

Topic Learning Outcome:

Integrate theories of leader-group relationships into real world situations and case studies.

Team Relationships: Simple and Easy Versus Complicated and Hard

Effective relationships, built and nurtured over time, are apt to “be there” in a supportive way, at some critical moment in the future when a team might need to discuss a difficult issue or address a crisis in a rational way. Why is this so crucial? Because, as the old adage goes, “When you really need a friend, it’s too late to make one.” Indeed, effective team relationships are the best insurance against hard times. In fact, the acid test of an effective relationship is whether it will contribute to the solution or add to the problem during a trying time.

What is a good relationship? How does it differ from a bad one? The following four points aid in answering these questions. First good relationships are *constructive* for both people. They embrace characteristics that acknowledge and protect the value of the relationship to both parties. They are mutually respectful, honoring the feelings of both people. They embody trust and, because they are non-threatening, offer a sense of safety.

Second, good relationships are *productive*. When necessary, they allow us to focus on real issues – the ones that matter – and to do so in a way that makes a difference. They really cause us to waste time and energy on defensiveness because they really force us to face anything we feel we need to defend. Instead, good relationships allow us to stay centered. They bring out the best in us – the best in our thinking, our attitudes, and our values – increasing our effectiveness as a coworker, spouse, parent, or friend.

Third, good relationships are characterized by *mutual understanding*. They encourage us to focus on and understand the other person’s perspective, and they offer us the satisfaction of being understood. Good relationships emphasize mutual clarity and minimize the frustration of uncertainty.

Fourth, good relationships are *self-corrective*. Both parties are committed to making adjustments that will improve the relationship. There is confidence that any agreed-upon changes will be honored mutually, not in passing, but in concrete, observable terms.

Bad relationships, as you might expect, produce opposite effects. Rather than being constructive, they are destructive, with one or both parties typically bending the relationship to their own benefit. There are usually threatening undertones and reasons for defensiveness that, rather than allowing us to remain centered, take us out of our rhythm, inhibiting our ability to be productive or hit our stride. Clarity is replaced by ambiguity; we don't really understand each other or each other's underlying motivations. And bad relationships are not self-corrective. Either the real issues cannot be discussed or promises and commitments are unaccompanied by concrete changes.

Qualities of individual team members form the basic building blocks of a team, but team effectiveness is often determined by how well team members work together.

Self-Assessment Question:

1. Using the relationship qualities identified in the topic lecture, analyze the relationships that exist within your groups and teams. What conclusions can you make about the effectiveness of your team member relationships?