

# ENHANCING PERSONAL AND GROUP PERFORMANCE THROUGH TEAMS: IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPROVED ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

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## **Abstract**

Teams are increasingly becoming the primary means for organizing work in contemporary business firms. The adoption of teams have, therefore, become so popularized that one wonders if there are still organizations that do not adopt them. The purpose of this pilot study is, therefore, to examine the extent to which work teams are adopted in selected Nigerian organizations. In an attempt to achieve the aforementioned objectives, ten management staff each were selected from four categories of organizations and questionnaires and interviews were both used as primary source of data. The data collected was analyzed using both the kendall coefficient of concordance and chi-square. The findings reveal that all the organizations used for the study sometimes adopted different forms of teams to perform different functions toward achieving the organizations set goals. However, there was no agreement among the firms on the particular advances derived from the teams used. The study recommended more regular use of teams toward enhancing personal, team and organizational growth.

## **Key words:**

work teams, self-managed teams, virtual teams, team players, and cross-Functional teams.

## **Introduction**

"Together Everyone Achieves More" is the general acronym used as the meaning of the word TEAM' and 'two good heads are better than one' has always been used to depict team work. In today's organizations, when there is so much clamour about working together to achieve synergy, meaning a situation where the whole is greater than its parts (Stoner et. al., 2005), all should be concerned about the use of teams or work teams. Synergy which may be expressed as  $2 + 2 = 5$  mathematically and epitomizes team work or working in teams. Work teams are becoming so popular because of the inherent benefits that have improved both individual, group and organizational performance. Twenty-five years ago when organizations like Volvo and General Foods (based in USA) introduced teams into their production process, it made news because no one else was doing it but today, "it's the organization that doesn't use teams that has become news worthy"(Robbins and Sanghi, 2006; 258). Records show that 80% of Fortune 500 companies presently have more than 50% of their employees on teams and 68% of small USA manufacturers use teams in their production areas (Stronnizak, 2000).

Teams are said to typically out-perform individuals when the tasks require multiple skills, judgments and experience (Giassop, 2002) and they are more flexible and more responsive to changing events than traditional departments or other forms of permanent groupings (Robbins and Sanghi, 2006). Teams also perform the key roles of adviser, linker, creator, promoter and assessor. Other key roles performed by teams are organizer, producer, controller and maintainer (Robbins et. al., 2008) and these roles directly concern personal group and organizational growth. As a result of the mentioned advantages, there is need for a paradigm shift in the activities carried out within Nigerian organizations to properly accommodate work teams, especially in Nigeria whose culture is predominantly individualistic (Hosfted, 1983).

Work teams encourage win-win situations because every member shares in the trail of victory That results from the adoption of teams. "Do Nigerian organizations adopt teams? which organizations do? and to what extent" become the questions which answers this study would attempt to provide.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **Teams Conceptualized**

Teams are groups of two or more people who interact and influence each other, are mutually accountable for achieving common objectives, and perceive themselves as a social entity within an organization (McShane and Von Glinow, 2000). Katzenbach and Smith (1993) defined team as a group of people with complimentary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they themselves are mutually accountable.

There are words associated with the word "team" which give meanings and explain the reason such teams are created. Examples are "work team" which means a group whose individual efforts result in a performance that is greater than the sum of the individuals inputs (Robbins, 2000); "command team" which is a team composed of a manager and the employees that report to the manager (Stoner et. al., 2005) and "team structure" or "team-based structure" which talks about the use of teams as the central device to co-ordinate work activities (Mcshane and Von Glinow, 2000). There are others like "team building" which means high interaction among team member to increase trust and openness. Still others are team spirit, team leadership, team players, team norms, team management etc. No matter the word teams are associated with, the meaning of both words or compound words will depend on the meaning of the attached word. Team work, we believe, is a process of using teams in accomplishing tasks within organizations.

While teams are groups, groups are not teams. Groups are two or more people who interact and interrelate to achieve a common objective but teams are more committed to each other's well-being and success. In an attempt to buttress this fact Katzenbach and Smith (1993) and Kinlaw (1991) define work group as a group that interacts primary to share information and to make decision, to help each group member perform within his or her area". Robbins and Sanghi (2006) further emphasize the difference by maintaining that

Work groups have no need or opportunity to engage in collective work that requires joint effort... their performance is merely the summation of each group member's individual contribution, There is no positive synergy that would create an overall level of performance that is greater than the sum of the inputs.

Therefore, as there are types of work teams, there are also types of work groups but this paper will concentrate on the former and use it interchangeably with teams.

