

Putting management Team-Building to work

Introduction

This article has been written with the intention of formalising an approach to the design and delivery of outdoor based team-building programmes that enable management teams to transfer what they learn, back to the workplace. The article is intended to both reflect what the author considers to be an example of "best practice" in the field of management team development, and to give other trainers/consultants a framework around which to design their own programmes.

The approach comes from eight years of OMD experience in the fields of leadership and team development with British managers and six years experience working with European managers on a wide range of management development programmes.

Why Management Team Team-building?

It has been identified both in America⁽¹⁾ and France⁽²⁾ (and accepted elsewhere) that many management teams are unable to perform effectively together when they come together in a situation that requires teamwork. Individual members have a tendency to reason more in their role of director / manager of a division / service rather than as member of a team treating transverse, organisational problems. Hence when the team is together energy is diverted to fulfilling personal (often hidden) agendas and little synergy is gained from the interactions between members. There is often a lot of vying for power, lack of trust and inflexibility, with individuals conscious of their status and "defending" their own "empire".

The senior manager (the team leader) is often unable to resolve these problems (usually because he/she is part of the problem) and much use is made of the services of outside consultancies in the running of team-building or team development programmes.

What is meant by an Effective Management Team?

An effective management team is more than just a collection of managers or heads of departments working together. Effective management teams do not just happen, they are created over a period of time and consist of managers who are not only competent within their own functional domain but who are also able to work effectively together on transverse problems, who are committed to a high level of work output and who are able to make decisions which result in the best outcomes for their organisation.

Some characteristics of an effective management team

- Team members have a strong commitment to achieving organisational objectives.
- All team members participate in the problem solving and decision making process where necessary.
- Team members are capable of using both competing and co-operating behaviours at the appropriate time.
- When discussion is completed, team members feel responsible and committed to the successful implementation of the management team's decisions and objectives.

From management group to management team

There are many models of how groups develop⁽³⁾, the one we use is that of Jones⁽⁴⁾ (see fig. 1). This model identifies two dimensions along which groups grow as they work together to get work done, these are called Task Behaviours and Process Behaviours. The former being a non-personal dimension relating to tasks and the later being a personal/interpersonal dimension related to the process by which the individuals interact to get the work done. These two dimensions can be combined to give the development matrix below.

Process Behaviours (Relationship)	Interdependence			Stage IV Effective Team	
	Cohesion		Stage III Sharing Group		
	Conflict	Stage II Fragmented Group			
	Dependency	Stage I Immature Group			
		Objectives	Organisation	Open Data Flow	Problem Solving
		Task Behaviours			

fig. 1
The Group Development Matrix

Any operating management team can be placed somewhere on the matrix. A highly experienced, effective team would most likely, be found on the top right, whereas a very new inexperienced team would more likely be found towards the bottom left. “Problem” teams are usually to be found between these two “extremes”, below the diagonal for those teams in which task behaviours are being emphasised at the expense of process behaviours and above the diagonal for those teams in which process behaviours are being emphasised at the expense of task behaviours.

The Team-building process

The process we use (see below) is not revolutionary, what is important is that we insist (and clients agree) that all phases are of equal importance and that a “one-shot-wonder”, “stand-alone” event has limited short term effects.

During phase 1 we interview each team member individually in order to understand his/her perception of the team and its current (and historical) problems and barriers to effective teamwork. We use diagnostic questionnaires such as the TOBI⁽⁵⁾, the TEC⁽⁶⁾, the TRQ⁽⁷⁾ or the TCI⁽⁸⁾ to identify more objectively the teams current stage of development with respect to the development matrix shown in fig. 1.

