
Developing Superior Work Teams

Building Quality and
the Competitive Edge

Dennis C. Kinlaw

Developing Superior Work Teams

*Building Quality
and the Competitive Edge*

Dennis C. Kinlaw



Lexington Books

D.C. Heath and Company/Lexington, Massachusetts/Toronto

in association with



University Associates, Inc.
San Diego, California

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Kinlaw, Dennis C.

Developing superior work teams : building quality and the
competitive edge / Dennis C. Kinlaw.

p. cm.

“Published in association with University Associates.”

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-669-24983-1

1. Work groups. I. Title.

HD66.K56 1991

658.4'02—dc20

90-41348

CIP

Copyright © 1991 by Lexington Books

All rights reserved. No part of this publication
may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or
by any means, electronic or mechanical, including
photocopy, recording, or any information storage
or retrieval system, without permission in writing
from the publisher.

Published simultaneously in Canada

Printed in the United States of America

Casebound International Standard Book Number: 0-669-24983-1

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 90-41348

The paper used in this publication meets
the minimum requirements of American National Standard
for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper
for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.



Year and number of this printing:

91 92 93 94 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*This book is dedicated
to my many friends and colleagues in NASA,
and its contractors
through whom I have learned most of what I
know
about teams and teamwork.*

Preface

Two realities are shaping organizational life in America today. The first reality is that all organizations are faced with the same primary challenge: they will either produce consistently superior services and products, or they will soon not be producing much at all. The second reality is that superior teamwork and developing superior work teams have been demonstrated to be the only consistent strategies for producing superior services and products.

The evidence is now quite unequivocal. Teams and teamwork make the competitive difference.

The purpose of this book is to provide managers and other key people (like trainers and consultants) with the practical tools that they require for building superior teamwork and developing superior work teams. The specific assistance that the reader can expect to find in this book includes:

- a clear picture of just what teamwork and work teams are;
- a model of the primary characteristics of superior work teams;
- many practical guidelines and suggestions for developing superior work teams;
- a set of powerful Key Strategies for developing superior work teams; and
- a description of the kinds of skills that leaders of superior work teams must have.

All the concepts in this book have been derived from experience in the workplace. To be sure, many are supported and corroborated

by other authors. But I did not begin my investigation of teams and teamwork in the library. I began seriously thinking about teams and teamwork when I found myself in the midst of trying to help organizations build teams and foster teamwork in the face of enormous obstacles and in extraordinarily complex environments.

Over the past several years the major focus of my consulting work has been on building superior work teams. Because teamwork and the development of work teams are so integral to Total Quality Management, much of my work has naturally been in assisting organizations in their Total Quality Management initiatives.

I have analyzed work groups in a variety of ways and tried to discover how work groups are different from work teams. But above all, I have tried to discover what distinguishes *superior* work teams from other work teams and work units.

My experience in analyzing work groups and teams has included many intense team-building interventions that involved individual work groups as well as interface groups from multiple proprietary companies. Much of my time in the recent past has been spent in helping NASA's Kennedy Space Center respond to a multitude of challenges to team performance brought on, first, by massive contractual and organizational changes that took place shortly before the *Challenger* accident, and, second, by problems in team breakups and performance caused by the accident itself.

Just as the concepts in this book have been primarily derived from my personal experience in the workplace, they have also been proven in the workplace. The reader can approach the material in this book confident that it is grounded in the real world of work and certain that the ideas, models, tools, and techniques presented here can make a demonstrable difference in the total performance of work teams.

This book reflects my conviction that the number-one priority of organizations should be to change every work unit into a superior work team and to make superior teamwork the norm for organizational behavior. This priority requires that all the leaders and other key people in our organizations have the practical knowledge and tools to be builders of superior teamwork and superior work teams. I have written this book to provide them with that knowledge and at least some of those tools.

Introduction

Teamwork is surely one of the most admired and praised characteristics of organizations. It is an ideal that managers and employees revere with something approaching religious fervor. In the many years that I have consulted with organizations, I have heard all sorts of complaints from all kinds of jobholders. But there is one complaint I have never heard—people have never said to me that there was too much teamwork in their organization.

The chief executive of a major aerospace group regularly reminds his subalterns that teamwork is one of his “gold watches.” And his executive staff knows that “you just don’t drop a gold watch.”

