



Why Groups?

Groups Have a Long History of Success

People have formed work groups to accomplish goals and tasks since the beginning of human history. The small group, whose members work collaboratively for their mutual benefit or survival, is the oldest form of social organization. Groups have played a major role in both the survival of human beings and the development of human culture. Some would argue that our ability to work together was, and is, the key to human survival and advancement. Work groups have a long and remarkable track record of success. People have always used work groups to generate new ideas, get things done, and nurture individuals.

We Need Groups Every Day

Most people participate in work groups on a daily basis and have always done so. Imagine building a house or an airplane, putting out a newspaper, developing a strategic plan, or doing almost anything all by yourself. Of course, there are tasks that can, or should, be done by one person, but given the complex nature of work in the 21st century, more and more tasks require people to work in groups.

There was a time when people tried to get rid of the collaborative nature of work. We set up assembly lines and precisely defined each person's job so he or she could do that job without input from others. Often, this was effective. The industrial revolution was a success, after all. But this strategy worked best for repetitive tasks in which innovation, creativity, and problem-solving were not necessary. In the 21st century, there are few tasks like that that humans perform. Robots have most of those jobs.

Even in the early industrial period there were groups throughout the workplace. People made decisions together. Engineers created new products together. Managers determined schedules and hammered out workflow processes together. There was a need for work groups then, and there is an even greater need for work groups now.

Groups Increase Our Knowledge Base

The current emphasis on work groups reflects our growing awareness that the complexity of work at this point in history necessitates collaboration. More work is conducted by groups of employees than by individuals because collaboration is the only way to accomplish complex tasks. Too much knowledge and too many different skills are needed for any individual to accomplish such tasks successfully alone.

The knowledge explosion led us to reevaluate the way we work. The assembly line model has lost much of its relevance. The individual contributor no longer can go it alone. Teamwork is necessary for organizational success.

When Teams Are Good, They're Very, Very Good

Lots of people don't like to work in groups. Many of us don't like to go to meetings and think that they are a waste of time. Most of us have had some bad experiences working in groups. Some of us associate work groups with fighting, hurt feelings, and inefficiency. This is not surprising, because many groups have difficulty functioning effectively. Even groups that ultimately succeed in becoming teams have periods that are stressful and unpleasant.

The distinction between a work group and a team is an important one in this book. A work group is composed of members who are striving to create a shared view of goals and to develop an efficient and effective organizational structure in which to accomplish those goals. A work group becomes a team when shared goals have been established and effective methods to accomplish those goals are in place. How work groups become teams is what this book is about. It chronicles how some groups develop into high performance teams and why other groups fail to become teams. Throughout the book, we refer to groups that have not reached a level of effectiveness and productivity as work groups and to groups that are effective and productive as teams.

When a group becomes a team, there is nothing like it. Work doesn't feel like a chore. It's fun. Members of high performance teams feel involved, committed, and valued. Time flies, work flows, and people help each other meet goals and deadlines. There's nothing like playing on a winning team. Effective teams are more productive, and that means that companies and organizations win, too. The trick to creating teams is to learn enough about how work groups function so we can increase the chances that work groups will become high performance teams.

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Creating Effective Teams

Books, articles, and research studies that attempt to describe the characteristics of high performance work teams have proliferated over the past few decades. The importance of teamwork in increasing organizational productivity is clear, and everyone jumped on the bandwagon to ensure team success. There has been a lack of solid support for the effectiveness of team development interventions. In recent years, however, researchers have been able to establish correlations between a number of different intervention methods and positive effects on work groups' processes and performance. This is very good news, since members and leaders need to know not only how work groups develop across time but also what are the most effective ways to become a high performance team. High performing teams can help organizations improve their customer service scores, do more work in less time, and generate more revenue for the company.

Groups and teams have always been with us and will not go away. The importance of teams in the workplace is here to stay. Despite the intense focus on coaching leaders, strategies designed to increase work group effectiveness continue to exist. Unfortunately, current team development strategies range from the ridiculous to the sublime. Determining what to do to help groups perform effectively is difficult and spurs questions such as, "Which strategies work? Which strategies are based on solid research evidence? Which strategies are the least time-consuming and most cost-effective?" These and similar questions are on the minds of many people charged with ensuring the effectiveness of organizational work groups.

We don't yet know everything there is to know about groups, but we know enough to be helpful to people working in groups. We know enough to answer the difficult questions posed above. That's what this book is about. The goal of *Creating Effective Teams* is to translate what we've learned about groups and teams into straightforward, user-friendly, practical guidelines for members and leaders. This book also will provide guidance for those who interact with a particular work group and for those who manage them.

Together we bring to this project nearly a hundred years of experience with groups and teams, and we are still curious. Studying groups and working with their members and leaders is endlessly fascinating and challenging. Beyond that, we believe that helping work groups become high performance teams is crucial not only to the bottom line but also to the creation of humane, interesting, diverse, and challenging workplaces. We hope this book continues the work of the first five editions in furthering the achievement of those goals.

How to Use This Book

Originally, this book grew out of a number of requests from organizational members for a jargon-free how-to book describing how work groups function

and what to do to help work groups become high performance teams. *Creating Effective Teams* has been read by thousands of team members and leaders, in a number of countries, and by team consultants charged with helping groups become high performance teams. This sixth edition was written to keep the ball rolling and to add new information that has emerged since the fifth edition was published.

As was the case in the first five editions, whatever we write is based on research evidence, and if we are speculating, we'll let you know. We will not overwhelm you with references in the text; they will appear at the end of the book. If you want more information, the references will be there for you.

We've included some recent and some not-so-recent research throughout the book and also things we've experienced as researchers, consultants, leaders, and team members over the years.

This book is meant to be used, not just read. Members of newly formed groups could begin by reading the first six chapters and discussing them together as a way of getting off to a good start. Chapter 2 describes what the larger organization can do to help groups be successful. Chapter 3 describes how groups develop and function. In Chapter 4, the characteristics of productive teams are outlined. This will help the members of a new group know what they are shooting for. The characteristics of effective members and effective leaders are outlined in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively.

Talk with one another about what you've read. Use the information as a way to begin to organize your group. Use the book as you would use a manual for a computer program. When you get stuck, refer to the appropriate chapter. There are a few checklists scattered throughout the text. Use the checklists to monitor your group's progress.

Once the group gets underway, refer to Chapter 7, which describes typical situations that arise in the first stage of group development. The chapter outlines ways members and leaders can be helpful during this stage. Chapters 8 and 9 do the same thing for groups at Stage 2 and 3, respectively. Chapter 10 outlines how to reach and sustain high performance at Stage 4. The topic of Chapter 11 is changes in the organization of work that are or will be affecting teams and how they function. Chapter 12 covers recent research related to work teams.

Reading this book once won't be enough. Like other changes in attitudes or behaviors, learning to use this information in the work groups you belong to will take time. Attitudes and behaviors don't change overnight. If you read and work with this information, however, it will happen. And you, like others before you, will find your work groups transformed into high performance teams.