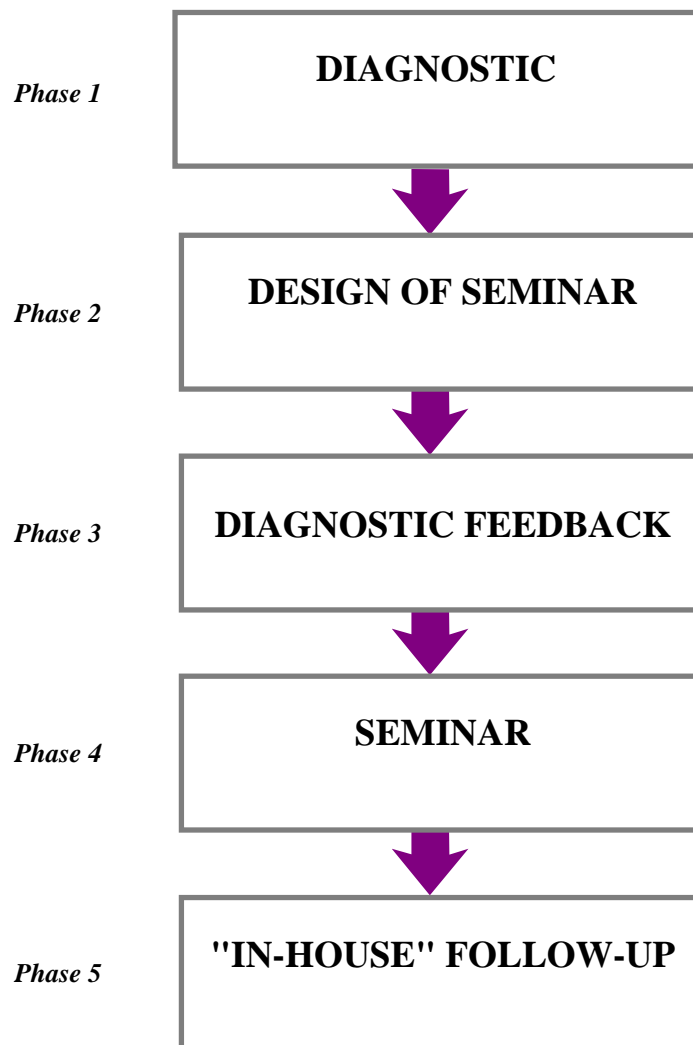


fig. 2
The Process

In designing the seminar (phase 2 of the process shown on page 3) we use the results of the diagnostic phase to decide on the appropriate mix of “exercises” i.e. do we need to concentrate more on Task Behaviours or more on Process Behaviours

The choice of the exercises to be used during the seminar is based on the Outdoor Development Outcome Matrix⁽⁹⁾ (see below). In this framework exercises are classified along a continuum ranging from “loosely defined” to “tightly defined”. A loosely defined exercise being one with limited rules and imposed external constraints (except in terms of safety), such as time-frames, budgets etc. A tightly defined exercise is one which has a high degree of imposed rules and constraints. A typical exercise of this type could be the classic “raft building” where the group has a limited time and “budget” to design, “buy” materials and build a raft capable of carrying a minimum number of people, between two fixed points, with no one getting wet above the ankles, in less than.....etc. Of course, take away the imposed rules and simply brief the group that they have to cross the river and that there are some materials available that may be useful, and you have a more loosely defined exercise.

A tightly defined exercise usually has a limited number of ways in which it can be carried out effectively and success and failure are based very much on the rules. Did the group finish on time? Under budget? Without getting wet? etc. Loosely defined exercises can usually be carried out in a number of different ways and success or failure tends to require skills such as analysing, defining objectives, setting standards and clear communication.

The review processes are also classified along a continuum ranging from “low intensity” to “high intensity”. Low intensity reviews tend to be more general, concentrating on the teams performance with the aim of developing general rules or guidelines for the team as a whole. High intensity reviews concentrate more on the impact of individual behaviours with individual feedback, concentrating on how individual behaviours effect team performance.

