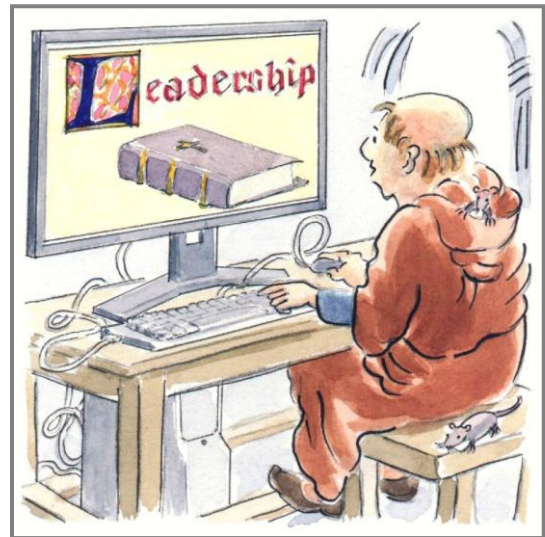


How to lead a team at church

Practical help for beginners

A45 Articles series: Leadership



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So, you have been asked, or are simply expected, to lead a team at your church.

It may be something already called a team such as the 'Finance Team', the 'Newcomers Team', the 'Awayday Planning Team', or even the 'Staff Team'. But beware: it may be known as a 'team' but Christians use the T word far too loosely so it may be that you in fact lead a group.

Or it may be something without the 'team' word at all but which might work better if it sought to become one: the 'Elders', the 'Music Group', even the 'PCC'.

So don't rely on the T word being an accurate descriptor. Just because people call it a team does not make it a team at all. Meanwhile certain groups can become at least team-like.

There are plenty of team ideas that people recognise. You may have heard about:

- John Adair's team, task, individual Venn (circles) diagram;
- Meredith Belbin's eight (or nine) team roles;
- Bruce Tuckman's team development stages: forming, storming, norming, performing.

These, and others, are good and helpful and are covered in what follows, but you first need to clarify what you are talking about before applying any of them.

So we need to consider, first of all, just what a team is so we know what we are dealing with. Hence the first part of this Article: 'Church teams'.

This is followed by 'Common misconceptions' to correct some standard ideas which need to be challenged. Finally, the third and main part of this paper gives advice to help you become an excellent team leader, in the form of eight recommendations.

Church teams

Teams, whether in church, Christian missions or anywhere, need to be distinguished from groups because the demands on the two are different. Any body of two or more people who get together for some reason is a group. All teams are also groups but not all groups are teams.

What turns a group into a team?

First, you decide you will seek to become a team. It does not just happen – it needs to be worked at; so all the members need to buy into the team aim. Teams differ from groups in having much greater emphasis on personal relationships leading to high levels of commitment, real collaboration, great trust, with conflict in the open and handled effectively. The key issue is a sense of togetherness. At least that is how they should be.

When they work well teams prove to be creative and productive in their output, building up the members in Christian character for future service and leadership, and giving a real sense of motivation and achievement in their togetherness. They play to everyone's strengths and encourage accountability.

But there are four requirements for all this to happen. See Training Notes TN41, *What makes a group a team*, on this website for further notes on these four.

1: One team task and vision

The most important feature has nothing to do with feelings for each other or team spirit. The members *together* need to have one clear team task they are seeking to fulfil and a vision of what might be if they did so successfully. The team is together working towards a specific achievement. All are agreed why the team exists and where it is heading.

In other spheres, the sports team seeks to win the match with a vision of eventually winning the championship. The sales team aims to settle the deal with a vision of their product leading the market. This team task is different from each person's individual job or role description. These all contribute towards the task but are not the task itself.

If a group is not seeking to achieve something outside of themselves, they are a group but not a team. That is fine, but some of what follows does not need to apply to them. That is why most church staff 'teams' are in fact merely groups. Just because they work together and meet once a week does not make them a team. Most church staffs do not have one specific task

they (and not others) are together seeking to achieve. They are simply those in that church's ministry who happen to be paid.

2: An agreed way of working

This describes the way the team is going to achieve this task. There has to be a common mind and a shared enthusiasm on what matters to this team in the 'how' of achievement. Two teams with similar tasks may go about their work in very different ways: one formal and the other relaxed, one in a hurry and the other taking a long time, one playing by the rules and the other cutting corners.

This agreed way of working (the technical term is 'values') can be broken down into:

- 'Non-negotiable foundations' (high level beliefs or actions such as a basis of faith or a commitment to teamworking itself);
- 'Community principles' (an expression of the ethos of the team);
- 'Internal agreements' (more detailed expectations over matters such as punctuality or availability).

Without a commitment by all members to the specific way the team is going to function there can be no real teamwork. 'Community principles' might include agreement about openness to each other, reliability, honesty, commitment. We look at this in more detail later.

3: A committed membership

There must be a known membership to enable a group to work as a team with crystal clear boundaries. In some groups, if someone has to miss a meeting they can send a replacement. That could never happen in a team – a one-off stranger would ruin the dynamic of trust and vulnerability.

