

# HOW TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL TEAM

By Ruth McGuire, BSc

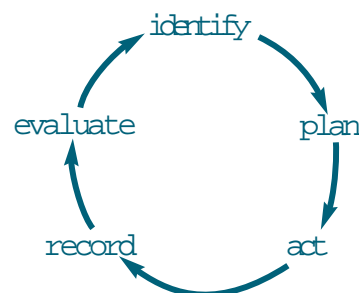
*Providing effective health care often relies on good team work. This article explores team behaviour and suggests ways to build a successful team*



## identify gaps in your knowledge

1. What is the difference between a group and a team?
2. What are the key features of an effective team?
3. Which team role do you fulfil?

This article relates to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's core competencies of "management" and "interpersonal skills" (see "Medicines, ethics and practice — a guide for pharmacists", number 26, July 2002, pp105–6). You should consider how it will be of value to your practice.



Mention the word "team" to people and they will probably think of sports, but the principles of team effectiveness are the same whether a team is based in the work place or on a pitch. In "Managing teams",<sup>1</sup> Robert Heller says: "A true team is a living, constantly changing, dynamic force in which a number of people come together to work." A successful team is more than just a collection of individuals: it has synergy. That is to say, the achievement of the team is greater than what the individual members of that team could produce on their own.

### A GROUP OR A TEAM?

It is important to understand the difference between a group and a team. Groups tend to come together for a specific purpose but members work independently. A group may have a leader, but the roles and functions of the other group members are not well defined. In contrast, an effective team has the following characteristics:

- Members who understand and commit to their role within the team
- Shared sense of purpose
- Members who share and contribute to team goals
- Strong leadership
- Members who trust each other
- Members who support each other
- Good communication
- Ability to manage conflict when it arises
- Transparent decision making processes

### ROLES WITHIN A TEAM

Many organisations use the Belbin team model to analyse their teams. Dr Meredith Belbin defined "team role" as being about how

people behave in a team, how they contribute to a team and how they interrelate with other team members. Having spent nine years researching team behaviour, he concluded that a balanced team exhibits nine roles (described in Panel 1 on p816) and that different personalities naturally lean towards certain roles.

The nine roles can be grouped into three categories: action-oriented (people who take responsibility for tasks), people-oriented (people who relate well to other people within the team) and cerebral (people who think creatively and analytically or contribute ideas and knowledge). Each role contributes differently to the team, but is also likely to be accompanied by typical weaknesses, which Belbin describes as "allowable".

Although a balanced team reflects all nine of Belbin's team roles, this does not mean that a team must be composed of nine people. It just means that all nine roles must be covered in order for a team to be most effective and many teams are composed of people who carry out more than one Belbin role.

If a new team is being created from scratch, then consideration needs to be given to filling the team with people who can bring characteristics of each of the nine roles to the team. For existing teams that are not productive enough, certain members may need to be replaced in order to ensure that all the Belbin roles are present within the team.

Belbin argues that understanding team roles is crucial to understanding team behaviour. When team members have a clear understanding of their own roles within a team and the team's goals, there is a stronger sense of commitment.

### SHARED SENSE OF PURPOSE

Although good teams work creatively, they need to have clear terms of reference so that they understand what is expected of them and know the limits of their responsibilities as a team. Teams are effective when members share a sense of purpose. In other words, when they know where the team is going and why it exists.

