Committee for Public Management Research
Discussion Paper 4

Team-Based Working

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Contents

Foreword

This discussion paper is one of a series commissioned by the Committee for Public Management Research. The committee is developing a comprehensive programme of research designed to serve the needs of the future developments of the Irish public service. Committee members come from the Departments of Finance, Environment and Local Government, Health and Children, Taoiseach, and Public Enterprise, and from Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin, and Institute of Public Administration. The research is undertaken for the committee by the research department at the Institute of Public Administration.

The discussion paper series aims to prompt discussion and debate on topical issues of particular interest or concern. Papers may outline experience, both national and international, in dealing with a particular issue. Or they may be more conceptual in nature, prompting the development of new ideas on public management issues. The papers are not intended to set out any official position on the topic under scrutiny. Rather, the intention is to identify current thinking and best practice.

This paper focuses on the development of team-based working in the civil service. Team working is an increasing feature of organisational life internationally. As organisations get 'flatter' and less hierarchical, and devolve more powers down to the operational level, teams are taking on a greater role in ensuring effective performance. In a civil service context, teams are also increasingly being turned to as an effective means of managing the 'cross-cutting' issues, such as unemployment and crime, which cannot be tackled within neat organisational boundaries. This paper explores some of the issues associated with setting up and managing teams. It points to lessons learnt so as to get the best out of team-based working.

We would very much welcome comments on this paper and on public management research generally. To ensure the discussion papers and wider research programme of the Committee for Public Management Research is relevant to managers and

staff, we need to hear from you. What do you think of the issues being raised? Are there other topics you would like to see researched?

Research into the problems, solutions and successes of public management processes, and the way organisations can best adapt in a changing environment has much to contribute to good management, and is a vital element in the public service renewal process. The Committee for Public Management Research intends to provide a service to people working in public organisations by enhancing the knowledge base on public management issues.

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General information on the activities of the Committee for Public Management Research, including this paper and others in the series, can be found on the world

wide web site of the Department of Finance: www.irlgov.ie/finance/cpmr (this site is currently being developed).

1. Background

The civil service is expanding its use of teams and teamwork mechanisms. The Valuation Office has moved to team-based working; project teams to tackle cross-departmental issues are proposed in *Delivering Better Government* (1996). Whilst teams have been a feature of working life in the civil service since its inception, team-based working is increasingly an integral part of the organisational structure and culture. Teams are applied to a wider variety of jobs and with more scope for action than in the past.

Yet moving to a greater use of team-based working brings its own challenges. There are a variety of team designs that can be used. New skills are needed of team members, team leaders, and senior managers overseeing team work. New forms of team-based incentives and sanctions must be developed to encourage high performance. There is a need for guidance as to when to use teams, what the most appropriate structures are, and helping the organisation to adapt to greater use of teams.

This paper sets out to investigate team-based working through a review of the literature on team working. It first asks what teams are and when and why they should be used. The next section outlines the different types of teams that can be formed and used in a civil service context. Potential problems with team-based working are then set out. Finally, some issues which need to be addressed if teams are to work effectively are outlined.

2. Defining teams and deciding when to use them

Katzenbach and Smith (1993, p.45) give a useful and comprehensive definition of a team:

> A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.

This definition highlights a number of key points that inform team design and effectiveness:

- *Small number.* Research has indicated that as task co-ordination becomes increasingly difficult through the addition of new members, the performance of teams begins to decline with size (Goodman, Ravlin and Argote, 1986, p.16). Most effective teams number between two and twenty people, with the majority numbering less than ten.

- *Complementary skills.* Teams need a mix of skills. One of the strengths of teams is that they combine a range of skills which no one individual alone can possess. Team skills requirements fall into three categories: technical or functional expertise; problem-solving and decision-making skills; and interpersonal skills (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993, p.47-48).

- *Committed to a common purpose and performance goals.* A knowledge of the purpose of the team, either developed by team itself or with direction from management, helps define the boundaries within which the team can operate effectively. Performance goals then translate that purpose more precisely into specific, actionable elements. Teams must be committed to this common purpose and to the team goals if they are to work well together.

