

Takeaway 13.1

Why Is It Important to Understand Teams and Teamwork?

ANSWERS TO COME

- Teams offer synergy and other benefits.
- Teams can suffer from performance problems.
- Organizations are networks of formal teams and informal groups.
- Organizations use committees, task forces, and cross-functional teams.
- Virtual teams use technology to bridge distances.
- Self-managing teams are a form of job enrichment for groups.

WE ARE ALL PART OF TEAMS EVERY DAY, AND IT'S TIME TO RECOGNIZE A BASIC FACT: Teams are hard work, but they are mostly worth it. The beauty of teams is accomplishing something far greater than what's possible for an individual alone. But even though two heads can be better than one, the key word is "can." Have you ever heard someone say, "Too many cooks spoil the broth" or "A camel is an elephant put together by a committee"? There are good reasons why such sayings are well used. So, let's start this discussion realistically.

On one level there seems little to debate. Groups and teams have a lot to offer organizations. But at another level you have to sometimes wonder if the extra effort is really worth it. There's no doubt that teams can sometimes be more pain than gain. There's a lot to learn about them, their roles in organizations, and how we participate in and help lead them for real performance gains.¹

A **team** is a collection of people who regularly interact to pursue common goals.

Teamwork is the process of people actively working together to accomplish common goals.

Synergy is the creation of a whole greater than the sum of its individual parts.

TEAMS OFFER SYNERGY AND OTHER BENEFITS.

A **team** is a small group of people with complementary skills who work together to accomplish shared goals while holding each other mutually accountable for performance results.² Teams are essential to organizations of all types and sizes. Many tasks are well beyond the capabilities of individuals alone.³ And in this sense, **teamwork**, people actually working together to accomplish a shared goal, is a major performance asset.⁴

The term **synergy** means the creation of a whole that exceeds the sum of its parts. When teams perform well, it's because of synergy that pools many diverse talents and efforts to create extraordinary results. *Check synergy and team success in the NBA.* Scholars find that both good and bad basketball teams win more the longer the players have been together. Why? A "teamwork effect" creates wins because players know one another's moves and playing tendencies. *Check synergy and team success in the hospital operating room.* Scholars notice the same heart surgeons have lower death rates for similar procedures performed in hospitals where the surgeons did more operations. Why? A teamwork effect—the doctors had more time working together with the surgery teams—anesthesiologists, nurses, and other surgical technicians. They say it's not only the surgeon's skills that count; the skills of the team and the time spent working together count, too.⁵

Don't forget—teams are not only good for performance, they're also good for their members.⁶ Just as in life overall, being part of a work team or informal group can strongly influence our attitudes and behaviors. The personal relationships can help with job performance—making contacts, sharing ideas, responding to favors, and bypassing roadblocks. And being part of a team often helps satisfy important needs that are unfulfilled in the regular work setting or life overall. Teams provide members with social relationships, security, a sense of belonging, and emotional support.

Why Teams Are Good for Organizations

- More resources for problem solving
- Improved creativity and innovation
- Improved quality of decision making
- Greater commitment to tasks
- Increased motivation of members
- Better control and work discipline
- More individual need satisfaction