Some teams even have a written mission statement to ensure goals are clear. The achievement of goals often provides further incentive for the team to continue working together. Goals should be challenging and "SMART" (specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and timely) to help team members to keep focused and motivated. For a pharmacy team, goals might be to:

*Ms McGuire is a journalist from West Yorkshire. She is also a lecturer and trainer in personal development*

- Improve relationships with other health care professionals
- Increase staff morale
- Review existing procedures and reduce waiting times
- Build better relationships with consumers
- Provide training and development opportunities for all staff
- Improve administrative systems
- Improve the range of products
- Meet financial targets

#### STRONG LEADERSHIP

The leadership style of the team leader will inevitably influence the effectiveness of a team. Effective teams have strong leaders (Belbin's co-ordinator role) and pharmacists are often expected to perform this role. Some football teams are a good example of teams inspired by good leaders (managers). They illustrate the importance of a leader with vision. The leader must be able to implement decisions, recruit new team members and select the best person to fulfil a particular role, ensure that individual team members are aware of their responsibilities and raise the morale of the team when needed. An effective team leader must take responsibility for the team achieving its goals. When performance is poor, the leader takes the blame because his or her role is seen as fundamental to team performance and productivity. The leader should ensure that the team stays focused on its work.

Good team leaders help team members to feel good about themselves. People almost always respond well to praise so it is important for a team leader to give praise when it is due. However, going back to the football team analogy, when goals are achieved, the success is shared and celebrated by the entire team and not seen as an individual achievement. This is the same kind of team spirit that exists within successful work-based teams. Where possible, team leaders could try to build a reward system into the team structure for when goals are achieved. Rewards used by organisations include pay rises, bonus schemes, profit sharing and prizes. An effective team leader:

- Can get people involved and committed
- Makes it easy for others to see opportunities for teamwork
- Allows people to perform
- Looks for people who want to excel
- Communicates fully and openly
- Celebrates achievement

#### TEAM TRUST

Trust is promoted through delegation, transparency and encouraging ideas. A good team leader delegates tasks to members and then leaves them to take responsibility for those tasks. Interference (from the leader or others) will leave a team member feeling that there is no trust in his or her abilities to fulfil a role. A clear distinction needs to be made between giving support and undermining a team member by trying to take over his or her task. If a task has been appropriately matched to a team member then delegation works well.

Allowing team members to develop can create trust and a team leader should be on the look out for opportunities for individual team members to grow, even if this means supporting a team member to apply for positions elsewhere.

The key to transparency is good communication. Teams usually find that meetings are a good way of communicating effectively. Meetings should be held regularly and include an agenda item on progress reviews. Encouraging ideas during team meetings not only helps members to feel valued but also to feel trusted. Furthermore, meetings provide opportunities for teams to bond and friendships can even be formed.

In "Managing teams",<sup>1</sup> Heller suggests that team members should try to relate to each other as people and not just colleagues. In other words, team members should not just work together but play together in order to function more effectively as a team. Some companies use "away days" as an opportunity to allow staff to discuss

#### action : practice points

1. Check the health of your team at [www.teamcommunications.com/team/teamcheck.htm](http://www.teamcommunications.com/team/teamcheck.htm)
2. Identify your Belbin team role(s) and reflect on how you use your role to contribute to your team's effectiveness.
3. Action plan to improve your team's effectiveness

#### evaluate

How could your learning have been more effective?  
What will you do now and how will this be achieved?

work issues in a more relaxed environment. Often, leisure activities or tasks that get people to work together in different ways are incorporated into the programme for the day.

### TEAM COMMUNICATION

As already mentioned above, good communication is the lifeblood of a successful team. This can be formal or informal. The frequency of communication will often be determined by the distance between team members. Research shows that the closer team members are to each other in terms of where they sit, the greater their chances of communicating. In larger premises, team members may not work in a space where communication is only a matter of talking across a short distance. Furthermore, in many places such as hospital pharmacies, team members will work different shifts, making regular communication even more of a challenge. It is therefore important for the team leader to choose the most effective method of communication for the team. This could be through traditional means such as meetings, noticeboards, circulars, memos or electronic means such as e-mails or an intranet. However, face-to-face communication is still the most effective means of communicating and some arrangement should be made to allow staff physically to meet on a

regular basis. Team meetings provide an ideal opportunity for the team to monitor its progress and to plan future goals. Meetings should also be used by members to share their successes and provide positive feedback on achievements.