- *Committed to a common approach*. A common approach is needed if a team is to work together to meet their purpose and performance goals. As Katzenbach and Smith (1993, p.56) indicate: 'Team members must agree on who will do particular jobs, how schedules will be set and adhered to, what skills need to be developed, how continuing membership is to be earned, and how the group will make and modify decisions'.

- *Mutual accountability*. Accountability must be based at the level of the team if the team is to work. Team members must be individually and jointly responsible for the team's purpose, goals and approach. Mutual accountability can help build commitment to and trust in the team. It is facilitated by having clear, specific and agreed performance goals.

But why use teams? When are teams needed and most effective? Some studies have shown that teams create synergy – they can help ensure that the performance of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Teams are also used to tackle complex problems when time is short and flexibility and speed of response are required. In developing common goals and sharing complementary skills teams can facilitate communications and respond to new challenges more quickly then individuals. Continuous improvement is frequently accomplished through the use of teams, such as quality-improvement teams and cross-functional task forces (Cohen, 1993, p.195). It has also been stated that teams perform better at solving problems caused by diverse, conflicting values and goals than do hierarchical forms of work organisation (Galbraith, 1977); and that teams are a useful way to tackle issues of a complex political or technical nature (Thompson, 1973).

In the civil service context, a study by Considine (1992) of ten task forces and project teams from three organisations in the Australian public service found particular merits in using teams in certain circumstances:

- Teams were found to be useful mechanisms for managing organisational conflict, especially where they involved officials from antagonistic departments.

This was particularly the case where there was a skilled, mandated and committed leader.

- Teams generally managed time pressures successfully. Teams put the issues of time, participation and role explicitly on the agenda at an early stage in projects. They also ensured that potentially time-consuming tasks such as securing participation and gathering information were incorporated into work plans and negotiated at the outset.

- Teams were found to provide a means to establish and maintain high levels of staff commitment and goal-oriented effort. Most team participants said that teams were better at creating stimulating working conditions than the arrangements usually used by their organisation.

Team-based working is thus a means of facilitating performance when faced with complex tasks and the need to foster co-operation and co-ordination. They can work alongside hierarchies rather than replacing them. But developing effective teams is a challenging task. It is no use simply setting up teams because it is fashionable to do so. Neither can groups of individuals become teams simply because they are labelled as such. Teams must be well-defined and crafted, and complement existing organisational structures and functions. In particular, the right type of team needs to be selected for the task in hand.

3. The different types of team

There are two broad categories of teams: (a) *temporary teams* brought together to perform specific tasks of a non-routine nature and then disbanded, and (b) relatively *permanent teams*, largely self-managed, whose work is self-contained and which can be organised around products, customers or services (Cohen, 1993, p.197). Within these broad categorisations, different types of team design are possible, ranging from short-term task forces of a relatively informal nature, through project teams which, though temporary, have a significant life span, to permanent work teams that form a part of the formal structure of the organisation. Of the most important team designs task forces, quality-improvement teams and cross-functional teams fall under the temporary team category; work teams and top management teams are in the permanent team category. Each of these team designs has particular strengths, weaknesses and characteristics that determine their effectiveness.

3.1 Task forces

Task forces are a widely-used team design. They can be found at any level in the organisational hierarchy. They require no changes in organisational structure or authority relationships. Hackman (1990:87) identifies four distinctive characteristics of task forces:

1. Team members typically do not work closely together in their normal organisational roles; they are brought together from different jobs or different units, to undertake a specific task. Membership may be assigned rather than voluntary.

2. The work of the team is non-routine. The task to be undertaken requires a once-off team to be brought together rather than being handled by the routine ways of working.

3. Task forces are temporary groups. They are normally given a specific deadline for the completion of their task. The team disbands when it has completed its work.

4. Task forces have an unusual mix of autonomy and dependence. They are often free, within limits, to progress the work as they best see fit. But at the same time, they do not normally make decisions; they report to some other person or group.

This last point, the fact that task forces make recommendations rather than decisions, highlights a point crucial to the success of task forces; that of the mechanisms set up to respond to task force recommendations. As Katzenbach and Smith (1993, p.246) note: 'Almost always, we have observed, the more top managers assume recommendations will "just happen", the less likely it is that they do ... By contrast, the more involvement task force members have in actually implementing their own recommendations, the more likely they are to get implemented'.