The members then need to grow to a point where they really know and understand each other, where people are genuinely concerned for each other, where disagreements are tackled with humility, where people listen to each other and react honestly. You cannot have people saying one thing in a meeting and then something

different in the car park afterwards. The aim for the leader is to get to 'we/us' language instead of 'he/him/she/her'. The team becomes a powerful unit, not just a collection of individuals.

Members of a committee turn up for meetings. Members of a team support each other, pray fervently for each other and depend on each other. Membership boundaries and trust of one another are two key components. It follows that teams need to be small. More on this to follow.

4: An identified leader

Someone needs to be responsible for ensuring the above points are worked out in the team. They don't just happen. Team leaders are accountable to their team. They are there to enable the team not to control it. They lead from within more than out front. That does not mean that there are never times when the leader has to step out with a bold decision, but their authority depends on their ability to unite team members in mutual trust. Leadership is a gift and a service to the team, not a status or position of power.

Great leaders are often solo, not team, leaders. There is certainly a place for such leadership. *Team* leaders stand out less from the crowd but may achieve more by the way they enable the people in their team to function effectively. Their role may not be as visible as a solo leader but can have greater resilience.

Teams can be wonderfully supportive but they can also be painful when people fall out or the task gets lost. Teams risk much by seeking to bring people into close contact with each other. There is a real element of edginess. It is the role of the leader to help the members together to succeed. That is what this article is all about.

A biblical perspective

The idea of being together is clearly a biblical concept. Although there are obvious solo leaders through Old and New Testaments, there is greater stress on people living and working together.

The Trinity sets the foundation

God the Father, Son and Spirit form the divine team at the heart of all biblical truth.

God's plan for marriage and family reflects togetherness

Marriage was ordained as a means of preventing people being 'alone' (Gen 2:18-24). Family units are the bedrock of the Old Testament narrative.

Even solo leaders needed teams

Moses ended up with too busy a diary and needed advice from Jethro to appoint a team to work under him (Exodus 18:13-26). Nehemiah arranged teams to rebuild the Jerusalem walls (see Nehemiah 3).

Hebrew wisdom knew the value of teams

The point of being dependent on each other lies behind much of the wisdom advice in the Old Testament. See for example Proverbs 11:14 and Ecclesiastes 4:8-12.

Jesus led a team

Jesus selected a team of twelve with two specific roles: to be with him and to be sent out from him (Mark 3:13-19). And what a diverse team it was! Rough fishermen, one of the hated group of tax collectors, a zealot, a thinker and of course a betrayer. A frustrating group they turned out to be, but Jesus never went back on his basic model of sharing his ministry with them. When he sent them out on a missionary task he put them in sub-teams of two (Mark 6:7-13).

The Early Church modelled the concept

The disciples then carried the idea on into the church of the Acts of the Apostles. The idea of fellowship, of being together, of sharing all things, was developed into the concept of 'church' itself (Acts 2:42-47). Some of the churches would have been team-sized, at least to begin with. Others were much larger. But the team principle was clearly central.

The New Testament teaches the idea

There are over 50 verses with a 'together' tag to them in the epistles (for example, Romans 12:13-16). The 'body' passages (eg. Romans 12:3-8) stress our diversity within a unity with Christ as the head and our need for each other. The Bible knows little of individual Christian living (a very British idea) but stresses that we form one family, one quasi-team.

Church leadership was team based

The idea seems to be there too in how churches were led. We hear little about solo leaders but plenty about overseers, elders or presbyters – with no one model appearing as 'the' one you had to follow.

Yet great things happened through solo leaders

But we cannot use the above to prove you *have* to have a team to do anything. Far from it: many of the Old Testament major actions were

achieved by a solo leader. Abraham, Joseph, and the prophets acted, for the most part it would seem, alone. But teams are certainly biblical and definitely important.

So teams in church and mission work are not an idea taken from the business world, but a foundational principle for all God's people at all times. Would it not be great if businesses came to the Church begging for team advice because they could see we had a secret they wanted to learn? Sadly, the Church is often known for its solo leaders more than for its teams.

Types of church team

Books on teams from the secular world assume a business model and a leadership or project team with the members selected by the leader. Books on teams from the church world think mostly in terms of church leadership. But the idea of teamwork in your church applies more widely than those illustrations.

Here are specific examples of (potential) teams that this Article covers. The role of leading a team can apply to a wide group of church members, not just the Minister or departmental heads.

- **A small leadership team**

In some denominations this might be an Eldership, in others a Ministry Team of people with special, external authorisation, in others a less official but defined team of leaders working with the Minister. This will be the idea that comes to most people first of all when we talk about a team. The leader would normally be the Minister.

- **A staff 'team'**

The phrase will be familiar and is often used for any church where there is more than just a Minister 'employed' and paid to serve the church. Whether most of these are in fact 'teams' is another matter, as already explained, but some could be teams so the idea is included here. Again the leader would normally be the Minister but can occasionally be an Associate Minister.