### **Characteristics of Work Teams**

There are four major characteristics of work teams as presented by Asogwa (2001)

- j. Common goals that must be clear, explicit and challenging,
- ii. Interdependence showing that each member brings unique skills, experience and perspective, which are needed to accomplish team goals.

To achieve interdependence, team members must :

- i. understand team goals and how they relate to the goals of the business,
  - ii. Be committed to team goals, and
  - iii. Demonstrate a willingness to solve individual and team problems,
  - iv. Common operating procedure, which is necessary to accomplish tasks. Members must have established formal and informal systems, procedures, processes and norms for addressing various issues facing them. The above reduces conflict and other problems within the group.
- v. Accountability which is achieved when there is a delineation of roles and responsibilities within a team for members to be held accountable.

### **Types of Work Teams**

Many types of teams can be formed or created by organisations depending on the specific functions for which they are needed. While some teams can be formed on ad hoc bases, others are permanent. Four most common types of team have been presented by Robbins and Sanghi\* (2006). They are problem-solving teams, self-managed work teams, cross-functional teams and virtual teams.

**i. Problem-solving teams** are created to deal with specific problems facing an organization like improving quality, efficiency and the work environment (Shonk, 1992; Verespej, 1992). Members can only share ideas on how to proffer solutions to specific problems on process, methods and other areas but they hardly implement any.

**ii. Self-managed work teams** are made up of 10 — 15 employees who perform highly related or interdependent jobs and not only suggest solutions to problems, but take up many of the responsibility performed by the supervisor (Nicholls et. al., 1999). They can therefore plan and schedule work, assign duties to members, have collective control over the pace of work, make operating decisions, take actions on problems etc. They can also select their own members as well as evaluate each others performance. Self-managed work team is, however, culture bound because research evidence reveal that in Mexico with low tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, and employees' strong respect for hierarchical authority, their performance was not impressive (Nicholls et.al., 1999). Also self-managed work teams should not be assigned with functions that may work against their members like downsizing (Zemke, 1993).

**iii. Cross-functional Teams** are teams made up of employees from about the same hierarchical level but from different work areas, who come together to accomplish tasks (Robbins and Sanghi, 2006). Cross-functional teams allow people from diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives within an organisation, and even between organisations, to exchange information, develop new ideas, solve problems and coordinate complex projects. They may, however, have initial teething problems of getting to know themselves, developing team spirit and learning to work with diversity and complexity.

**iv. Virtual Teams** are those that use computer technology to tie together physically dispersed members in order to achieve a common goal (Gibson and Cohen, 2003). No matter how far apart members are, whether separated by room or offices, by cities o across the globe, virtual teams can share information, make decision, and complete tasks. They can gather for a few days to solve problems, a few months to complete a project or exist permanently (Kiser, 1999). Virtual teams are becoming more popular because of the law of telecosm, that is, a principle stating the as the web of computer network expands, distance will shrink and eventually become irrelevant (Townsend et. al. 1998). Various ways virtual teams can be used are e-mail, video conferencing, electronic chat rooms, intranets and network computer.

### **Building Effective Work Teams**

Not all teams are effective and the effectiveness of any team says a lot about its success. Team effectiveness is the extent to which the team achieves its objectives, achieves the needs and objectives of its members and sustains itself over time (West et. al., 1998). Teams are created to serve organizational purposes as well as result to the groups' and members' satisfaction.

Several authors have suggested different ways of making teams more effective. Mcshane and Von Glinow (2000) developed a model of team effectiveness that covers three major areas,

i. Organisational and team environment which covers

- Reward system
- Communication system
- Physical space
- Organizational environment
- Organizational structure and
- Organisational leadership

ii. Team design made up of

- Task characteristics
- Team size and
- Team composition iii.

Team processes which includes

- Team development
- Team norms
- Team roles and

## Team cohesiveness

Robbins (2000) and Robbins and Sanghi (2006) also built a model of team effectiveness which consists of the following four areas

- i. Contextual factors which covers
  - Adequate resources
  - Leadership and structure
  - Climate of trust and
  - Performance evaluation and reward system
- ii. Team composition made up of
  - Ability of members
  - Personality
  - Allocating roles
  - Diversity
  - Size of teams
  - Member flexibility and
  - Member preferences
- iii. Work design which includes
  - Autonomy
  - Skill variety
  - Task identity and Task significance
- iv. Process variable
  - Common purpose
  - Specific goals
  - Team efficacy
  - Conflict level
  - Social loafing

In recommending ways of making teams effective Stoner et. al. (2005) suggested guidelines for making committees or task forces effective. In maintaining that committees differ greatly in their functions and activities, the authors insist that one set of guidelines may not be appropriate but they suggested the following:

- i. Clearly defined goals
- ii. Authority specified
- iii. Optimum size determined (Not less than 5 but not more than 10)
- iv. Selection of chairperson to be based on ability
- v. Agenda supporting materials should be shared before the meeting
- vi. Meeting should start and end on time.

