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Come and learn...come and teach

Quick Start Guide to Building Effective Teams

All organisations comprise individuals working in groups. In civil society organisations (CSOs), these groups are more often than not made up of employees and volunteers working together to some expected end. Undoubtedly, these groups get work done successfully but critical for our understanding is; not every group that works together is a team.

Teams do not instantly come into existence, they are deliberately formed and distinguishable from other groupings of people. In fact, one great definition of the term is: *"a team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they are mutually accountable."* (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993).

In civil society organisations, most people who have worked in teams have had both negative and positive experiences. A major goal of teams should be its strengthening or building so that the team can enjoy success, indeed, the purpose of teambuilding is so that the team is effective. Emerging from teams' experiences of successful team work are the following factors or criteria that make teams effective.

Criteria For Teams To Be Effective:

- The team has a clear vision or purpose that serves to guide its work;

- Members understand, agree and identify with the goal/s or task/s to be achieved;

- Team members communicate well, in particular they give and receive appropriate feedback;

- Roles and responsibilities of team members are clear. Everyone knows what they have to do and how their individual work contributes to the work of the whole.

- Members demonstrate a high level of commitment to each other's success in the team as well as to the successful achievement of team goals;

- There is mutual trust as based on demonstrated commitment, team members are able to rely on each other;

- Team leadership is strong, leaders manage human differences effectively so that the best possible results are achieved;

- Among team members there is mutual support as well as mutual influence;

- Resident in team members are complementary or dissimilar skills, that when combined, are useful for the successful achievement of common goals;

- Appropriate decision making methods are used;

- There is mutual accountability so that the team is collectively responsible for the generation of results and success.

Building and Maintaining Teams:

Team Maintenance Functions:

There are two major interconnected team maintenance functions that, working together in a balanced way, help the team remain effective. These are: *task functions,* those functions that allow teams to achieve their purpose and meet their responsibilities, these functions are necessary to get the job done. Some tools that assist with task functions are project meetings, staff meetings, strategic and work plans. Then there are *support functions*, these functions aim to promote positive relationships and are undertaken to take care of the team and its members. These may include socialising together; creating opportunities for affirming and encouraging members; celebrating individual and team success and rewarding achievements.

Supporting Team Development:

Every team in every CSO is different and distinctive from others but every team goes through phases of development. These phases are necessary for teams to grow, face and overcome challenges, find solutions, plan work and achieve results. Some suggestions for treating successfully with each phase include:

- When the team first comes together, it may be best to provide structure and support, communicating expected results clearly and making allowances for members to socialise.
- When members enter the phase where work has begun and tensions begin to surface, this is the time for team leaders to develop methods for collaboration and resolving conflict.
- The team will enter a phase where there is greater collaboration and the team develops rules to guide its operations. This is the time for greater focus to be on the achievement of goals.
- At the time when the team is greatly interdependent and performing optimally, it is important to maintain high performance and accomplishment in the team.

Critical to the success of teams in CSOs is not only the building but also the management and maintenance of teams. Civil society is dependent on effective teams and their work.