- **A team of ministry leaders**

One example would be those who lead different children's groups. They may well be just a group but it can be that they

work as a close-knit team keeping in touch with each other week by week. The leader might be a volunteer Co-ordinator or a children's specialist on the staff.

- **A music 'group'**

These are, for some reason, usually called groups rather than teams but they need to be a team if they are to sing and play in harmony. Members bring their different musical skills, they all work together and what comes out should be a beautiful and multi-coloured piece of music. The leader will be the Music Director (or Choir Leader).

- **A project team**

This will be a team with a limited lifespan, set up to plan a major church event or programme. The team should disband once the task is complete (note the 'should'). The leader here could be anyone appointed to this role or chosen by the team.

- **A small ongoing task group**

Examples here include the Newcomers Team (where they all work together each week and rely on each other) or a catering team run on similar lines. Each would have a leader drawn from its membership.

- **A Church Council**

No Council (eg. PCC) is set up as a team because it is elected rather than selected. Most are also too large in number, but if they are to be effective I argue elsewhere that they need to work *like* a team (see Article A24, *Mission-shaped Councils* and the third main point there).

In a Christian mission agency typical examples would be a staff leadership team, a project team, a departmental team, or something similar. The staff here may well be a team because there is greater separation from the volunteers than in a church.

So a team is a special form of group, based on an idea that lies at the heart of Scripture and which has many applications in any church.

But Christians have some inbuilt ideas about teams that are inaccurate. The next part aims to put the record straight.

Common misconceptions

Before moving on to advice on how to lead a team, there is a need to clear away a range of misconceptions. Most of these are concerned with team leadership but first there is the misuse of the word 'team' itself, as already shown.

The use of the word 'team'

Here are some church groups that are not usually teams at all, though incorrectly assumed to be.

- Most church **staff teams** as already noted. There is usually no one task that, together and with no one else, they perform.
- Most church **home groups** – they may open up to each other, they may be united, but if they have no one task to perform outside themselves, they are not a team.
- A church **congregation**. They are certainly a group but their 'membership' changes Sunday by Sunday and most are far too big to be a team.
- A church **membership**. Here the boundaries may be clear and there might even be a specific task. But most church memberships are too big for team-like engagement with each other, even if the concept of church is team-like.
- A **one-off work party**. Teams take time to build so one-off or occasional groups cannot fulfil the requirements.
- Any **committee**, even if they meet every month, unless they specifically turn themselves into a team. Most assume they are there just for the business. As explained above, a Church Council is the same but can seek to behave like a team.
- A group of **friends** who are completely open with each other and get on together really well. That is deep friendship rather than 'teamship'.

Team Ministries

There is a structure in some denominations that sets up what may be known as a 'Team Ministry'. This usually consists of a number of churches grouped together and led by a clergy 'team'.

This is a lazy use of the word 'team'. It is being used purely as a term for the structural grouping of parishes that, too often, have little desire to work together. Even the clergy 'team' may all be trained to be solo workers and find

that the Team Ministry gives them one more meeting each week and a more complex governance structure. Having said that, the Ministers are more likely to be a team than their congregations (not just for reasons of size).

There are also so-called 'Group Ministries' where the structure that binds the group of churches together is less formal. But this is a better term for all such groupings.

Just throwing in the word 'team' changes nothing. What is needed, if this new structure is indeed the right one, is for a complete rethink at how colleges train would-be ordinands. That can only start if all churches understand and adopt proper team concepts at local church level.

Misunderstandings about team leadership

There are also misconceptions about team *leadership* in churches. Here are some of them. The error in each case is that the leader needs...

...to be the most senior person

Team leadership is not about status. Yet if you form a team there can be an underlying assumption that the most senior member ought to be the leader. For example, if the Minister is a team member, some people immediately assume that he or she has to lead the team. They see the church's structure diagram in their mind and the leader is at the top.

That may be true, but it may not. Working in a team is like being in a micro-climate. You work together, you share your gifts and personalities, you rely on each other and you are served by a leader whose job is to enable the team to function as one.

...to be the most experienced person

There is a natural desire to crown as leader the person who knows more, who has been around longest, who has served the team for more time than anyone else. Yet the best leader may be new to the team, younger than the others, and

unused to the task the team is responsible for. They may have team leadership aptitude when others do not.

...to be an extrovert

Leading a team is not about dominating but about enabling the team. Leadership in Christian gifting is not about status but service. Servant leaders do not have an aim to stamp their authority on the team but to enable it to function as a whole. Team members need to talk about 'us' not 'him' or 'her'. So being an introvert is not a bar to leading a team. But neither is being an extrovert – this is not the right axis to be thinking about who can and cannot lead a team.

There are of course times when leadership demands being the one to take the difficult decision once all the team members have expressed their view. And then to live with the outcome. But that is about courage, not being introvert or extrovert.

...to select the members

Yes, that is the way perhaps it should happen. It will be like this if a Minister picks a leadership team, or if someone tasked with organising the Christmas Fayre picks their organising team.

But what if you are the new Minister coming in to a leadership team? Some would argue that the team should all resign to give the new Minister the opportunity to select only those he or she wants. Some feel that the team only works once all those under the old leader have dropped out.