When NASA successfully returned to manned space flight and launched the first shuttle since the tragic *Challenger* accident, the center director of NASA’s Kennedy Space Center sent out a congratulatory letter to every employee at the center. The primary characteristic of the return-to-flight process that he chose to emphasize—above all else—was teamwork. The letter read (emphases mine):

Dear Fellow *Team Member*:

When the U.S. orbiter *Discovery* lifted off on the ST-26 mission to return the United States to manned space flight, there were . . . unusual items of “cargo” in the mid-deck area. One was a very special book, signed by virtually everyone at KSC, expressing the support of the KSC *team* “from liftoff to landing.”

Managers routinely appeal to a group’s *team spirit* when dissensions and conflict erupt; they urge their people to *pull together*

when the group faces major challenges; and they predictably congratulate the whole *team* when difficult milestones and production goals are met.

The word *team* finds its way easily into organizations' logos and rallying cries. *Team Excellence* is the current motto of a major NASA installation. *Team Report* is the title of the newsletter of a Florida-based engineering firm. *Go Team* is emblazoned on the T-shirts of a software project team.

In a *Harvard Business Review* article, Reich (1987) maintains that the American myth of the entrepreneur, as depicted in books such as Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick*, is the enemy of economic revival and that our real hope lies in teamwork and the team.

To the extent that we continue to celebrate the traditional myth of the entrepreneurial hero, we will slow the progress of change and adaptation that is essential to our economic success. If we are to compete effectively in today's work, we must begin to celebrate collective entrepreneurship, endeavors in which the whole of the effort is greater than the sum of individual contributions. We need to honor our teams more, our aggressive leaders and maverick geniuses less.

McDonnell Douglas recently underwent a major reorganization and reassignment of all its managers and supervisors (McDonnell Douglas 1989). All managers and supervisors had to compete for their jobs based on their subordinates', peers', and superiors' perceptions of their abilities to lead. The first characteristic evaluated was: "Teampayer: Unites others toward a shared destiny through sharing information and ideas, empowering others and developing trust."

There is no reason to doubt that managers have a strong and genuine belief in team performance. This belief is daily reinforced as more and more organizations begin to recognize that whatever they do or produce today is not good enough for tomorrow.

Wherever we go in organizations today we see prominently displayed posters emblazoned with such slogans as *Quality Team*. One very popular poster issued by the Association for Quality Control reads, "Quality—The Result of Teamwork."

Total Quality Management and Teamwork

A recent general programmatic initiative that has drawn greater attention to teamwork as the key to organizational success is Total Quality Management (TQM). These programs consistently emphasize various strategies such as focus on the customer, continuous improvement, total employee involvement, and the like. Their emphases may vary somewhat from organization to organization. But there is one emphasis that we find in all TQM programs without exception. It is teamwork.

William Scherkenbach (1988) describes W. Edwards Deming's fourteen points for achieving quality as a "customer-driven, team-fueled . . . approach." Florida Power and Light (FPL) is the first (and only) American company to receive the prestigious Deming Award for quality. FPL's TQM program is clearly team centered. Through the strategy of team formation and development, FPL has renewed its internal communication networks and strengthened its relationships with customers and suppliers.

Just how integral team development and teamwork are to TQM is apparent in such companies as Martin Marietta's Space Launch Systems Company (*Aviation Week and Space Technology* 1988). The company's TQM plan calls for some fourteen thousand employees to be trained in a three-day program that stresses teamwork. Following the training program employees are organized into high performance teams and management teams. Vice President for Production John R. Adamoli and his staff function as a high-performance leadership and steering team.

As teams mature at Martin Marietta, they are expected to assume more and more responsibilities for the management of themselves and for every aspect of their work life, such as setting their work and vacation schedules and establishing team performance goals and budgets. Some teams are responsible for totally redesigning work process systems, such as the Titan rocket factory assembly floor.

With Martin's increased emphasis on teamwork, rewards are increasingly focused on team performance. Rewards are structured

to return a percentage of increases in the “bottom line” to teams that are responsible for achieving their own performance goals, while using their own improvement strategies and techniques.

Douglas Aircraft emphasizes teams in the TQM commitment statement that every employee is expected to sign. Employees commit to the vision that “quality is the supreme value” and to specific responsibilities “to cooperate with all their *teammates* [emphasis mine] in this new way of working together to build airplanes” (Holpp 1989).