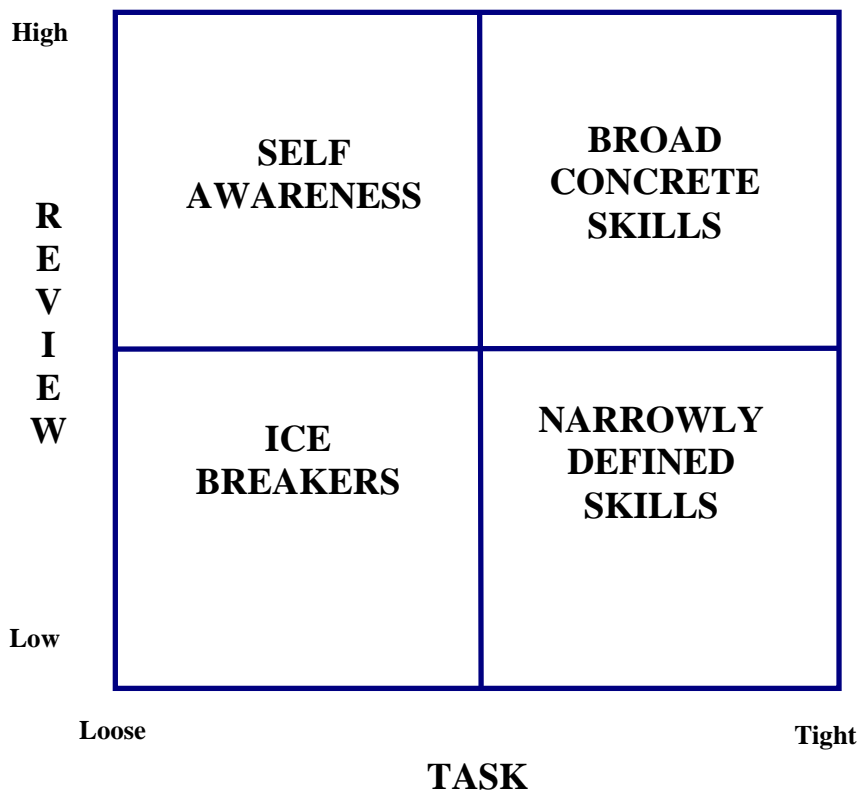


fig. 3
Outdoor Development Outcome Matrix

The combination of these two dimensions results in the outcomes shown in fig. 3. We use a progression that was christened the “reverse Z” by a colleague (fig. 4 below). We start in the bottom left quadrant with exercises designed to get the team talking about the key elements of effective teamwork, we then move onto exercises that concentrate on particular team orientated management skills (e.g. objective setting, decision making), before moving on to start looking at how individual behaviour effects the overall team performance. We finish with an exercise that integrates the key points of the seminar and requires a wide range of management skills for success (planning, co-ordination, reconciling conflicting objectives, setting priorities and matching tasks to competencies).

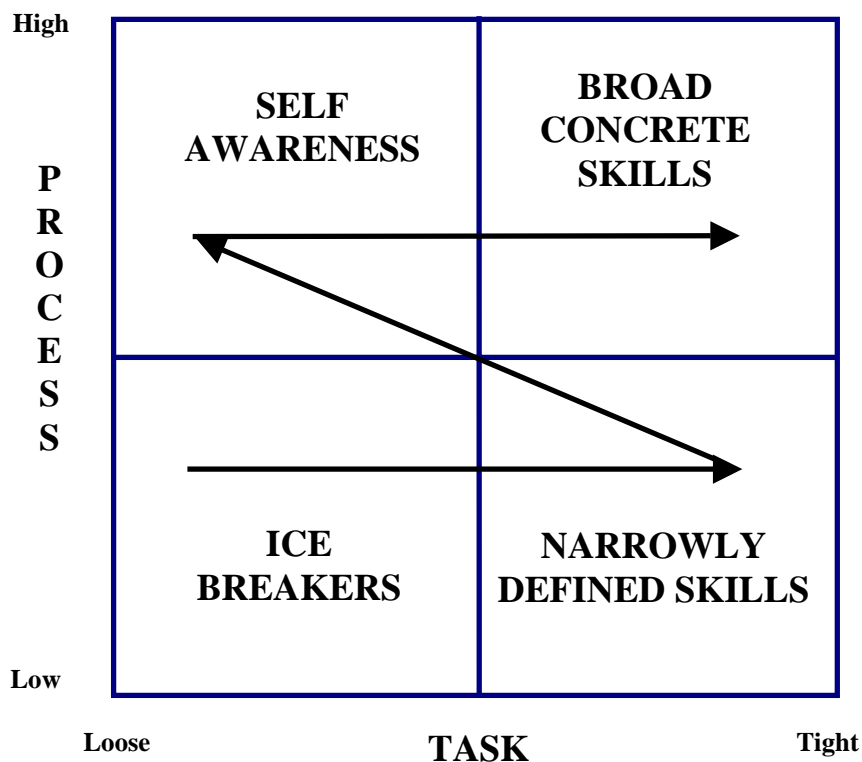


fig. 4

The reversed Z route to effective team performance

During phase 3 (Diagnostic Feedback) we feedback to the team the general tendencies (common points of view, major differences, etc.) obtained from the individual interviews carried out in phase 1, together with the results of the questionnaires and where the individuals perceive the team to be in terms of its development. We also present the programme of the seminar, highlight what we believe are the key issues to be treated, explain why particular activities have been selected or not and make the final decision on the choice of what we call "client based sessions" e.g. Objective setting, redefining the mission statement, modifying strategy, allocating roles, etc.

This phase takes place "in house" and for the management team it is effectively the starting point of the team building process. It is here, that they see, often for the first time, that they have different perceptions with regards to the objectives, strategy, operating procedures and even the "raison d'être" of the team itself.

The seminar itself is generally of two and a half to three days duration and mixes a wide range of exercises and activities, from theatrical improvisations and group orienteering, through barrels and planks, onto caving, film making and finally a complex multi-task project requiring the need to reconcile team and individual objectives.

Our approach to the seminar is based a slightly adapted Experiential Learning Cycle⁽¹⁰⁾ (see below), with a constant emphasise on the transferability to the workplace both in terms of individual and team learning.