But very often you have to lead the people you did not choose. Taking over an existing team is an obvious example, leading an 'elected team' (some would say those two words cannot go together) is another, and being part of a team that then picks their own leader is a further example.

...to chair team meetings

The gift of leading a team is not the same as the gift of enabling a business meeting. There may be considerable overlap but chairing a meeting calls for people and business management skills more than leadership ability. People who feel the leader has to be chair as well probably have a 'Chair of the Board' model in mind. But the Board in this instance may well not be playing as a team.

In fact there are huge advantages if the leader is not in the chair at meetings. A leader chairing a meeting seeks to bring everyone in, to clarify the

views being expressed, to act as a referee more than a captain. But the team leader should have passionate views about major issues being discussed. And so you end up with a conflict of interest: one enabling good process, the other wishing to express a heartfelt viewpoint.

In a church PCC or similar council, the Minister may be ex officio chair, but if they want the Council to play like a team they will find they can fulfil their leadership role with more power when not in the chair, provided there is someone gifted who can take this role on.

...to outshine other members

A weak team leader will pick people for their team who are similar to them in many ways (so they can get on without conflict) but who do not shine quite so brightly as themselves, whether in ability, knowledge or respect. But a strong team leader will pick people who outshine them in a range of areas. This is a real team – it is not expected that the leader will dominate.

Nor does the leader have to outshine others in terms of workload or hours put in. The team leader who happens to be a workaholic is likely to cause damage by their expectation of others' involvement.

...to have the bright ideas

There is also a misconception around that leaders have the ideas which are then honed by the others and agreed. But ideas should come from everyone in the team, and not be held to be more important just because they came from the leader.

Vision can come from anyone. Part of the leader's role is to keep the team to its vision, but that does not imply the vision idea had to originate in the leader.

If someone feels threatened by this and other points here, it would seem that they will not make a good team leader. Passion, innovation and sharp thinking need to be seen throughout the team membership.

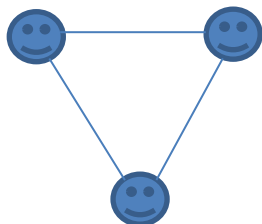
A note on team size

As already stated, team commitment implies that teams have to be small. But why?

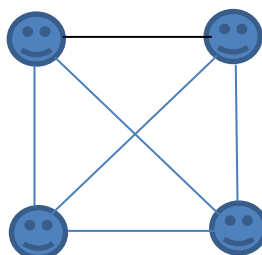
Imagine two dots on a sheet of paper representing two people and draw all possible lines between them: one line only.



Now draw three dots so the team has three people and draw all the connecting lines: three lines. The team size has gone up by 50% and the number of links by 200%.



If there are four dots for a team there are six lines. This time the team has gone up by 33% and the number of links by 100%.



And so on. What you find is that the number of links increases far faster than the increase in the number of people. The formula for the number of links is

$$\frac{1}{2}n(n-1)$$

where n is the number of people in the team.

In other words the number of links increases as a square of the number of people – or, in simple terms, much faster than the size.

So a team of 11 (such as a football team) has 55 relationship links to cope with, but once you get to 15 (for rugby) it's 105 and for 20 (far too big for a team now) it's 190. Teams in the business world are thought to be best if in the five to eight range.

In churches there is misunderstanding around this point because people feel there is safety in numbers.

If your Council appoints a team of any kind, make it as small as you can. Four or five may be fine depending on the task to be completed. Then you can develop real trust between each other.

Advice to you as team leader

Here are eight pieces of advice for any team leader. From here on what is written is directed to you. Rather than providing a random list these are based on:

- the four requirements for a group to be a team, as already listed (these come as Recommendations 1-4);
- the three well-known theories about teams, already noted (these come as Recommendations 5-7);
- the team's meetings (Recommendation 8).

The first four are explained quite briefly because the basis has already been laid in the first part of this article.

Recommendation 1

Hold everyone to the team task and vision

This is the first essential for a team so your responsibility is to ensure that each team member understands and is totally committed to the team's single purpose, the job the team *together* has to do. Everyone will need regular reminders of this. Remember, this is not the same as the individual role they play.

Whenever a new member joins the team, they need one-to-one sessions with you to clarify and explain the team task, whatever that person's individual role may be.

It is also vital that each person knows the role they are to play within that overall task and how this meshes with everyone else's role. If everyone has a role definition, however simple, give everyone the complete set so all are clear about everyone's contribution. Teams are no places for secrets.

But vision too. Each member needs to own the vision and work towards that outcome even if that means taking a lowly place on the grid behind others. Keeping this big picture in mind can give great encouragement, but when the going is hard it can become lost to view.

If an administrator, for example, is passionate about the team's vision, that gives them context and purpose for the background part they play. So make sure the big picture vision is kept in sharp focus for everyone, whatever their role. Make it everyone's prayer focus.

It can help to break the vision down into dated steps along the way. That stops it being out of reach for everyone. Celebrate with and affirm the team at every milestone you reach.