Work Teams and the Changing Roles of Managers and Supervisors

The emphasis on teamwork and developing work teams is having far-reaching implications for changes in the traditional roles of managers and supervisors. M&M/Mars has opened a new plant in Waco, Texas, with self-managed teams. TRW has a plant in Lawrence, Kansas, in which supervision has been eliminated. At Ibis, producer of industrial enzymes, teams are largely autonomous. At Aetna Life, self-managed teams take care of all the functions for processing claims. These teams are responsible for the traditional supervisory functions of hiring, work scheduling, overtime, and performance evaluations (Sherwood 1988). The Johnsonville Sausage Company has eliminated supervisors and organized its production around pride teams, which are responsible for managing themselves (Peters 1985).

Twenty percent of General Electric’s work force of 120,000 employees has been organized into self-managing work teams. The corporate goal is to have 35 percent of its work force organized into self-managing teams. GE expects to realize a 40- to 50-percent improvement in productivity by organizing its work force into teams (Business Week 1989).

The many radical and far-reaching changes in the way organizations are being restructured into self-managed teams has dramatic implications for the roles and functions of managers and supervi-

sors. Where the jobs of managers and supervisors are surviving, we can observe a shift

- from managing by control to managing by commitment;
- from focusing on individual motivation and output to focusing on team motivation and output; and
- from the traditional functions of planning, organizing, staffing, evaluating to the functions of coaching and facilitating.

Total Quality Management initiatives have increased organizations' emphasis on and commitment to teamwork and team development by orders of magnitude. Teamwork has been demonstrated to be the single consistent strategy for continuous improvement in quality and for increased competitiveness. The movement toward teamwork has taken on the proportions of an avalanche roaring through American firms and sweeping most traditional resistances before it. Traditional distinctions between supervisors and employees, management, and labor are being swept away, but where these distinctions still remain, they account for most shortfalls in the performance of organizations.

The challenges that organizations face to remain competitive are enormous. The competitive game is tough, and it will—without question—get tougher. The organizations that are winning are those that are using team development and teamwork to make the leaps in innovation, quality, and efficiency that they must make—if they are to survive.

The key position that teamwork has in performance is captured in the criteria that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration uses to award its prestigious NASA Excellence Award. One criterion that companies competing for the award must meet is that their employees must be trained to participate “in building . . . teamwork” (NASA 1989).

There is, then, a growing commitment to team development and teamwork by managers—stimulated to a large degree by TQM initiatives. Team development is being increasingly accepted as the key to regaining and keeping the quality and competitive edge. In superior teams the synergistic effect is apparent. One plus one plus one equals a lot more than three.

The closer-knit a group becomes, the greater the dynamism it creates. The greater the commitment within a group to a set of common goals, the greater the likelihood that members of the group will make personal sacrifices to meet these goals.

The Need for a Practical Model

Teamwork is what leverages the potential of an organization into superior results. Teamwork is the vehicle for integrating information, technology, competence, and resources—starting with the human. Teamwork is the fundamental requisite for continuous improvement. It can leverage the potential of any organization to unimagined levels of sustained superior performance and continuous improvement.

But although there is a present and growing commitment to developing teams and fostering teamwork on the part of managers and other key employees, their level of commitment is rarely matched by the practical knowledge and skills for turning work groups and total organizations into superior teams.

Team development is not easy, and it is not simple. Even under the best of conditions, it can be a task of mind-boggling, back-breaking difficulty. But without a clear, functional model to guide us, the task becomes so confused and contaminated with unsupported opinion and bias that it is impossible. Consider a recent experience.

A year or so ago, I was asked to design and implement a team development program for a large architectural firm. After I made a preliminary analysis of the firm's readiness to begin a team development initiative, I cataloged the following five conditions that were working against team development in this firm.

1. Each of the major organizational elements in the firm was set up to bill the others for internal services, and the result was an enormous amount of internal competitiveness, bickering over chargeable costs and distrust.

2. The firm had doubled in size in each of five successive years and undergone numerous organizational changes. Whatever informal network had existed at one time was now badly damaged and not working.
3. In the process of rapid growth, new professionals had been hired at better rates than many of those who had been with the firm since it started. A lot of resentment built among the older hands toward the new hires.
4. The firm had no strategic plan, and people had little sense of long-term direction. Work groups and individuals had very disparate perceptions of what was important and what was not.
5. The founder still ran the organization and had developed an inner ring of confidants who operated from Mount Olympus and who had no interest in sharing their visions and power with the mere mortals who occupied the lesser heights.

But the biggest impediment of all to initiating a team development process in this firm was that none of its decision makers had a functional picture of what team development was all about. As a result, I was unable to develop a consensus about such a picture or model, and I finally abandoned the project.