When formed, task forces typically face a non-routine task and comprise a mix of people not used to working together. They are unlikely to have pre-prepared procedures for determining who should do what or for co-ordinating efforts. In such circumstances, as Gersick (1988) discovered in a study of eight task forces, these teams do not progress smoothly from one stage of work to another. Rather:

- Task forces tend to establish an initial direction at their first meeting, which they follow until half their time is gone. This suggests that managers need to plan carefully for a task force's first meeting, as this meeting will determine what happens in the task force for quite some time. Similarly, at the first meeting a key task for the leaders is to help the team define its task and develop working relationships.

- At the midpoint stage there is a transition, where task forces tend to change their work patterns, re-engage with outside managers, develop new understandings about their task, and make dramatic progress. The team welcomes outside assistance and guidance at this stage, whereas previously they are not very receptive to outsiders. This phase provides a good opportunity to re-affirm or re-negotiate the teams direction; fine-tune the team's task; reflect on process difficulties; and consider what organisational supports and resources are needed for the next phase of the team's work (Hackman and Walton, 1986, p.100).

- Following this midpoint transition, there is a period of intense production work, leading up to completion of the task. It is at the completion stage that the issue of hand-over, referred to above, is crucial to the success of the task force.

3.2 Qualit- improvement teams

Quality-improvement teams are used extensively in quality-assurance and control programmes in both manufacturing and service industries. They have been used in the Department of Social Welfare, as the central element of a quality-improvement programme (see Box 1).

Quality-improvement teams are similar to quality circles in that they comprise a small group of staff who meet regularly to identify and analyse problems in the work process, with a view to presenting solutions to management in the hierarchical decision-making structure. Often, steering committees are formed to respond to quality-improvement team suggestions. Where possible, teams implement the solutions themselves. They tend to be more formal than quality circles, with specific terms of reference assigned by management, and are usually facilitated by someone other than an immediate supervisor. Teams are often drawn from more than one work area and disband once they have completed their task. Further teams may then be formed to address other organisational quality-related issues (Blennerhassett, 1992, pp.4-6).

Box 1: Using quality-improvement teams in the Department of Social Welfare

This quality-improvement initiative was undertaken in the Sickness Benefits Branch of the department. Quality-improvement teams were established, along with a lead team and supported by facilitators:

Quality-improvement (QUIP) teams – six quality teams were established, each of between four and seven staff. Membership was voluntary. Teams investigated and reported back on specific problem areas, selected by management, generally within a period of three to four months.

Lead team – the lead team comprised the manager of the branch and two assistant principals. It functioned as a steering committee, identifying problem areas and setting terms of reference for the teams. It also reviewed recommendations of QUIP teams and decided on implementation.

Facilitators – each QUIP team had a facilitator who served as a support and resource person to the team.

The guiding principles underlying the QUIP approach can be summarised as respect, research and responsibility:

Respect – the approach recognised that those on the teams – junior clerical and administrative staff – have the knowledge, expertise and ideas to improve quality of service. They also deal most closely with the client system, and are aware of deficiencies in the service delivery process.

Research – the approach was research-based. The emphasis was on facts and figures; on providing objective evidence based on analysis of the problem. All QUIP teams were required to produce a formal, written report and to make a formal presentation of their work to management.

Responsibility – each team member took personal responsibility for the project. As far as possible, work was shared out equally. All team members were identified equally with the project and its recommendations.

Source: Blennerhassett (1992)

Guzzo (1986, p.41-42) has identified four phases of decision making that quality-improvement teams are likely to work through:

1. *Intelligence phase.* The team seeks to define the nature of the problem or opportunity they are addressing. Through quantitative and statistical analysis of data, the team establish the facts of the situation.

2. *Design phase.* This phase is a direct extension of the intelligence phase. The team devise alternative ways of tackling the identified problem. One of the strengths of quality-improvement teams is that they are made up of the people who know best how to solve quality problems, as they are the people directly involved with the work.

3. *Choice phase.* In making a selection from amongst the alternatives, the team are likely to require the approval of management prior to implementation. As with task forces, the management of the interface between the team and the formal organisational hierarchy is crucial to success at this phase. However, unlike many task forces, quality-improvement teams are more likely to see implementation through themselves, rather than hand this task over to others, although as part of their 'normal' jobs rather than part of the team.

