players --- by definition lone rangers are better suited to working alone, while team players thrive in teams.

Hopefully, these three considerations will help you decide whether to use a Team or individuals / teams. And while this "check-list" may seem like common-sense... well, we all know that common-sense isn't necessarily common!

Anna Johnson is the author of the How To Manage People System, including her book, How To Manage People (Even If You're A Control Freak!). Get Anna's FREE 12-page report, How To Be An Outstanding Manager – The 8 Vital Keys To Managing People Effectively:

<http://www.howtomanagepeople.com>

Evaluating Your Team Building Activities

By Brett Danielson

Team building has become one of the newest buzz words in the corporate lexicon. In fact, for at least the last decade surveys of business leaders in every industry have shown that the prime characteristic they look for in new hires is the ability to work with a team. And why not? Research has shown that when people work in teams, they can accomplish far more than a group of individuals working together. But not all team building activities are created equal. Over the last few years, some industry experts have leveled criticism at the 'quick-fix' attitude that has been adopted by many companies who

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attempt to create or sponsor their own team building activities.

In order to be effective, say experts in corporate teams, a team building event must:

- Be integrated with real work goals.

- o It's not enough to plan a fun day of activities for your team. The team building event that you plan should help focus the members of the team on what's not working and what needs to happen for the team to work together.

- Be part of an overall company goal.

- o Plan team building activities and events as part of the company's overall plan for success. That means more than just a one off event to go buggy riding. Team building events should be an ongoing, annual or semi-annual event.

- Be planned by a team. o After all, the goal is to promote teamwork. The planning team should model the behavior that you expect it to promote.

- Be followed up with real work integration.

- o A one off event that has no follow up in the work world will be seen as a holiday at best – and a cynical attempt at manipulation at worst. To be meaningful, team building efforts must continue beyond the event day.

- Be reinforced by rewarding teamwork and team behavior.

- o Once you have a team that's working as a team, you need to reinforce that behavior by rewarding it. Recognition of teams that are working exceptionally well, special corporate events to mark team accomplishments and notice in the company newsletter are all ways to reinforce and reward teamwork within your company.

If planning an event that will do all that seems daunting, keep in mind that there are companies who make this their business. A company like that specialises in building team activities can offer your company custom team building activities that are designed to help your employees and coworkers focus on the importance of working together as a team.

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planning unique

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<http://www.chillisaUCE.co.uk/corporate-events/>

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