

Team Working

What is a team?

You could define a team as:

'A group of people working together towards a common goal'

As a manager, you are a member of several teams. You may be a member of a sub-team within a larger team, and of a team that draws from several other teams. You may also be a member of one or more social teams at work as well – those who take breaks together, or socialise together outside work.

As well as motivating individuals, you also need to make sure that each team works well together, and that the teams work well together. To do this, it helps to be aware of some of the things that make a proper team different from a group of people who just happen to work together.

<i>A team...</i>	<i>A group...</i>
Has a common goal or target	Each person has their own goal or target
Bonds through choice	Chooses not to bond
Fall naturally into various roles and are comfortable and productive in these	May duplicate effort by trying to do it all themselves
Often has a shared history	Has little or no common ground
Works well together without supervision	Needs direction
Supports and helps each other as needed	Works independently
Solves it's own problems	Requires help from outside
Divides work between them according to ability & time	Concentrates on their own tasks
Has an output greater than the sum of it's parts	May lose output due to internal wrangling
May socialise together in or outside work	Restricts activities to work only

There are of course many other differences along the same lines.

Working as part of a team

When you need to work as part of a team, it will help to:

- ‡ **Understand the team purpose** – what does it exist to achieve?
- ‡ **Find out what you can contribute** – what do you bring to the team?

- ‡ **Find out what you need** – what can you expect help with?
- ‡ **Identify who's who** – what roles do the other team members play? These may not be the same as their formal titles or job roles.
- ‡ **Observe the team** to discover what's acceptable – what in-jokes or team traditions exist?
- ‡ **Prepare well** – you only get one chance to make a first impression.
- ‡ **Assess yourself** against the rest of the team – what do you need to do to fit in even better?

Team roles

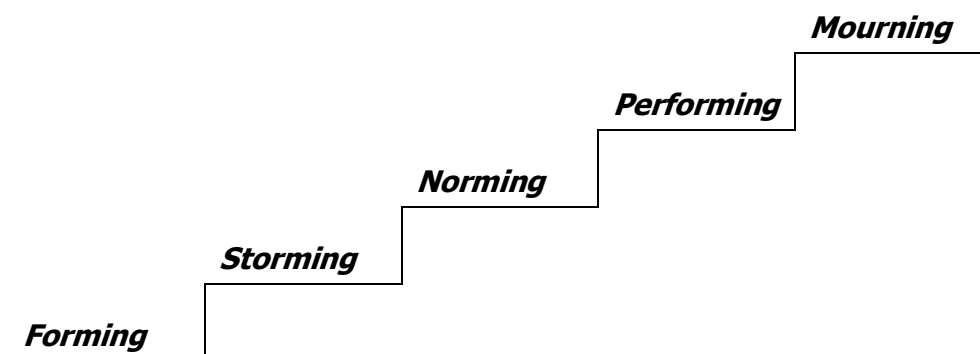
As mentioned above, people's roles within a team may not correspond with their job titles or formal roles, for instance a manager may hand over his/her leadership responsibilities to a team member. One study – Belbin Team Roles - suggests there are nine different roles that people play within a team. This does not mean that all teams should have nine people, but the most effective teams should have all these roles covered. This may be by each person fulfilling more than one role within the team.

Various other studies have identified more or less team types than this, and often called them by different names. However the basic idea holds good, that people should fall into a role where they can be at their most productive and use their natural skills and talents to the best advantage of the team.

Stages of a team's development

A successful team does not just happen. One study suggests that it will go through a number of stages as shown in the diagram below. There is no fixed time-scale for how long this process will take to complete, but as a manager you can help it to happen efficiently in a number of ways.

5 stages of team development



Forming

At this point the team is just coming together, and is still a group of individuals.

Storming

At this stage the team is beginning to find itself, establish an identity, and work out its roles and values. There may be challenges to the structure and roles of the team.

Norming

During this stage the team is laying down its accepted behaviour; people are settled into their roles. The team is beginning to work together.

Performing

During this stage the team is at its peak and will put out the best quantity and quality of work. The members are working well together and achieving more than they could separately.

Mourning

If one or more members leave the team or it is disbanded for any reason, it will go through a period of yearning for 'the good old days' before beginning to re-form.

Helping a team to build

As a manager, you can help by:

- Where possible, select people who will 'fit in' to minimise conflict
- Providing a clear goal and purpose and helping the team achieve it
- Showing you trust and believe in the team
- Showing an interest in each individual as a person
- Taking an interest in the team's and each individual's work
- Empowering the team
- Allowing the team to form at its own pace – you can't force it!
- Don't force people into roles that don't suit them

For related topics see Top Tips:

- **Change Management**
- **Leadership**
- **Succession Planning**