4. *Review phase.* During the course of the other phases, there is regular tracking and displaying of performance information by the team.

3.3 Cross-functional teams

Cross-functional teams are normally made up of people from different sections in an organisation or different departments. A good example of cross-functional teams in the civil service context are the project teams proposed in *Delivering Better Government* (1996) to tackle cross-departmental issues such as child care, drugs and employment (Box 2).

Cross-functional teams are an example of parallel team structures that supplement normal work structures. They carry out functions that the organisation is not equipped to perform well (Cohen, 1993, p.206).

> **Box 2: Project teams to manage cross-departmental issues**
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> *Delivering Better Government* (1996) indicates that there are many vital national issues which can no longer be resolved from within a single department or agency. As part of a strategy to tackle these issues, a number of cross-departmental teams are to be established, with co-ordination by a minister/minister of state and with a specific lead department.
>
> These teams are to be given a specific remit and detailed objectives over an agreed period. Team members are to be detached from their departments whilst serving on the teams, on a full or part-time basis depending on the specific skills they bring to resolving the issues within the team framework. Teams will be obliged to develop solutions and new approaches. It is envisaged that suitable reward mechanisms will need to be designed for this work.
>
> The work of the teams, as well as being co-ordinated by a minister/minister of state, will be monitored and assessed by the Co-ordinating Group set up to oversee the implementation of *Delivering Better Government*.
>
> *Source*: Second report to Government of the Co-ordinating Group of Secretaries (1996, pp.14-16).

Cross-functional teams are assigned unique, uncertain tasks, and are expected to produce non-routine products. Members are typically professionals brought together from a diversity of backgrounds. Given the complexity of the tasks they have to undertake, the teams normally have broad mandates and responsibility for making decisions within defined strategic parameters agreed by senior management. Also, due to the nature of their work, cross-functional teams may have multiple leaders. Leadership may be based on knowledge and task expertise, functional expertise, or managerial position, and may shift according to project phase, technical requirements, and customer requirements (Cohen, 1993, p.202).

Parker (1994, p.50) has indicated that the development of shared goals is a key task for cross-functional teams: 'Cross-functional teams often lack a clear vision of where they want to be and what they want to accomplish ... Team members seem clear about what pieces they have to deliver, but they don't know where the pieces fit ... Some front-end work needs to be done on the problem before it is handed over to the team. The team then translates that information into specific goals.'

As with task forces and quality-improvement teams, cross-functional teams have to manage complex relationships with other groups and managers, both within and outside the organisation. To help manage these relationships, Parker (1994, p.50) recommends that team members should identify key stakeholders; look for commonalties with stakeholders; communicate information about their team and learn about other teams; select informal 'boundary managers' from team members skilled in handling the flow of information and resources; and identify potential barriers and ways to overcome them.

Also, as Cohen (1993, p.214) indicates, because of the complexity of the task and the long life-cycle of many projects dealt with by cross-functional teams, the setting and monitoring of interim milestones becomes crucial. Teams must chart their progress towards their ultimate goals by setting intermediate targets which act as a guide for checking progress and direction within the team.

3.4 Work teams

Work teams are permanent teams created by the organisation to produce goods or services. Examples include production teams, customer-service teams and support teams. Such teams are often self-managing, in that they have a degree of control over decisions made regarding the service or production activity that is their responsibility. Work teams are most appropriate for self-contained, on-going tasks. Work teams have been established in the Valuation Office to improve customer service (see Box 3).

Box 3: Team-based working in the Valuation Office

Before 1994, the Valuation Office was organised in three functional groups: professional, technical and clerical/administrative. The three groups had their separate streams for reporting and cross functional co-operation was low. The participation of each stream was essential to delivering service yet each group operated independently.

In 1994 the Valuation Office reorganised into a work-team structure. Each team has a number of professional, technical and administrative staff. Teams have responsibility for delivery of service to a number of customers. The average team size is twelve and each team has a team leader. All streams within the team report to the team leader.

The team-based structure allows the co-ordination of the efforts of all functions, promoting a better service to customers. While only a low level of cross-skilling was undertaken, a degree of flexibility has evolved and co-operation within the teams has improved dramatically.