Never make the vision too easy. Teams thrive on something that is challenging and scary. It is the leader's responsibility to judge the level of challenge that is needed: too little and the team will never work to its potential, too much and the team may feel overwhelmed.

Above all, real vision has to be formed through prayer because the vision is God's work. It is sometimes better to talk of vision in terms such as 'faith' or 'prayer' to make sure you know it is God's doing: you are simply to be faithful to your purpose.

See also (on this website)

Article A4, *Twelve questions to help you plan*; Training Notes TN32, *What do you mean by 'vision'?*; TN48, *Let's get purpose statements right*.

Recommendation 2

Identify and model the team values

The second essential for a group to be a team is that everyone agrees and works to shared values, a code of belief and behaviour. The trouble is that such things are too often unstated or assumed and so there is little coherence in the way team members abide by them.

First define the 'non-negotiable foundations'. One should be that you are all committed to becoming a team. There may be others to do with doctrine or to do with the purpose and vision for the church or mission.

Then you need to help team members define and own the 'community' you set. One of the key areas here is the standard you expect of everyone: let it be known how high the bar has

been set but involve everyone in the setting of it. You have to live up to this yourself of course!

Your values might include issues to do with:

- **Quality**
The standard expected in all output.
- **Reliability**
Everyone keeping their promises.
- **Trust**
In each other and showing others can trust you.
- **Caring**
Responsibility for each other's needs.
- **Co-operation**
Seeking to work together effectively.
- **Conflict**
How disagreements are to be handled.
- **Discipleship**
Everyone seeking to follow Christ as Lord.
- **Training**
The belief in developing as a team.
- **Leadership**
Agreeing your role as the team leader.
- **Respect**
For each other's role and views.
- **Loyalty**
To the team as a whole
- **Failure**
Permission to make mistakes.
- **Flexibility**
The ability to change when necessary.
- **Enjoyment**
In being a team.

Your role is to help the team define these and then work to them. For example, in team meetings the way the decisions are taken may matter as much as the decisions themselves.

So team leaders need to be role models: to keep their promises, to admit when they are wrong, to take criticism from the rest of the team when deserved, to put aside their own preferences when the team wishes to follow a different line and to let others take the credit for team performance. Solo leaders will find all this very hard. You, the leader, learn to be accountable to the whole team.

See also (on this website)

Training Notes TN74, *Understanding values*; TN25, *The radical values that Jesus taught*.

Recommendation 3

Build the personal relationships

One of your key roles is to ensure the members know who makes up the team (and so who is not a member).

That is not as obvious as it may sound sometimes. Some church leadership teams include spouses, some do not, and in some it is unclear. A team may have associate members in some form: are they members or not? Team boundaries need to be precise. It is quite possible to have an inner team and a slightly wider one (not too large) which includes all on the inner team.

You then need to enable everyone to build relational links between each other. This takes time and might mean you hold regular sessions without team business, arrange occasional team outing where you let your hair down, ensure no one is cut off from other members, and help everyone to listen to each other and observe each other's needs. But much of this occurs when team members are working in their activity together rather than in forced meetings of a social nature.

This calls for you to be open and vulnerable. Build your own links with each member as a role model. This calls for high levels of emotional intelligence. You are seeking to build trust throughout the whole team.

Everyone needs affirmation. Relationships develop when you affirm individual members in their role and the whole team when they succeed in what they set out to achieve. But the aim should be to develop to a point where everyone affirms everyone else.

The best teams are often very mixed: in age, gender, experience, gifting. Building strong relationships is not straightforward. But a united commitment to the team task and a growing trust in each other can overcome such differences.

See also (on this website)
Training Notes TN94, *Becoming self-aware*.

Recommendation 4

Demonstrate your leadership role

The fourth requirement of a team is that there is a leader who enables the team to function to its highest ability. So everyone needs to know you, your style of team leadership, and to see that you are seeking to be the enabler rather than the controller, but that when tough

decisions are to be made you are not afraid to face them.

In a Christian context leadership involves keeping the team in discipleship mode all the time: seeking to help each member grow as a Christian through their involvement in the team (see 1 Timothy 3:13). It is your responsibility to ensure Christ is Lord for the team as a whole and for each individual member too.

At the same time your role is to develop new leadership. First, you should be looking out for who might take the leadership role over from you at some point. Secondly, you should be seeking to develop leaders for other teams and in different spheres.

Relationships, in the previous point, are built on affirmation. But some feedback needs to be in terms of reprimand and it is your role to see when this is necessary and to give it. Make it clear at the outset that you will do this, rather than springing it on the team unannounced.

For individuals you need to do this one-to-one without in any way degrading them in front of others. You reprimand them for the action or lack of it, not for the person they are. But there may be times when the reprimand is for the team as a whole, which includes yourself.

In line management it is wrong to always encourage without reprimand, or to reprimand without frequent encouragement. The same is true in team leadership. But here you need to be known to accept reprimand from other team members when you need that. Effective reprimand goes with vulnerability.