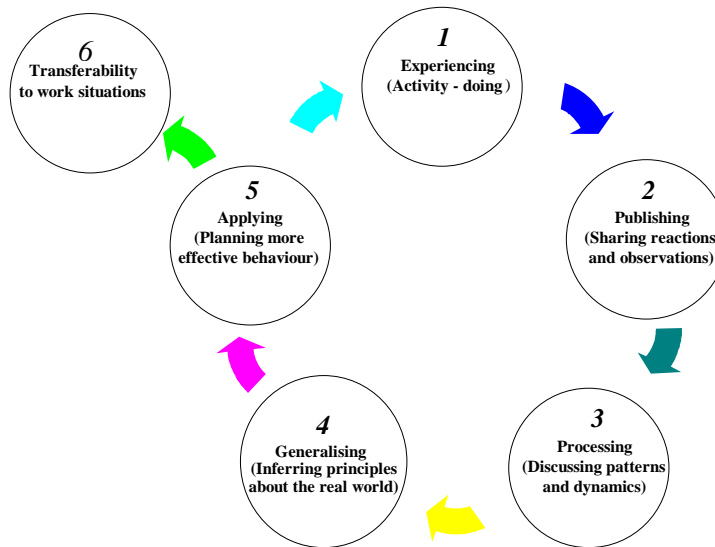


fig 5
The Experiential Learning Cycle

Two consultants are involved in running the seminar. One being responsible for the overall process, from the initial diagnostic through to the in-house follow-up (i.e. phases 1-5 as shown in fig. 2). The other being directly responsible for the design, delivery and management of the seminar itself. Outdoor Management Development Trainers are very few and far between in France (it is an approach that is relatively under-developed in France compared to Anglo-Saxon cultures), so I take responsibility for the seminar itself and work alongside "traditional" French trainers in running the seminar. The key trainer skills are the "soft" skills associated with each stage of the learning cycle; the ability to give clear briefings and actively observing during stage 1, using these observations to catalyse group discussions in stage 2, facilitating process review in phase 3, giving appropriate theoretical input in stage 4 and finally coaching for improved team performance in stages 5 and 6. We use French "moniteurs" to cover any safety aspects and make security based decisions.

The reviews (stages 2 and 3 in the learning cycle), move from a consultant led, directive approach, using pre-prepared debriefing sheets during the early part of the seminar addressing the more task-orientated aspects of teamwork towards a client led "auto-review" approach during the later part of the seminar concentrating more on the interpersonal interactions taking place and the effect they have on effective teamwork.

Various management models and theories such as situational leadership, the teamwork cycle, Belbin and Transactional Analysis are used in stage 4 to help the group clarify and understand how it is behaving. These theories are often appropriated by the group to run their own reviews.

Stages 5 and 6 in the learning cycle are crucial to both testing ways of improving team performance during the seminar itself and for creating a "blueprint" for long term effective team performance. The seminar itself finishes with a team action planning session that pulls together the key learning points of the seminar and translates these into concrete actions to be implemented post seminar.

It is this action plan that forms the basis of phase 5 of the process (fig.2), the In-house Follow-up. The consultants meet with the team at intervals of (at least) 3 months, 6 months and 1 year after the seminar to review ongoing progress and to give continued feedback and advice on how to maintain continued team effectiveness.

Some examples of clients

We have been using this approach for approximately five years, running on average five or six events per year. Clients over this period have included both French and European management teams (it is an approach that appears to be unhindered by cultural barriers), some examples being:

- A relatively new multicultural (Dutch, English, French, Italian and German) joint venture project management team where the emphasis was on creating a common frame of reference and clarifying the objectives of the team.
- A well established European (French, English and Spanish) management team lacking confidence due to loss of market share and needing to develop a more flexible approach to their strategic planning.
- The management team of a chain of French department stores about to be given a significant increase in power by their PDG and needing to find a greater cohesion and clarify the roles of certain individuals.
- The communications team of a joint venture, suffering from a mixture of too many changes and severe interpersonal conflicts needing an environment to vent their frustrations and anger, and to redefine their methods of working.
- The management team of a large factory needing to review their style of management following a major company reorganisation.

The results have been excellent both in the short and long term. A recent survey of our clients carried out by an external consultant showed amongst other things that 80% of participants felt that the diagnostic phase prior to the seminar was primordial to success, 75% felt that the seminar itself created an open environment where "real" problems could be treated in an atmosphere of mutual respect and 85% considered that the action plans developed at the end of the seminar contributed directly to improved team performance.

Following the success of our approach we are currently developing a modified version for completely new teams, where the overall objective is to "kick-start" the team development process and help teams move as quickly as possible to the top right-hand corner of the group development matrix shown in fig. 1 - i.e. effective team.

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Note:

* from University Associates, Inc., 1988 Formation Magazine