The move to the team-based structure is part of a larger process of focusing on customer service. Customer satisfaction as measured in the Valuation Office customer survey shows considerable improvement since the introduction of teams. The staff participating in the teams are also positive to this form of organisation. Staff climate survey measures show an improvement in satisfaction levels within the office.

Creating permanent work teams is a major change in organisational activity, particularly in traditional hierarchical organisations. Consequently, management must be sure that they are needed. Katzenbach and Smith (1993, p.247) indicate that such teams work best at 'critical delivery points' where the cost and values of an organisation's services are directly determined, such as where accounts are managed, customer service performed or products defined: 'If performance at the critical delivery points depends on combining multiple skills, perspectives, and judgements in real time, the team option makes sense. If, on the other hand, an

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arrangement based on individual roles and accountabilities is the best way to deliver the value customers require at the right cost, teams may be unnecessary and possibility disruptive.' Management must be sure that work teams are needed before making significant changes to organisational structures to accommodate them.

When work teams are well-designed and a need exists for them, there is some evidence that they make a positive contribution to an organisation. Cohen (1993, pp.216-217) cites studies which indicate that self-managing teams have a modest positive impact on productivity, positively change attitudes of team members, and produce a high concern for quality.

Customer service teams are a specific form of work team. As Saavedra, Cohen and Denison (1990, p.399) note: 'Customer service teams operate precisely at the intersection between the company and its clients and often serve as something of a buffer between them, mediating or smoothing over conflicts.' This can place such teams in a difficult position, in that they often have to face competing and possibly conflicting demands from customers and from the organisation. It also makes managing such teams a difficult challenge. They must be given sufficient autonomy to respond to customer requirements, yet at the same time conform to the organisation's strategy and direction.

3.5 Top management teams

Top-management teams represent a special form of work team. Typically, top-management teams have a clear internal hierarchy. One member is ultimately in charge. Management advisory committees composed of secretaries and assistant secretaries represent an example of top-management teams in the Irish public service.

The importance of top-management teams has been stressed by Kakabadse, Alderson and Gorman (1991) in a study of Irish management:

An effective top team will agree upon, communicate and follow through, in terms of implementation, the mission statement of the company. This does not happen with an ineffective team. Further, whereas an effective top team is associated with clear communication of functional, departmental or divisional objectives in each part of the organisation, non communication of these objectives is more commonly linked to an ineffective team ... Not only is an effective top team necessary for communication of objectives and direction, it is also essential for leadership in establishing good upward and downward lines of communication within the organisation, and the creation of a culture in the organisation which uses those lines of communication effectively.

Eisenstat and Cohen (1990, pp.78-79) have also identified several reasons why an organisation might use a team at the top rather than turn to a single individual for leadership:

- A team's decisions are more likely to represent the wide range of interests that exist in organisations.

- More creative solutions may emerge from a group of individuals with different skills, perspectives and information.

- Team members are more likely to understand and support organisational decisions they had a part in determining.

- Communications among top management are more efficient and regular.

- The job of managing a complex organisation is too big for any one individual.

- Serving in a top-management team provides developmental experience for senior managers.

Yet despite these positive reasons, the literature indicates that top-management groups can have considerable difficulty operating as teams. Eisenstat and Cohen (1990, pp.82-85) identify two main reasons for top-management teams failing to function:

1. When things start to go wrong in these teams, they tend to come apart. The internal processes of the team are managed poorly; decisions made one week are undone the next; conflicts develop amongst team members, but without a forum for discussion and resolution.

2. When the chief executive sees things going wrong, he or she begins to avoid using the team for organisational decision making.

In general, the role of the chief executive is crucial to the success or otherwise of top-management teams. The chief executive determines whether or not a collegiate atmosphere exists where team members trust each other to exchange views freely. He or she also determines the boundaries of the team and its work. When everyone knows what issues can be dealt with in the team, performance is good. When there is uncertainty, difficulties emerge.