Your role is not so much to be out in front but to ensure all the principles in this Article are followed. In all this you are responsible for:

- ensuring the team does not stray from its spiritual moorings: that the team prays together for each other, for the team as a whole and for the vision;
- handling team conflicts well;
- demonstrating real delegation so that every member shoulders specific responsibilities and you are not micro-managing them;
- role modelling everything covered here.

Throughout all this you remain accountable to the team, as already noted.

See also (on this website)
Article A32, *Be creative as a line manager*;
Training Notes TN15, *How not to delegate!*;
TN30, *How to give and receive criticism*.

Having worked through the four marks of a team, we now take those three theories of teams that most people have come across at some stage, from Adair, Belbin and Tuckman, if only as illustrations of the importance of needs, roles and development.

Recommendation 5

Understand individual and team needs

John Adair's Action-centred Leadership Model (developed in the 1970s) proposed that good leadership in a team context means seeing the needs of

- Individuals
- the team as a whole, and
- the task

of equivalent importance. These are often drawn as three interlocking circles, a Venn diagram.

We have covered the task in point 1 above. Here we look at the needs of individuals within the team and then the needs of the team itself. The model is sometimes criticised for being too simplistic, but makes a powerful point for team leaders.

Individual needs

Watch and listen to each member, pick up the body language, read the signs correctly and know the background. You need to understand how each member will respond to, for example, a direct question. 'How are you today?' to two different people going through a crisis at home will produce the word 'Fine!' from one and an outpouring of grief from the other, though much will depend on how much they trust you. Consider, too, people's:

- **Expectations**
These could be any of 'I ought to be the leader', 'With Jason in the team we are in for disaster', 'I just want to go home and curl up in a ball', 'I'm so excited to have been chosen for this' (among other possibilities).
- **Emotional needs**
Lonely people may look to the team to provide friendship, those struggling in a relationship may look for relief, those in a dead-end job may be looking for status and purpose. But the team is not there to meet all these needs.

- **Practical needs**
Single parents may find it hard to get (and pay for) baby-sitters, commuters may not have time to get home for a meal to get to the evening meeting, some people can work flat out for hours on end, others need frequent down-time.
- **Spiritual needs**
You may have a team with people at very different levels of Christian maturity or expectation or backgrounds in teaching and experience.
- **Role needs**
Each person needs to know exactly what part they are to play in the team (their task role) and how they are to grow in this. So as well as making their role clear, give them authority to fulfil it. Don't micro-manage. Don't answer all their questions for them.

Team needs

People's individual needs cannot be seen on their own, for the team together has needs too.

- **Training**
Team members may need ongoing training in the skills they are contributing to the task, but the team together needs training in teamwork. It is not just the task that requires proper training but the learning to work together too.
- **Research**
And as well as training there may be research and information which the team needs to function well. It is you who should ensure that this is sought and that specialist help is available when required.
- **Difficulties**
See every failure as an opportunity for learning, rather than as an excuse to berate the team. There should be permission to fail, after all you as leader will no doubt fail in various aspects of your leadership role!

What is necessary is for problems to be faced, not covered up. If there is something wrong, it is your responsibility to bring it out into the open in a sensitive way. Don't rush to any solution until the real problem has been defined – the presenting issue may not be the problem at all.

- **Conflicts**

Handling team conflict is another key role for the leader. In a group conflict is often swept under the proverbial carpet and haunts everyone for years. This cannot be permitted in a team setting where conflicts should be expected, faced and handled well. The team can gain much from the experience of seeing a conflict handled with sensitive, respect and firmness.

- **Spiritual growth**

The team should be growing in their discipleship of Jesus Christ and you ought to ensure that this is happening. Bible input, times of prayer, listening to God and other elements need to put Christ as Lord of the team and the task. This is so much more than just adding in a quick prayer time at the start of a meeting or saying the Grace at the end.

One another

It can be valuable to explore the 'one another' verses in the New Testament to see how they relate to building the team. Here is one analysis of them all, grouped as follows. We are to:

- love one another;
- live at peace with one another;
- serve one another;
- encourage one another;
- greet one another;
- teach and admonish one another;
- be honest with one another;
- all because we belong to each other.

There is no better listing of team values (see also Recommendation 2). See Training Notes TN79 on this website for fuller details and all the Bible references.

In all this remember that some of your members are likely to be natural team people and some will be quite the opposite. Some may balk at the idea of being a team-member and they need your patience and sensitive support.

See also (on this website)

Article A27, *Reliability in ministry*;
Training Notes TN31, *Affirming volunteers*;
TN49, *What's going on under the water*;
TN79, *'One another' teams*.

Recommendation 6

Identify and utilise team roles

Each member plays a part in building the team which is not the same as the technical expertise they bring or their own job description or role definition. You need to identify and affirm these distinct 'team roles'.

If you want something very simple, get everyone to assess team members by sharing out a total of 10 points for each of them between four possibilities:

- Doer – focusing on the task.
- Thinker – focusing on ideas and analysis.
- Carer – focusing on people's needs.
- Planner – focusing on team action.