Over the past several years I have become deeply involved in understanding and improving work-team development and performance. Much of my work has been in conjunction with assisting organizations in their TQM initiatives. I have analyzed work groups in a variety of ways and tried to discover the general functional characteristics of work groups that distinguish them from work teams. But above all, I have tried to discover what distinguishes superior work teams from other work teams.

The data that I have compiled from these many team-focused activities and interventions have led me to the following three conclusions:

1. Managers and employees have experiences on work teams—especially superior work teams—that they describe as remarkably similar.

2. Managers and employees rarely have an explicit model of team development and performance that describes clearly the functional characteristics of superior teams.
3. Managers and employees, largely because they have no well-defined model, often cannot efficiently initiate a set of integrated strategies for developing teams capable of sustained superior performance.

Questions and Answers

In order to build and maintain superior teams (both temporary teams, as in projects, and permanent teams, as in work groups), managers and other key players must have a model or picture of what superior teams are like. I have tried to build a model of team development and performance that answers the following questions: (1) What do superior work teams achieve, and how do their results differ from the results of other groups and teams? (2) What are the critical processes in team performance that lead to superior performance? (3) What do members of superior teams feel that distinguishes them from other groups and teams? and (4) What are the characteristics of leadership in superior teams that distinguish it from traditional leadership in work groups?

My sources for creating a model of superior team development and performance have been:

- interviews with over two hundred work-team members and leaders;
- data obtained from over three thousand people from ten different organizations attending a two-day team-development seminar associated with implementing an integrated TQM program;
- data obtained from several hundred managers attending my two-day seminar, “Practical Team Development for Managers”; and

- a review of studies published over the past twenty years on work groups and work teams.

Later chapters in this book are devoted to describing in considerable length the superior work-team development and performance model that has resulted from my studies. The model is used as the basis for describing the key leverage points on which team leaders and other key organizational people should concentrate to maximize their efforts to build superior work teams.

Purposes and Objectives of This Book

The purpose of this book is to provide managers and other key people (like trainers and consultants) with a functional model that they can use for developing superior work teams. The book is particularly useful in undertaking the team development process that is so critical in TQM initiatives. The book has been designed for use in several ways:

- as a self-help guide for leaders to make their work groups into superior work teams;
- as a conceptual basis for trainers to use to equip others to build superior work teams;
- as an adjunct resource for participants involved in any team-development program; and
- as a special guide for people having responsibilities in TQM team-development initiatives.

The specific objectives of the book are, first, to present the Model for Superior Team Development and Performance and clarify each of its elements, and, second, to describe a set of Key Strategies that can be used to address the key elements in the model and move teams toward superior development and performance.

Organization of the Book

This book is built on my own work and studies. But it also reflects and tries to take into account the studies published by others about work teams and related topics.

Because I have intended that this book—above all else—be used and applied to the task of team development, I have kept to a minimum the use of references in the text proper. In the “References and Resources” section, however, is a list of those studies referred to in the text, as well as other relevant resources.

Chapters and Content

The chapters that follow are previewed below.

Chapter 1: Groups, Teams, and Superior Teams

Groups differ from teams, and both differ from superior work teams in a number of ways. This chapter prepares the reader for understanding and using the superior-work-team development and performance model by defining the functional differences between groups, teams, and superior teams.

Chapter 2: Team Building and Team Development— What’s the Difference?

Team building and team development are not the same thing, even though the terms are normally used interchangeably and careful distinctions are not typically made between them. This chapter suggests that there are quite important distinctions that must be made that have a functional significance for developing and maintaining superior work teams.

Chapter 3: Overview of the Model for Superior Team Development and Performance

The characteristics that distinguish a superior work team from all other kinds of work groups fall into four categories: Results, Informal Processes, Feelings, and Leadership. This chapter gives a rationale for making these characteristics the practical basis for understanding and building superior work teams.

Chapter 4: Focusing on Results

The critical practical difference between superior work teams and all other work units becomes most apparent when we compare the results that superior work teams produce with the results of other work units. They produce superior results. This chapter explores in detail these results and describes their implications for superior-work-team development and performance.

Chapter 5: Focusing on Informal Team Processes

Superior work teams use a number of effective and efficient processes for achieving superior results. These processes include communicating and contacting, responding and adapting, influencing and improving, and appreciating and celebrating. These processes are discussed and their implications drawn for superior-work-team development and performance.

Chapter 6: Focusing on Team Feelings

Members of superior work teams describe how they feel as team members in distinctive and consistent terms. Certain kinds of team norms and actions are conducive to the emergence and growth of these feelings, and certain kinds are not. This chapter describes these important feelings and how they are nurtured.