4. Potential pitfalls associated with team-based working

Despite its growing popularity, team-based working is not a panacea for organisational problems. Teams themselves can be the source of difficulties, as Pacanowsky (1995, p.36) illustrates: 'Among the most common complaints: too many meetings, too many missed opportunities, too much inaction, and, finally, too many poor solutions.' There are also pitfalls that designers and leaders of teams can fall into. Hackman (1990, pp.493-504) identifies five common mistakes in team formation:

1. *Call the performing unit a team but really manage members as individuals.* Here, no effort is put into actually building a team. Members may be assigned to a team and given a task, but treated as individuals with their own specific jobs to do. A team is not just a group of people working together: the team's boundaries must be set; the task defined and collective responsibility agreed; and the management of internal and external relationships determined.

2. *Getting the wrong balance between authonomy and control.* Managing the tension between giving teams authority to carry out their tasks while controlling their work is a difficult job. If teams have too much control over decision-making they can head in directions contrary to organisational purpose; too little and they become de-motivated and ineffective. Most studies indicate that teams welcome being given a clear task, strategic direction and clearly defined boundaries for team behaviour. It is the means of accomplishing the work that should be assigned to the team.

3. *Assemble a large group of people, tell them in general terms what needs to be accomplished, and let them work out the details.* Teams rarely work well together without common agreed goals. Yet often, these goals are not clearly specified or agreed with teams. The team's authority and accountability structures must be clearly defined and determined.

4. *Specify challenging team objectives, but skimp on organisational supports.*
    Even where clear goals are set with teams, there may be problems if they are not
    provided with the support needed to achieve these goals. The main supports
    are: training and development for team members; a reward system linked to
    team rather than individual performance; an information system that meets team
    needs and links members together; and material resources – money, equipment,
    staff etc.

5. *Assume that members already have all the competence they need to work well
    as a team*. Particularly at team start-up, it is crucial to determine the existing
    competencies of team members and identify gaps which need to be filled
    through developmental activities. In particular, the team leader may need
    support in developing skills and competencies to perform well in this
    challenging role.

In general terms, if teams are to work well, they need the full support of the
organisation. Developing good team performance is challenging. It is not enough
simply to state that team-based working is to be an increasing feature of
organisational life. The organisation must support and nurture the teams if they are
to prove effective and complementary to individual responsibility and authority.

5. Supporting team-based working

Having established that teams need effective support, what types of supports are needed? From the literature, it would appear that support is needed in two areas: setting the organisational context, and developing team process.

5.1 Setting the organisational context

A number of activities are needed at the organisational level to ensure team-based working is effective:

- *Defining task structure, authority and accountability requirements.* The task allocated to the team must be clear and facilitate shared responsibility and accountability. How and when the team inter-relates with the established organisational hierarchy is a key element here.

- *Developing appropriate reward systems.* Rewards that an organisation can provide for team work include extrinsic rewards such as pay, and intrinsic rewards such as recognition. How these rewards are distributed can have an impact. Guzzo (1986, p.53) indicates that distributions that induce competition among team members may be dysfunctional when tasks require a high level of co-ordination. Blennerhassett (1992, p.33), when discussing rewards in the civil service, encourages creativity in the use of non-monetary rewards, such as vouchers, small prizes, recognition and praise. Cohen (1993, p.202) stresses that co-operative or collaborative behaviour should count in individual performance reviews and appraisals.

- *Creating supportive information systems.* Teams need access to data for their analysis and option-generating exercises. New technology facilitates the generation of such information, and also the facility to share such information among team members. Electronic mail and video conferencing, for example,

facilitate co-ordination and help decision making occur on the basis of task expertise rather than status (Cohen, 1993, p.203).

- *Developing links with top management.* Top management can provide a significant lead to teams by helping them clarify their purpose and tasks, and ensuring that these link with organisational priorities. Top management can also facilitate team transitions, such as leadership changes, to minimise disruption and avoid losing momentum. Ensuring that recommendations are acted on or reacted to seriously is also a key task for top management.

- *Ensuring effective team composition and structure.* When setting up teams, managers must give attention to the staffing of the team: size, expertise, interpersonal skills needed and so on. A balance needs to be struck between having the necessary skill levels from the start versus developing skill levels in the team. A mix of abilities and member characteristics has been found to contribute positively to team performance (Goodman, Ravlin and Argote, 1986, p.15). The need to keep teams small has been referred to earlier in the paper.

5.2 Developing an effective team process

The means by which teams work together is central to their success. Developing rules of behaviour, providing team members with the necessary skills, and ensuring effective leadership of teams all contribute to ensuring that the process by which the team carries out its work facilitates the task in hand.

