



TEAMWORK

When you are embarking a coop working project, teamwork is a fundamental starting ground. In this focus point, you will learn everything you need to know about teamwork: its meaning, its challenges and its advantages. We will also give you some advices in order to improve the communication with the other team members and consequently to make even more efficient and meaningful your coop mission!

Teamwork

Within a cooperative, members are part of an enlarged group work, which gathers during the general assemblies. However, each member can belong to a more restricted group of people, not only to daily collaborate with, but also to confront oneself with other members in order to reach one's own professional goals. We have defined this sub-group as a "team" (in [STEP 3 – TRAINER GUIDE Cooperative Structure](#) and in [STEP 3 - TFS 1 – COOP ORGANIGRAM](#)). In order to work in an efficient way within a team, it is useful to be aware of what a teamwork means, how it works and which are its dynamics. You will find below some food for thought on this topic. Please pay attention to the work of your team in the light of what you are going to read.



Team definition and features

The teamwork or team is a more complex reality than a simple group of people; it can be defined as a whole of people that:

- are related to each other for a defined period of time;
- share a common goal;
- are mutually aware that they are part of a group;
- Have mutual trust in each other;
- Are in the condition to take decisions and common actions;
- Are generally guided by a leader.

Moreover, a teamwork is defined by the positive interdependence among its members. A positive interdependence originates when a person realizes to be committed to others for the achievement of one's own goal. Positivity consists in the division of tasks and in the sharing of materials, resources and information. It

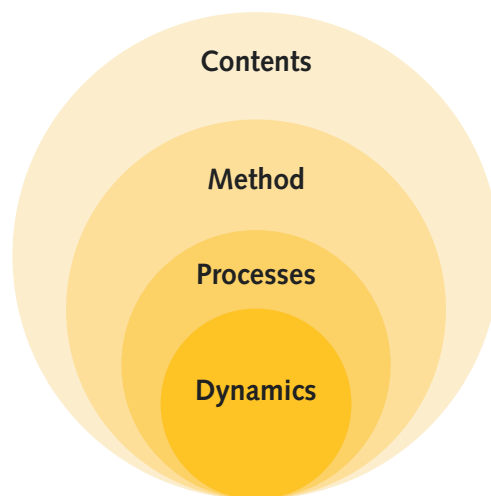




is fundamental that each member of the group is aware that he/she is positively dependent on the other people of the teamwork. In case the leader badly handles the team conflicts, a situation of negative interdependence might occur: in this condition, members will impede each other, leading to the team failure. Even if the human being belongs in its lifetime to several groups, teamwork is not often an easy and pleasant thing. Being part of a group is something that satisfy the need of belonging and social relations: this guarantees basic formative experience which is the continuous self-experimentation and knowledge. Indeed, "[...] *individuals feel the need to situate themselves in a larger identity which surrounds the individual identity and gives it additional meaning*".

Team levels

Each team simultaneously moves and acts at several levels, all significant ones, even if these are not always so evident and visible.



Contents :

It is the most superficial level, the most visible one. It includes everything the team and its members explicitly do or say: from the stated goals to an order of the day, from the topics to discuss to the social object (developed product/service)...

Method :

The method is the way in which the group organizes the expression of content: the use of a particular language, the communication sequence, the meeting times and places, the rituals, the ways to decide. In a teamwork, it is useful to wittingly choose the method, in order to define the functioning rules, the roles system and their interactions in a shared and clear way. The method allows to identify the group structure and it stays constant in the group story, which is always changing.



Processes :

As far as processes are concerned, this term refers to the historical sequence of the observable elements: how they precede contents, how the method loosens, how the group structure works. Particularly processes define who talks, how many times, in which way, how the different roles interact with each other, how and how often rules are applied, how the team story develops, how the team grows... If contents and methods are structural, processes are their expression put into action.

Dynamics:

Dynamics stand for the group's emotional movements, their progresses and their story. Dynamics have a significant power on the team: they exist in every moment, here and now, even if they are often not so visible and evident. Emotions, affection and feelings are capable to influence all the previous levels, in a way in which dynamics can also be interpreted as symptoms/expressions of contents, methods and team processes. Complex emotional aspects such as fears, anxieties, fantasies, desires and expectations of each member constitute the "secret" part of the group, its hidden life, the submerged part of the iceberg. The more they emerge, dynamics require attention, care, protection, responsibility, enhancement. A simple strategy to unfold and pay attention to the team dynamics is the one of *circle time* (for a more detailed description of the circle time activity, please refer to [STEP 3 – TRAINER GUIDE – TEAMWORK](#)).

