

TEAMWORK GOES BOTH WAYS

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What we need is some **teamwork** around here!" How often have we heard this cry? But what does it really mean?

Teamwork is key to most approaches to improving organizational performance, whether called adhocracy, motivation, TQM, value engineering, Quality Function Deployment, or Re-Engineering. But lets consider the various things people really mean when they talk about teamwork:

- "Do it my way!"
- "Win one for the home team!"
- "You do your job, I'll do mine"
- "Play like a team!"
- "Don't rock the boat"
- "Let's create together!"

While each of these meanings is an **aspect** of teamwork, managers often focus on just one aspect, missing most of the opportunity. Lets look at each of these aspects individually.

TYPE I: AUTHORITARIAN: DO IT MY WAY!

Unfortunately, a lot of managers seem to think that teamwork consists of unthinking obedience. While this can be effective in those very rare cases when the boss actually does know everything and the employee knows nothing, in most cases, this attitude is simply a sign that the boss is not a team player.

It is important to note that teamwork always involves giving up some of one's independence, taking actions you might not take on your own, but it should not mean giving up your soul or your intelligence.

TYPE II: MOTIVATIONAL: WIN ONE FOR THE HOME TEAM!

When individuals are motivated to play with pain and to sacrifice their personal life and values for the society, or the team, or the school, we call this teamwork. When the individuals strongly value

the higher system, this aspect of teamwork is very worthwhile.

However, in an organization, it often means that individuals are expected to sacrifice their time, health, and family life to increase the incomes of the shareholders and top executives.

People can be seduced into this kind of teamwork once or twice, but if rewards and compensation do not result, the embittered employees tend to leave the organization.

TYPE III: INDIVIDUAL EXCELLENCE: YOU DO YOUR JOB, I'LL DO MINE

This is the kind of teamwork which assumes that if everybody does their job right all the pieces work together to produce the desired result. If I am doing my job right, and the organization falls apart, I have done my best. In this point of view, I assume that I can ignore the performance of all the others on the team, and just become expert in my job.

This is the underlying paradigm of most bureaucracies. As long as the world doesn't change much and you have a good division of tasks and you have and keep excellent people, it can work to keep you at the same level of performance. But if problems or opportunities arise, or you start getting turnover, the system falls apart. Like a chain, the weakest link determines the strength of the system.

TYPE IV: SYNERGISTIC ACTION: PLAY LIKE A TEAM

This level of team operation assumes that everyone has a responsibility and a specialty, but that each is also required to coordinate their actions with others in order for the system to work. This is the amazing teamwork seen in top level athletic teams. Individual players help each other out without interfering with each other. They coordinate their efforts for better effectiveness. This is

THE BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.
The first approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
is very like a WALL!"
The second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, "Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a SPEAR."
The third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, the Elephant
Is very like a SNAKE.
The fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee
"What most this wonderous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth He:
"Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a TREE!"
The fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a FAN!"
The sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Than seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a ROPE!"
And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
and all were in the wrong!

John Godfrey Saxe

the best level of teamwork, unless of course, the game changes.

Of course, new problems and opportunities can make the game plan obsolete. Then all the teamwork in the world is to no avail.

TYPE V: GROUPTHINK:

"DON'T ROCK THE BOAT"

This well-recognized phenomenon is one of the most disastrous effects of teamwork. A group

vision becomes strong that no one is allowed to challenge basic assumptions. This term was first coined in comparing the way President Kennedy handled the Bay of Pigs invasion and the way he handled the Cuban missile crisis. In planning the Bay of Pigs invasion, no one was allowed to challenge the basic assumption that the people of Cuba were waiting to rise up against Castro and that the invasion would succeed militarily and politically. People who did not agree were excluded from the discussions.

Kennedy learned from this disaster. When the missile crisis erupted, he teamed people who would fight for their various perspectives while listening to others. This co-creative system worked.

TYPE VI: CO-CREATIVE:

"LETS CREATE TOGETHER"

These teams recognize that each person has a unique perspective on reality and that the best perspective can only be attained by pooling the viewpoints of each. This is exemplified in Kennedy's Cuban missile crisis team and in the classic poem, "The Blind Men and the Elephant".

In this poem, based on a thousand year old Hindu book for training young Princes, we are advised that each person has a different perspective and that only by respecting, combining, and integrating **all** the perspectives can we begin to grasp the whole problem.

If any one of the blind men convinces the others to follow only his perspective, the team, and the organization, loses. If one or more of the blind men are left out of the interaction, it is unlikely to succeed.

This form of teamwork seems new to many managers, although Value Engineering has based its success on this approach for almost 50 years. Organizational consultants are now talking more than ever about cross-functional teams, adhocery, ad hoc teams, tiger teams, etc. to handle strategic change. And although quality programs tend to use simpler ideas of teamwork, once they begin to deal with the real problems of organizations, they invent the multi-discipline "Corrective Action Team".

The idea of assembling diverse specialists into bureaucracies is still powerful and useful, but the problems encountered by today's organizations require the capacity to bring all the perspectives to bear at once. It requires co-creative teamwork.