5.2.1 Developing rules of behaviour

Rules of behaviour, or ground rules, help determine the approach taken to the work of the team and the level of commitment of team members. Generally, rules are agreed for attendance, confidentiality, contributions, and confrontation. Once such rules are agreed, they must be enforced by the team.

5.2.2 Developing team member skills

Training and development is a crucial support for team members. Faced with complex tasks, and a new way of working, team members need new skills and competencies to perform well. Katzenbach and Smith (1993, pp.47-48) identify three categories of team skill requirements:

1. *Technical or functional skills*. These are the skills that usually need the least support in a team setting, as members bring these particular skills with them to the team.

2. *Interpersonal skills*. In a team setting interpersonal skills development is vital. The ability to communicate and deal with conflict in a constructive rather than negative way depends on interpersonal skills. Team-building activities, group interaction skills and conflict resolution skills can help team members work together more effectively.

3. *Problem solving and decision-making skills*. Teams need appropriate tools to solve the diverse and complex problems they are faced with. Techniques such as force-field analysis, brainstorming, nominal group technique and simple statistical techniques such as pareto analysis and cause-and-effect diagrams are particularly useful at the problem-solving stage (Guzzo, 1986, pp.56-60; Blennerhassett, 1992, p.15). At the decision-making stage, tools such as multiattribute decision analysis, and the use of a 'devil's advocate' role to challenge tendencies to group think can be useful (Guzzo, 1986, pp.62-63).

5.2.3 Developing the team leader role

The importance of the team leader to the successful running of teams has been briefly mentioned in this paper already. Team leaders have a key role in two main areas (Steckler and Fondas, 1995, p.21):

1. *Managing the team's external boundary*. The team leader acts as the link between the team, other units, and senior managers. In this role he/she needs to

be able to forecast environmental changes, minimise obstacles, clarify others' expectations of the team, share information and secure resources.

2. *Facilitating the team process.* The team leader helps the team develop innovative solutions to problems, and supports team members in their respective tasks. In this role, she/he must be able to diagnose group deficiencies and take necessary action to correct deficiencies.

Team leaders need support to carry out these tasks and, as with team members, appropriate training and development is necessary. Hackman and Walton (1986, pp.106-107), quoting from an earlier study of leadership in a civil service context in the United States, indicate that it is useful to develop a matrix with the critical leadership functions as rows, and the knowledge and skills required to fulfill these functions as columns:

Critical leadership Functions	**Required knowledge**	**Required skills**
Monitoring and taking action regarding:		
1. Setting directions		
2. Designing the team		
3. Setting the context		
4. Coaching and assisting		
5. Securing resources		

The knowledge and skills required are likely to be particular to each organisation, as the requirements vary from setting to setting. However, Hackman and Walton (1986, pp.107-109) identify some generic knowledge and skills required of leaders, including:

- Data gathering skills

- Diagnostic and forecasting skills

- Knowledge of the key conditions for team effectiveness

- Negotiation skills

- Decision-making skills

- Knowledge of the operating context of the team.

6. Conclusions

Team-based working is likely to be an increasing feature of Irish civil service organisational life in the coming years. Both permanent and temporary teams offer a means of tackling complex problems and enhancing service delivery. At the same time, teams can operate alongside the traditional hierarchy, which is needed to service other necessary functions effectively.

But in forming teams, managers need to give serious thought to a number of questions:

- Is a team-based approach the most appropriate? The nature of the problem or issue to be tackled must be examined to see if the setting up of a team is the right way to go.

- What type of team is most appropriate? If a team-based approach is chosen, does the situation call for temporary or permanent teams; a task force or a cross-functional team and so on?

- What organisational supports are needed to ensure that the team operates effectively? Does the team have a clear idea of its task and performance goals, the necessary mix of skills, and sufficient resources to do the job? In particular, the issue of boundary management – managing the interface of the team and the organisation regarding implementation issues – must be addressed.

- What team supports are needed? Should a team leader be appointed, and does the leader need training and development? Training and development for team members in interpersonal skills and group analysis and decision-making are also needed, as is information systems support.

It is only in addressing such questions that departments and offices will ensure that team-based working enhances performance and job satisfaction.

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