In addition to the above, the terms of reference of any committee, be it ad hoc and standing, must be clearly delineated from the onset. This will enable the committee to be properly guided.

Is a committee a work-group or a work team", is the question people may request to be answered. Organisations may choose to call their groups by any name but we maintain that making a group realize that they are a team will have greater impact in their commitment in the work that is set before them. Suffice it to mention that committees have their setbacks, one of the outstanding being "domineering view of the chairman overriding". This, from what we have heard so far, is not a part of the work team. Every view is as important as the other in a work team.

### **Making individuals Team Players**

As a result of the peculiar nature of teams, it is a general belief that many people are not inherently team players. These are persons who may have been loners and would want to be recognized by their individual achievements. These individuals may have started with organisations which have nurtured individual accomplishments (Robbins and Sanghi 2006) or they may have grown in

cultures that are purely individualistic (Hofstede, 1983) in orientation. For this category of individuals it may be difficult to abruptly make them team players. However, since researches already reveal that teams fit well with countries that score high on collectivism (Kirkman et. al., 2001), employees from individualistic cultures like Nigeria must be taken up and turned into team players if they must function as work teams.

When there is individual resistance to becoming team players, management operating in team-based organizational environment would need to reshape employees involved. In so doing Robbins and Sanghi (2006) suggest three options

- i. Selection: In addition to technical skill required for the job, Hymowitz (2000) maintains that only those with the interpersonal skills to fulfill their team role should be selected. Alternatively, such employees can be transferred to areas where emphasis on work team is minima! or absent.
- ii. Training: Team training usually organized and conducted by experts is another way of shaping team players. Such experts would offer workshops to help employees improve their problem-solving, communication, negotiation, conflict-management and coaching skills. Employees are reminded of the importance of patience - because teams take longer to make decisions than employees acting alone.
- iii. Rewards: Team reward system should evolve with work teams to encourage cooperation rather than competition. Individual pay and incentive systems kill (earn initiatives since work teams may not see the need to work as teams. Team reward should always be applied in addition to the basic individual reward.

Intrinsic reward also counts a lot in team work since teams provide camaraderie and people are usually excited and satisfied to be part of the a successful team (Robins and Sanghi, 2006).

### **Common Problems of Work Teams**

Though work teams have a lot of advantages, they also share in some problems presented below:

1. Process losses are resources in form of time and energy expended toward team development and maintenance rather than the task (Steiner 1972 in Mcshane and Von Glinow, 2000). Time losses, can result from adding new members to work teams that have already taken off. Re-orientation may be required to carry everyone along.
2. Many organisations do not create enabling environments for work teams to perform effectively. According to Mcshane and Von Glinow (2000), if companies put people in work teams without considering the environmental factors, their efforts may be wasted.
3. Productivity loss through social loafing which is the tendency for individual to expend less effort when working collectively than when working individually (Robbins and Sanghi 2006) is another problem with work teams.
4. Work teams can also be over-used in the sense that not all duties require work teams. However, team based organisations may tend to create teams for all and every duty in which case, teams become overused. This problem is epitomized by Peter Drucker who maintained that 'the now-fashionable team in which everybody works with everybody from the beginning rapidly is becoming a disappointment (Panchak, 1998).
5. Asogwa (2001) also presented common team problems as follows:
  - Unclear goals
  - Failure to share Information
  - Criticizing and Complaining against each other
  - Lack of Individual Feedback

## Methodology

Four categories of organizations were selected for the pilot study and 10 respondents (all head of units) were randomly sampled in each case. Data was collected through primary and secondary sources. The Kendall coefficient of concordance and the Chi-square,  $\chi^2$  were applied in testing the hypotheses formulated for the study.

## Hypotheses Testing

### Hypothesis I

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between the adoption of work teams and the achievement of organisational goals.