Teamwork opportunities and risks:

Teamwork presents some unquestionable convenient opportunities related to individual work. Working in team allows people to have at their disposal an elevated quantity of knowledge and experiences, to analyse every situation from multiple points of view, to understand more in depth the complexity of questions and to create a major number of possible situations. Moreover, working with other people ensures the fulfilment of a task thanks to a joint effort: the division of work and the recognition of a role facilitate the circulation of information and the development of complex innovative projects. In addition, each individual's specialization of competencies increases the whole team know-how and improves the overall quality of its work in a continuous exchange of best practices, methods and knowledge. However, if the work is carried out with little motivation and awareness, it is possible to face some relational, cognitive and psychological risks. These risks, if they are not identified and opportunely handled, can hamper and compromise the problem resolution and the goals achievement. Particularly, a relational risk is constituted by the possible appearance of lines-up. An example of lines-up can be coalitions, triangulations and deviations:

In the coalition there are one or two persons that create a relation of solidarity against a third one;



In a triangulation one person is dragged into a conflict by two people, who push the subject to side with one of the two competitors;

In the deviation two people in disagreement address their conflict to a third person.

A psychological risk is the lack of responsibility, which emerges when the team is subjected to a diffusion of different responsibilities. If an individual decides on the risk that he/she might assume, he/she will feel responsible not only towards himself/herself but also towards the rest of the team. This will make the person acting more cautiously, fearing to lose face. However, the more the individual talks with the other members on how to proceed, he/she will feel less directly responsible of the choice he/she made. Finally, a cognitive risk is the *group thinking*. This occurs when a team takes a particularly unsuitable or failing decision, despite the competences and knowledge the team has. This can specifically happen when participants feel the necessity to decide in very short terms, for instance when there are social pressures involved, which could imply a delay in terms of time. Another example can be when people tend not to share their ideas because there is a high judgement within the team and so they fear their ideas could be perceived as naïve or too simple and become object of sarcasm and mockery. Individual creativity, originality and autonomy of thinking (which also includes the possibility to have doubts!), are all sacrificed in favour of the ideal of cohesion within the group.

How to improve efficiency and the atmosphere within the team

An efficient and effective team is capable of communicating in a functional way, of correctly evaluating data and information, of taking informed decisions and to learn from its past mistakes. To reach these functioning goals, it is important that in the group there is a good communication and dialogue. Some advices to improve communication are:

Make a collaborative environment within the team

An added value in a team is the multiplicity of perspectives: it is indeed extremely important to create a favourable environment allowing each member to say their opinion. Aggressive behaviours, such as criticizing a proposal before having carefully listening to it, or humiliating a person, are neither constructive nor correct. It is important to make instead an atmosphere of mutual respect, characterized by the capability to listen, to be open to confrontation, towards other members' opinions.

**- Accept each member's contribution**

Each person has the right-duty to take part to a discussion in which he/she is directly involved. It is important to actively listen to the intervention of each team member, because anyone can give remarkable inputs for the teamwork. Moreover, somebody actively engaging into a discussion can be a significant source of inspiration for other members, who might have new elements to enrich the discussion.

- Be coherent during discussions

It might appear as an obvious advice, but discussions while working in team often might deviate on different aspects or on clichés related to lack of resources, little autonomy and limited time, etc. During an operational meeting it is instead important to keep the communication contents related to the dealt topic and the established goal.

- Criticize the behaviour not the person

It can occur that a person makes a mistake, that does not fulfil a task that the team assigned him/her, that somehow does not meet the initial expectations. It is fundamental in this case not to attack the person with statements such as "you are unable" or "we cannot trust you", but make criticism on the single behaviour, commenting it in the most possible objective way: "you did this task in a superficial way". "Attacking" a person implies two significant disadvantages: it damages the relation and, as a consequence, it decreases the person's motivation and commitment. Plus, it does not help the person understand the mistake he/she made and thus does not prevent the mistake to occur another time.

Useful Bibliography (ITA)

Il gruppo al lavoro- strategie e consigli per migliorare la performance e la creatività del vostro gruppo Giovanni Lucarelli Ed. Franco Angeli

"Gruppo di lavoro, lavoro di gruppo"- GP Quaglino et al - Cortina ed.