

## **Team roles and team member functions**

**As a leader you must have a clear understanding of team roles and functions:**

- The role of the leader
- Team task roles
- Group building and maintenance roles
- Individual roles

Lets look at each of these points in more depth.

*The following descriptions of roles are based on the work of Kenneth D. Benne and Paul Sheats in 1948 published in 'Functional Roles of Group Members', Journal of Social Issues, Vol 4, No 2.*

### **The role of the leader**

The position of leader of a team is a most important one. Without a leader the team would have no guide or direction and would, most likely, soon become very unproductive. The main role of all leaders, therefore, is to help the team achieve its common task, to maintain the teams' unity and to ensure that individuals give their best. This applies to leaders in all working situations.

Every leader will bring their own personality to the role they fill, along with their particular knowledge and experience suited to the task to be achieved. Some roles will need certain personal qualities as well as specific knowledge and experience. It's these individual traits that allow us to be creative as leaders. Draw upon as many sources as possible to gain more knowledge about your role and how you can expand it.

All leaders also have obligations to their superiors and their colleagues on the same level as themselves. This means the leader also has the roles of subordinate and colleague. This balance of roles can be quite a challenge and can cause:

- insecurity
- a lack of confidence
- a lack of clarity
- irritation
- anxiety
- stress
- low morale
- communication difficulties

and sometimes even anger from those around you.

Some ways of counteracting these problems include:

- Learn to prioritise your commitments
- Agree with your superior to reassign or delegate some of your responsibilities
- Lower your self-expectation levels to a more acceptable standard
- Ask for clarification if you are uncertain of your obligations
- Make sure you take time out to spend with family and friends

## Team task roles

Each member of a team may take on more than one role within a team and, indeed, the roles may change depending on the task in hand.

The roles found within a team include:

- **Initiator/contributor:** suggests new ideas, goals, procedures or new definitions of a problem.
- **Information seeker:** asks for clarification about tasks and tries to find information relevant to specific problems.
- **Opinion seeker:** asks for clarification of the values, rather than facts, relevant to problems.
- **Information giver:** passes facts or relevant experiences to the other members of the team.
- **Opinion giver:** states his beliefs in relation to the problem or to the suggestions being made about how to solve it.
- **Elaborator:** details suggestions, and reasons for the suggestions, to solve a problem and tries to deduce the consequences of these suggestions.
- **Co-ordinator:** clarifies the relationships between various ideas and suggestions and tries to co-ordinate the groups' activities.
- **Orienter:** defines the position of the group with respect to its goals.
- **Evaluator/critic:** looks critically at the groups achievements and goals.
- **Energiser:** stimulates the group into making a decision or a higher quality of activity.
- **Procedural technician:** performs routine tasks to keep the group moving.
- **Recorder:** writes down suggestions, decisions made and minutes of meetings.

## **Group building and maintenance roles**

Members of a team take on various roles, often more than one, which help build team attitudes and maintain them. These roles can be carried out by either the leader or the individual team members:

- **Encourager:** radiates a warmth and sense of encouragement towards other team members' contributions.
- **Harmoniser:** attempts to reconcile any differences of opinion and reduce tension between other group members.
- **Compromiser:** offers compromise regarding his own ideas in order to maintain group harmony.
- **Gatekeeper/expediter:** encourages communication and participation between and from all team members.
- **Standard setter:** expresses and applies working standards for the group to adhere to.
- **Group observer/commentator:** keeps records of data produced by the group and feeds it back to the group so they can evaluate their procedures.
- **Follower:** takes a back-seat in group discussions and accepts the ideas of others.

## **Individual roles**

When joining a group individuals bring with them their own set of expectations and needs. Sometimes these needs can be irrelevant to the group task and hinder its progress.

These roles include:

- **Aggressor:** attacks the group or the validity of the task at hand by expressing disapproval or displaying envy towards others.

- **Blocker:** opposes and acts negatively towards new ideas.
- **Recognition seeker:** gains attention from others by boasting about personal achievements and perceived knowledge.
- **Self-confessor:** uses the group as an audience to express ideas and feelings unrelated to the task at hand.
- **Playboy:** displays nonchalance and horseplay along with a general uninterested attitude to the group and its task as a whole.
- **Dominator:** tries to manipulate the group or specific group members by using flattery, being attention seeking or interrupting others.
- **Help-seeker:** tries to get sympathy from other group members by showing insecurity, confusion or a lack of self-confidence.
- **Special interest pleader:** speaks on behalf of the public minority usually covering his own prejudices.

Benne and Sheats saw individual roles as quite negative but we will go on to look at individuals in relation to the task and the team in a much more positive way.

## **The individual within the team**

As a leader you must have a clear understanding of the individuals who make up the team:

- commonalities between individuals
- treat people as individuals

## **Commonalities between individuals**

Individuals are just that, individual, but there are also certain elements which are common between individuals.

As humans we share certain common needs, for example food and shelter, security and preservation. We also share the human social practice of giving and receiving, and exchanging things. Unconsciously we are aware that this exchange should be roughly equal between the parties involved. This same principle can be found within teams. The rewards of being part of a group should equal the input from the individual. If this is not the case it can lead to resentment between employees, especially if another team member is perceived as receiving more than their fair share of the rewards.