**Table I:** Work Team contributions to Organizational Goal Achievement

Response Options	Organisations			
	Banks	Manufacturing Firms	Universities	Total
Yes	8(5.7)	4(7.1)	5 (4.3)	17
No	0 (2.3)	6(3)	1(1.7)	7
Total	8	10	6	24

**Table II:** Calculation of the Chi-square

F <sub>o</sub>	F <sub>e</sub>	F <sub>o</sub> - F <sub>e</sub>	(F <sub>o</sub> - F <sub>e</sub> ) <sup>2</sup>	I
8	5.7	2.3	5.29	0.92
4	7.1	-3.1	9.61	1.35
5	4.3	0.7	0.49	0.21
0	2.3	-2.3	5.29	2.30
6	2.9	3.1	9.61	3.31
1	1.7	-0.7	0.24	0.14
24	24	0		8.23

$$d.f = \frac{(3-1)(2-1)}{2 \times 1}$$

$$\text{Critical}^2 = 5.991 \%^2 \quad \text{Calculated } -\chi^2 = 8.23 \text{ Reject}$$

Since the critical  $\chi^2$ , 5.991 is less than the calculated  $\chi^2$  value 8.23, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate.

### Hypothesis II

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no concordance in the advantages derivable from work teams in the different categories of organizations.

#### Advantages of Teams Tested

- A. Collective decision
- B. Commitment
- C. Friendship
- D. Representative Participation
- E. Flexibility of Action
- F. Avenue for Learning
- G. Shared experience and skills
- H. Accountability

Table III: Scores from the different Rankings

Organization	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Manufacturing firms	1	3	2	5	6	8	4	7
Banks	2	4	6	1	3	5	7	8
Universities	8	1	3	2	4	7	6	5
Services organization	4	5	8	6	7	3	1	2
Total	15	13	19	14	20	23	18	22

**Formulae** for Kendall Coefficient of Concordance

$$W = \frac{C - 12 \sum R_j^2}{p N (N^2 - 1)} - \frac{3(N+1)}{N-1}$$

where

N = the advantages

K = the sampled staff

R<sub>j</sub> = the sum of each advantage

$\sum R_j^2$  = the square of each rank sum and the total of all the ranks

$$W = \frac{J - 12 \sum R_j^2}{K^2 N (N^2 - 1)} - \frac{3(N+1)}{N-1}$$

$$W = \frac{12 [15^2 + 13^2 + 19^2 + 14^2 + 20^2 + 23^2 + 18^2 + 22^2] - 3(8+1)[8^2 + 1]}{4^2 (8) [(8^2) + 1]} - \frac{3(8+1)}{8-1}$$

$$= \frac{12(225 + 169 + 361 + 196 + 400 + 529 + 324 + 48) - 271}{(16)(8)(63)} - \frac{27}{7}$$

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4.00-3.857

0.143

$$\chi^2 = K(N-1)W \quad \text{with } N - J \text{ df}$$

$$4(8-1)0.143 \text{ with } 7 \text{ df}$$

$$4.0044$$

Since the computed value of  $\chi^2$ , 4, is less than the critical  $\chi^2$  value 24.32 at 0.001 level of significance, the null hypothesis is accepted.

### Findings

There is a significant relationship between the use of work teams in organisation and the achievement of organisational goals.

All the benefits/advantages of work teams contribute differently but significantly toward an

organization's well-being and goal achievement. In other words, there is no agreement on the ones that contribute most,

The banks sampled believe so much in teams that they do not see any problems with them except those emanating from human biases and interpretations.

The most popular team from the banks are the marketing teams which go out to source for customer and sell the firms products.

All the categories of organizations used for the study adopt one form of team or the other depending on the task to be accomplished.

The Universities sampled use mostly committees and task forces.  
The most prevalent problems with university committees are poor attendance to meetings and time wasting.

### **Implications for Managers**

Since work teams have been proved to be effective in enhancing individual and group abilities toward achieving organizational goals, management would do well to adopt more teams. So many other advantages have also been attributed to the adoption of teams within organizations and therefore whether organizations decide to reward employees as teams or individual, the important thing is that they derive the advantages there in.

### **Conclusion**

Team work has been found to be advantageous and definitely contributes to the achievement of individual, group and organisational goals. They are therefore, highly recommended in all organisations as much as possible.

Work teams are not new in Nigeria but since the level of commitment differs, there is need for organisations to create more awareness needed to making team members start adopting the attitudes synonymous with teams, that is, team spirit.

Most work teams are not rewarded as teams. There is need to start doing so as this may tend to arouse the spirit of greater commitment among team members even as they look forward to serving such teams.

In as much as work teams serve in a lot of ways to making organisation and groups achieve their goals, they should be used mostly in carrying out projects that will harness their contributions. By so doing, team over-use will also be avoided.

A culture of team spirit can be inculcated in team members by continuously making it clear why they are created, the benefits for the team members in particular and for the organization in general.

For work teams' sustainability, there should be a lot of open communication, team cohesiveness, honesty and trust within the teams, and continuous feedback between the work teams and the organisation

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