So one person might come out as D=4, T=3, C=1, P=2 and another D=1, T=7, C=0, P=2. The total each time must be 10 so you are giving relative values, not absolute ones.

But the accepted theory here is based on the work of Dr Meredith Belbin, first published in book form in 1981.

He identified eight team roles (a ninth was then added) and demonstrated that a team can be highly effective if all the roles are fulfilled within the membership (with, of course, most members playing more than one role).

Not only this, he pointed out that each role has positive characteristics but also what he termed 'permissible weaknesses'. Here is an outline. The team role name and function is followed each time by the positive characteristics and then some of the permissible weaknesses.

- **Plant** – produces original solutions
Creative, unorthodox, imaginative but sometimes unrealistic with poor communication
- **Monitor Evaluator** – offers wise judgement
Pragmatic, detached, clear thinking but can be aloof, critical, uninspiring
- **Resource Investigator** – source of information and ideas
Enthusiastic, inquisitive, extrovert but can lose interest quickly and be over-optimistic
- **Completer Finisher** – offers quality control by dotting i's and crossing t's
Detailed, thorough, precise but may worry overmuch and be too pernickety

- **Implementer** – offers strategic planning and outworking
Practical, structured, clear thinking but sometimes too conservative and inflexible
- **Teamworker** – brings harmony to the team
Relational, perceptive, diplomatic but may avoid confrontation and can be indecisive
- **Co-ordinator** – enables the process to reach the vision
Clear sense of direction, confident but sometimes manipulative and may not be creative
- **Shaper** – challenges the status quo and drives everyone forwards
Dynamic, passionate loves pressure but can be irritable, intolerant, offensive

These roles only make sense when seen within one given team. If there is no Shaper in a team, someone will shift to take on that role. If there are three Shapers one or two may fulfil other roles in that team as well. Someone who is on two different teams may play different team roles on each. There are exercises to discover such roles, or you can do it as a team exercise where each person is assessed by the rest.

Then play to strengths. If you need to know what other churches are doing – ask your Resource Investigator to do some work for you, but don't ask your Shaper or Plant. If there is an emergency, don't ask your Teamworkers to front this but ensure they keep the team together through the difficulty.

Different roles have particular value at different stages of the team's task. You need your Plants to get the project moving but your Completer Finishers to ensure it's all sorted at the end.

Belbin added a ninth role, that of **Specialist**. I cannot help thinking we as Christians should add instead the role of **Prophet**, the person who prays much and often, who has a sense of God's purpose, who applies Scripture to the team task and who is prepared to guide the team back to the will of God whenever the team appears to divert from it.

This should be a team role which is sought and identified in one or two members. Allowable weaknesses: perhaps being too intense or pious at times, or staying aloof from the action.

It is your responsibility to help the team identify each other's roles, affirm people in these roles and ensure the team uses each one effectively.

See also

<https://www.belbin.com/about/belbin-team-roles/>.

Recommendation 7

Enable team development

Team behaviour depends on many factors but one is the stage of development, which in turn depends on:

- the size of the team;
- the length of time this team has existed;
- the rate of membership turnover;
- the frequency of meetings and get-togethers;
- the opportunities to be open with each other;
- the level of confidence in the leader;
- the openness to risk and failure;
- the maturity of people's Christian faith;

and all the recommendations so far.

But perhaps the key factor is your attitude and your setting of the climate to allow development.

Whenever someone new joins the team, or even when someone leaves, many argue there is a new team and you need to work on this basis. On our formula for the number of pairs of links in a group of n people, $\frac{1}{2}n(n-1)$, when one person changes ($n-1$) links change, and these in turn impact on many of the other links. So it is not just a question of inducting the new member but of allowing all the links to wobble somewhat and then settle, perhaps in a different place from before.

It follows from this that it is difficult to develop a team if its membership is constantly changing. There is of course the opposite danger of a team that has remained unchanged for too long and which has become stale.

Stages of development were identified by Dr Bruce Tuckman in 1965 in the following often-quoted form:

- **Forming**
Initial set-up as people get to know each other and gradually start to relax. The leader plays a critical role at this stage and members look to her or him to guide the team. Roles are as yet unclear and processes may be ignored.
- **Storming**
The stage where the masks start to slip and people learn of each other's strengths and weaknesses. Power bases may emerge as people vie for position and there can be conflict at this stage. But if handled well ...

- **Norming**

... the team starts to gel as people adjust to each other's oddities and group norms are understood. Roles are now clear, the leader has people's respect, the advice in this Article is being applied even if the ride is, at times, bumpy.

- **Performing**

People have learned to trust each other and the team starts to reach its potential. There is a clear understanding of vision and of individual, team and task needs. Disagreements are in the open but in a context where people respect each other.

It is well worth working out where your team currently stands in this progression.

Remember that teamwork is often far from comfortable, especially if your team is very mixed in its membership. If you all agree on everything and if you all have similar personalities, that does not sound like a good team. Teams need to be worked at: consider what life might have been like for Jesus' 12 disciples.

Teams will develop through making mistakes, so expect these and use them as means of learning and so growth. A team (or a leader) that is terrified of making a mess will never take the risks required for success.