### DEALING WITH TEAM CONFLICT

It is inevitable that at one time or another, there will be conflict within a team. However, a disagreement should never be allowed to reach the stage where it threatens the existence or success of a team. Team leaders should always try to gather the facts and identify the causes of a problem before reaching a judgement. Frequently, the conflict will be resolvable but, in extreme cases, if a problem arises because an individual does not contribute to the goals of a team, it may be that his or her membership of the team needs to be reviewed. The key point to resolving team conflict is to address the problem rather than the person.

Although there may be a temptation to try to conceal or ignore a problem, some management experts believe that it is far better to be open about conflict because a problem within a team presents an opportunity for learning rather than blaming. Some organisations use a "problem log". Using a log is a transparent process that allows team members to offer suggestions for resolving problems. It enables a problem to be clearly identified, its causes to be isolated, the resources for resolving the problem to be identified, solutions to be offered, and an action plan for implementing the solution outlined. The final outcome of the problem solving plan can also be logged.

### MEASURING SUCCESS

The success of a team should be measured at regular intervals so that team spirit can be encouraged, either through celebrating achievements or through sharing problems. In terms of measuring success, it is perhaps easier to gauge the progress of a sports team than it is to rate the performance of work-based teams, for example, the performance of a sports team can usually be tracked by league tables. Within the context of pharmacy, the measurement instruments will be determined by the goals set. For example, one goal might be to increase profitability. This could be measured by looking at actual expenditure and profit versus forecasts. The progress of a goal to increase morale could be assessed by conducting a staff survey.

### CONCLUSION

Working as part of a successful team makes work enjoyable. It provides employees with a supportive work environment and enables them to address any conflict that might arise in a constructive way. Panel 2 suggests tips for team building.

### PANEL 1: BELBIN'S TEAM ROLES

**Plant** A plant is creative, imaginative and unorthodox. He or she solves difficult problems and comes up with ideas but can tend to ignore incidentals and is often too pre-occupied to communicate effectively

**Co-ordinator** A co-ordinator is mature, confident and a good chairman. He or she clarifies goals, promotes decision-making, delegates well, motivates others and makes the best of team resources. However, a co-ordinator can be seen as manipulative and may attempt to off-load personal responsibilities

**Monitor evaluator** Sober, strategic and discerning, the monitor evaluator sees all options. He or she judges accurately and is good at making decisions but lacks the drive and ability to inspire others

**Implementer** Disciplined, reliable, conservative and efficient, an implementer turns ideas into practical actions. He or she is a good organiser but is somewhat inflexible and slow to respond to new possibilities

**Completer finisher** A completer finisher is described as painstaking, conscientious, anxious. This team member searches out errors and omissions, delivers on time and pays attention to detail but is inclined to worry unduly and is reluctant to delegate

**Resource investigator** Extrovert, enthusiastic, communicative and adaptable, a resource investigator is good at exploring opportunities and developing contacts. However, he or she can be over optimistic and can lose interest once initial enthusiasm has passed

**Shaper** A shaper is challenging and dynamic and thrives on pressure. He or she is also highly motivated and has the drive and courage to overcome obstacles but can be prone to provocation and offending the feelings of others

**Teamworker** Co-operative, mild, perceptive and diplomatic, a team worker is good at listening, building on ideas or suggestions and averting friction. However, team workers can prove indecisive in crunch situations

**Specialist** Specialists are typically single-minded, self-starting and dedicated. They provide knowledge and skills which are in rare supply, but tend to dwell on technicalities and only contribute on a narrow front

### PANEL 2: TIPS FOR TEAM BUILDING

- Set "SMART" goals
- Have regular "away days"
- Share and celebrate team successes
- Make sure team roles are matched to members' interests and skills
- Keep communication channels open and flowing
- Resolve conflict positively and learn from problems
- Have fun

### REFERENCES

1. Heller R. Managing teams. London: Dorling Kindersley; 1998.

### FURTHER READING

- Maddux RB. Team building. 2nd Ed. London: Kogan Page; 1994.