



Teambuilding

JOHN BESSANT
Managing Innovation

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Although teamworking is increasingly important, we should not assume that simply grouping people together makes them into a team. There has been a great deal of research on teams and their dynamics and from this we can pick some useful lessons on how to build and run successful teams.

The first point is to recognize that teams have two sets of responsibilities – those concerned with getting the job done (task) and those concerned with working well together (process). Unless we pay attention to both, there is a good chance that the team simply performs like a collection of individuals. Imagine a football team with eleven strikers or goalkeepers – even if the combined merits of Beckham, Zidane and Ronaldo were available, there is no guarantee that the team would be effective. Instead there is a need for different roles and a mix of skills. So we need to have people who can carry out specific tasks well and, depending on the job, to have a spread across the range of task skills.

But that same football team also depends on their ability to work together as a team – to share, to anticipate, to sustain each other – and to celebrate when things go well and to support each other when they don't. All of these elements contribute to the sense of being a team and to being a unit that faces things together. This doesn't come about by accident but results from attention to 'process' issues – not so much about what the team does, or the individuals in it, as the ways in which they work together. There are roles associated with this

– for example, it is often the captain's particular contribution to hold the team together, but there may also be particular characters like the team's comedian or joker who do things that help bind people together.

Research shows that the balance of roles is a very important element in teamworking so one important skill is to try and make sure you have a good balance of roles. There are various psychological tests that can help spot which roles people are more suited to and if you are fortunate you can use them to pick a balanced team. In most cases though you need to work with what you have and to use the understanding of team roles to identify where you have gaps or weaknesses, and make sure the team understands this and tries to compensate. One helpful and simple approach to team roles is the one developed in the UK by Meredith Belbin and widely used throughout the world.

See www.belbin.com for more information.