How about the team's spiritual development? Where are you on that and where should you be? Are you meeting together to pray on a regular basis: for each member of the team, for the team as a whole, and for the task you are seeking together to fulfil?

Is it appropriate for you to meet to study Scripture to grow as disciples and to seek a biblical understanding of both the team you are building and the task you are fulfilling? You should consider all these questions.

Note that Tuckman later added a fifth element (but not an extra stage), Adjourning. This relates to the break-up of the team when the task has been completed.

See also (on this website and elsewhere) Training Notes TN15, *How not to delegate*; TN103, *How to encourage creative thinking*.

Various websites including <https://www.businessballs.com/team-management/tuckman-forming-storming-norming-performing-model/>

Finally, a point about the team's meetings. Never over-estimate the importance of these because the team exists 24/7. But they may be the only times when all the team sit round a table together, so use the time well.

Recommendation 8 Make team meetings special

Team meetings should include an appropriate mix of prayer and study, team development, plus task review, analysis and planning. They should be well planned and in themselves reflect the values of the team.

The task function listed might be expressed in the following six elements. There are two each for past, present and future.

- 1 What achievements can we celebrate?
- 2 What difficulties and mistakes should we note and learn from?
- 3 Where are we within our plan as of today?
- 4 How are we developing as a team as of today?
- 5 What problems do we now need to seek solutions for?
- 6 What actions do we each now need to take?

Here now are a few areas of meeting you need to consider with care.

Frequency

It is difficult to enable a team to work if you only get everyone together infrequently. A monthly meeting is probably the minimum and a weekly gathering the ideal.

Chairing

As already explained you do not need to chair the team meetings and conferences. You are often in a much better place by not being in the chair where there will be a conflict of interest. You can get your point across from the floor more forcefully than if chairing the meeting. Teams are not about chair control!

But, as team leader, you are still responsible for ensuring the meetings are chaired well, by someone who can play this critical team role. Sharing the chair round is often disastrous because the role demands very special skills.

You may need to chair if there is no one else with the required skills. Or at least you may want to introduce the meeting or to chair basic business, then hand over for key items.

Out of the chair you can watch proceedings and note people's body language. There may be issues you need to pick up on afterwards: someone who clearly seemed unhappy about one decision taken, another member being unhelpfully flippant which probably hides something worth probing,

Communication

Communication within the team is essential, and the team meetings should be times when this is demonstrated. Your role is to ensure that everyone knows what they need to know and comprehends what they need to understand. Meetings should give an opportunity for not only giving quality communication but checking up where there have been failures. If people have hidden agendas teamwork will suffer.

The meeting's agenda should be one example of quality communication. It should guide everyone's preparation, allow no surprises and give the information everyone needs.

Decisions

The point of meetings is to hear from everyone and then take decisions which all can own. You may need to help the person chairing by asking a quieter member for their view at some point, or by pointing out that the decision taken is too vague and needs firming up – with a completion date. The chair ought to do this but may miss such points if focusing closely on the business to be conducted. What you must not do is to chair the meeting from outside the chair!

So where from here?

This article has only covered the basics. There are books to help you go further on vision, change, conflict and other team topics. There is a range of further material on my own website to help you. There are also other team models than those given here.

I am a passionate believer in teams, even though, for me, it is not my natural environment. As a Christian disciple I have to believe in teams. I am frustrated that many church leaders do not understand basic team ideas or are frightened of losing control by taking them on board. I hope this article will make a small contribution towards helping team leaders in all aspects of church life to be accountable to their team members and to thrive as a result.

I welcome feedback and ideas for improvement.

The key point is to make decisions which you all sign up to, even though you all came from different points and disagreed along the way. Then to take action – and to decide who will do what by when. Teams exist to decide and act.

Feedback and review

One of your roles is to ensure there is plenty of feedback to the team. This may be in terms of encouragement, with successes in reaching milestones marked and celebrated. If you are setting the culture of support, enthusiasm and thanks, members will do it to each other too. Meetings are important opportunities for this.

You should also ensure that team meetings and team performance (task and teamwork) are reviewed on a regular basis as a learning exercise. In a team context of openness and honesty it is important to assess progress and learn from the past.

Minutes

For most small teams, formal minutes may not be required but you do need a one-side of A4 report listing all decisions taken and action responsibility. This should be out to everyone within a couple of hours if all work together, or within one or two days of the meeting otherwise. The leader should ensure this happens, whoever is responsible for it.

See also (on this website)

Article A5, *How to chair meetings*;
A40/41, *Going deeper into meetings*;
Training Notes TN45, *Are you sure it's minutes you need?*
TN61, *Mapping out a meeting.*;
TN118, *Why, exactly, are we meeting?*

This article is available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index> then A45. See also Article A24, *Mission-shaped Church Councils*, and Training Notes TN18, *A leadership team checklist*, TN41, *What makes a group a team*, TN79, *'One another' teams*, and TN101, *Working with a No. 2*. Plus other items referenced in these pages.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A45 under Leadership (with a link to Management).

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