2 Team Effectiveness –
Linking Up Psychology,
Culture and Strategy

Observations on Team Development Initiatives

Most senior executives have at some point participated in a team
development exercise. The largest organizations spend hundreds
of thousands of pounds or dollars every year developing their
teams, at every level of the organization. A senior researcher with
one of the world’s leading pharmaceutical companies recently
sighed “another one of my boss’s team development off-sites
is coming up, at another five-star hotel, flying everyone in and
probably having another ‘carrying poles around the garden exer-
cise’ as part of it.” Despite this joking reference, he also said
that the team off-sites had produced a much better glue, which
helped a closer international research collaboration.

Nevertheless, the exact effects of team development are
rarely analyzed or objectively demonstrated. The term team
development is nebulous and vague, as it can describe any-
thing from outbound, military style, physical team-bonding
exercises to in-depth psychological development with behav-
ioral feedback to each member of the team. My observations
from practice are as follows:

▷ Despite the many forms of and approaches to team develop-
  ment, we often do not know what works best, if it works at all,
  how it works and what type of development we should aim for
  in our own teams
▷ Given the abundance of business school courses, books and
direct exposure to different forms of team development, most
executives still do not know some of the basic elements of team work or have a framework that helps them in pulling a team together.

- In assessments of competencies of senior executives, team leadership inevitably comes out as one of the lowest ranking competencies as opposed to the harder business skills of operational effectiveness or customer orientation.

- Team development initiatives become rarer the higher we go up the organization, which may be caused by the discrepancy between the CEO’s perception of the effectiveness of his or her team and the team’s perception (as we have seen in Chapter 1).

- Many senior executives only reach the top because of their highly competitive, single-minded and often individualistic streak and are then all of a sudden expected to be a team player. This can be particularly hard when several team members are vying for the CEO’s position.

Whereas in the past, we have looked at the executive team as a group of functional leaders, coming together, updating each other and running their respective operations or business divisions, the need for a team approach for the success of a business (using the collective brainpower of the executive team) has never been more evident than right now.

When I asked Samir Brikho, the highly successful international CEO of AMEC, how his leadership behavior has changed and developed over time, he commented:

Reflecting on myself over the last ten years, I would say that I learnt to listen, tolerate, respect, sense and feel. Whereas before, I had to believe that the solution is within me and I would give the answers to all the questions that arise, I now see my role to ask the right questions and get the solutions from someone else. I try to ask the right questions to help the team to crystallize the issue and thereby facilitate the solution. Am I advisor or coach? I see my role being to inspire people, giving them the confidence and tools to achieve and deliver excellence against stretch targets.

The CEO as the Chair and Advisor coordinating and coaching the team to find the right solutions and empowering it to use its