One of the attractions as an individual to work in a team is that it allows us to expand our knowledge, ability and experience. This is what we receive from the team in exchange for our hard work and dedication.

All humans have certain characteristics which are developed by the environment and inheritance. Some of these characteristics are:

- Trust
- Autonomy
- Initiative
- Integrity
- Security

The level of development will vary between individuals. It is this level of development which makes up our individual personalities. For example, we all have a sense of humour without necessarily finding the same things amusing.

## **Treat people as individuals**

Every person is unique even though we have similarities in temperament, interests, habits, our jobs etc. Organisations that treat their members as individuals, rather than numbers, are much more likely to get the best out of them.

Individuals that are not treated as such will feel:

- Suppressed
- Cajoled
- Trapped
- Pressured
- Manipulated

They will no longer feel able to use their initiative, judgement and creativity.

When a person is recognised for his individuality it will be realised what a unique contribution he could make to the common task and the team as a whole.

## **The overlapping needs of task, team and individual**

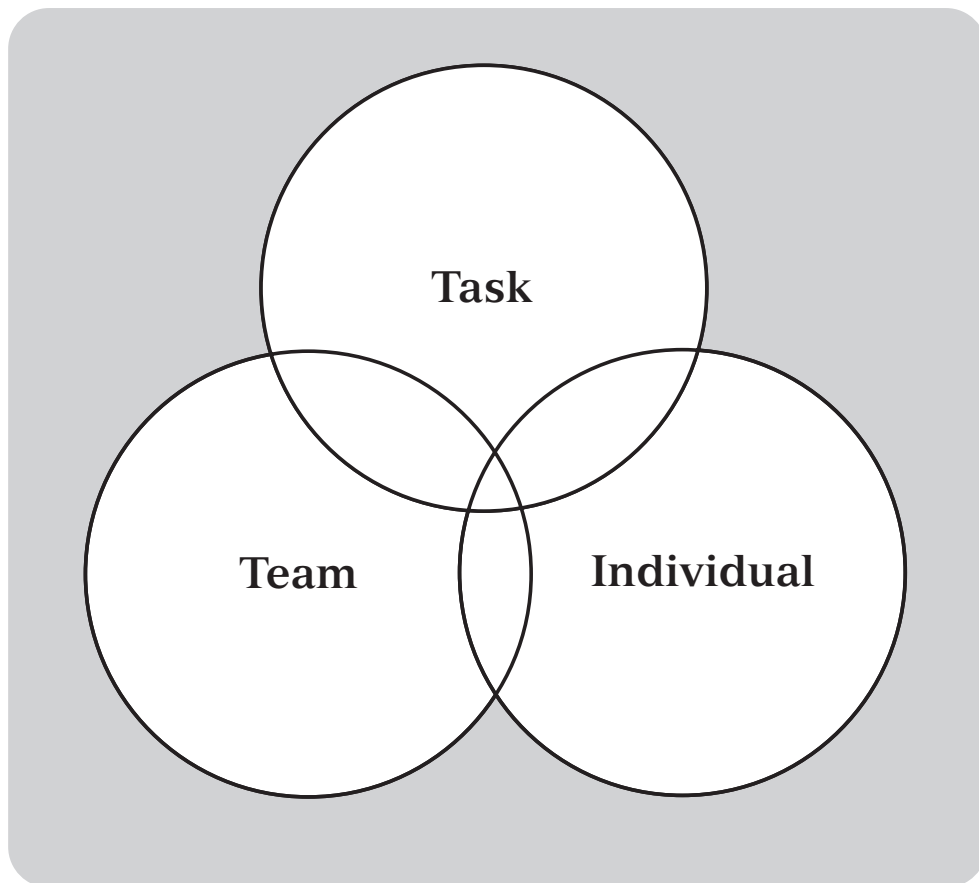
Teams can develop personalities of their own as they grow. One team will not be exactly the same as another but, just like individuals, groups share common needs.

The needs of a group:

- **Task:** the need to accomplish the common task or solve a problem. This is what the group is talking about and is usually seen in terms of things rather than people.

- **Team:** the need to develop and maintain good working relationships among the members. This is primarily about people and how they relate to each other.
- **Individual:** the need to fulfil their own individual needs, such as food, shelter, security, respect and self-actualisation. Individual needs should be met along with the group and task needs, not at their expense.

The interaction between these needs can be illustrated as follows:





By achieving the common task a sense of unity is created within the team which will also affect the individual. A good team will mean you are more likely to achieve the common task. If the individuals are fully motivated they will have a greater input to the team and therefore the task. If one of these areas fails or under-performs it will affect the other areas dramatically.

### **Leadership functions and needs**

In order for task and team needs to be met certain functions have to be carried out by the leader or, indeed, other team members:

- **Initiating:** getting the team motivated to begin work.
- **Regulating:** influencing the direction and the speed of the work.
- **Informing:** bringing new information to the group as it becomes available.
- **Supporting:** harmonising, relieving tensions, encouraging and motivating.
- **Evaluating:** helping the group to evaluate decisions or procedures.

If any of these functions are missing it will affect how the team performs.