

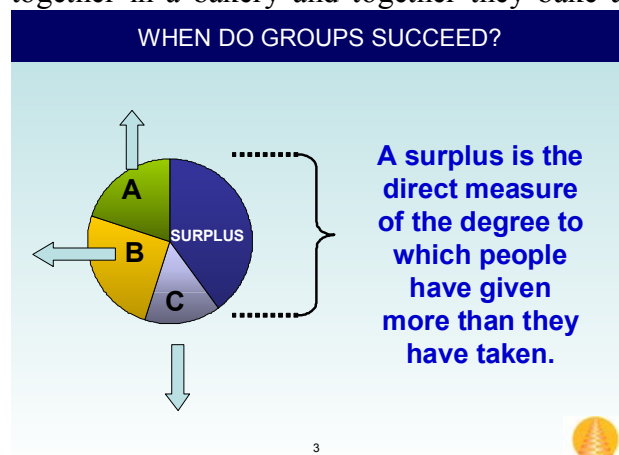
# Building Teams

## E Schuitema

### Introduction:

The premise that the work done on teams at Schuitema is based on is that one can account for the success of any group of people on the degree to which the individual in the group is unconditional in pursuit of the group's objectives. For example, people normally measure the success of an enterprise based on the degree to which it has produced a profit or a surplus. The question to explore here, is how does this profit or surplus come to exist in the first place.

We use the example of the three bakers: Assume one has three bakers who work together in a bakery and together they bake a cake. At the end of the month each



baker takes a slice home and the slice that is left over one could call a surplus. The question is, why does this surplus exist in the first place? Surely the surplus only exists because the total cake that was baked was bigger than what each individual baker took home.

So the question to ask here is, collectively have these bakers given more than what they have taken or have they taken more than they

have given? Clearly, they have given more than they have taken. That indicates that a group succeeds based on the degree to which the individual in the group is acting for reasons that are bigger than their self interest.

This is true for any group. Military organisations succeed based on the degree to which the individual combatant commits to the cause, rather than being a conscript or a mercenary. Sport teams succeed based on the degree to which the individual player is will to forgo his own agenda for the requirements of the team. When this does not take place then one does not have a team, one has a heard of cats.

It is very important to understand the site of this capacity that people can and do have to be here to make a contribution. It has very little to do with what people know or how they are equipped. One could give the three bakers the most advanced baking equipment or the most sophisticated baking training, if every one of them was a malevolent bastard who was here to get as much as he could for giving as little as possible, the group would still fail. This suggests that being here to contribute really is not so much about what people know or how they are equipped; it is an issue of intent.

The next question is, then, how does one solicit the intent top contribute. We have argued very explicitly that people do not go the extra mile for organisations, they go the extra mile for people. We have therefore been very explicit in claiming that the key attribute that distinguishes successful from unsuccessful groups was the degree to

which the leadership of the groups solicits the intent to contribute among the members of the group.

While this is obviously true, it is also true that teams that are successful are ones where the member of the team goes the extra mile in pursuit of the objectives of the team. This suggests that over and above the leadership of the team, there is something that takes place in the dynamic of how the team operates that supports the contribution of the team members. In my experience there are 3 critical criteria for successful teams:

1. The team has a vision or objective that solicits the intent to contribute.
2. Each member of the team understands how their individual role contributes to orchestrating the success of the team.
3. There is mutual respect among members of the team.
4. The behaviour of team members is fundamentally value driven.

I shall deal with each of these issues separately.

#### The Team has a Benevolent Intent:

The issue of benevolent intent challenges the core of the prevalent view on the purpose of enterprises. In my experience most people think that the reason why enterprises exist is to render a profit to the owner of the enterprise. The implication of this assumption for the intent of the individual in the organisation to contribute is not very positive.

Assume, for example, that you are an operator in a GSK factory that produces the silver bullet for AIDS, both as a prophylactic and as a cure. This is a miracle drug. A patient could be on his death bed about to breathe his last, should he take one of these pills he is walking around within hours. Further to this, if a person should take this pill once they will never get AIDS. However, you and your colleagues are not very inspired by your jobs and you really do the minimum that is required, and this is noticed by management.

One day the general manager of the plant has a brilliant insight as to how to enthuse the workforce regarding the work done in the factory and calls a big meeting in the cafeteria. In the course of the meeting he basically announces the following: "Work very hard at making these drugs because if you do you will make a shareholder on the LSE very wealthy." If you were an operator in this factory you would probably be very discontented at this point and will more than likely want to know what was in it for you.

However, should the general manager say something like "Work very hard at making these drugs because if you do you will save millions of lives around the world" you would feel much better about the job that you are doing and may even be inclined to go the extra mile in making the drugs.

The difference between the first two statements really lies in intent. The first statement makes one feel like you are being taken from while the second statement really gives one a sense of making some sort of contribution, of giving something. Clearly, if the success of the team is dependent on people going the extra mile, it is only the second intent that really solicits that possibility.

We refer to this second intent as a benevolent intent. A benevolent intent indicates how the service or product of an organisation makes a contribution to the world. It phrases a reason which is noble enough to give people an excuse to rise above their self interest. The interests of the shareholder are never enough of a reason to do this.

Any enterprise has a benevolent intent. Any enterprise has a market that it is aimed at serving, which means that every enterprise is aimed at adding value to someone outside the enterprise. It is only once that has been achieved that there can be profit. One has to bake the cake before it can be shared. In the broader sense, when groups are purely aimed at their own preservation they generally ossify and stagnate. Robust groups are groups that coalesce around a set of interests that are bigger than the group. Examples would be the military unit that fights for the freedom of the nation, the sports team that plays for the honour of the province, the employees of an enterprise that is making a genuine contribution to its market.

Practically this means that people find it easier to commit to a team or an enterprise when:

1. There is a clear understanding of who the customer of the organisation is.
2. There is a clear understanding of the immediate need that is fulfilled by the team. This means that the members of the team know exactly what goods and services are delivered to the customer.
3. The team members understand what transformation the enterprise is trying to effect. What this means is that there is a clear understanding of the difference between the before and after state for the customer. The transformation effected by an explosives manufacturer, for example, is the breaking of rock. The transformation effected by a cement producer is the binding of aggregate.
4. The team members understand the benevolent intent of the organisation. It means that the team member can take then next step to see the implications of the transformation that is being effected. For example, when explosives break rock they unlock wealth. When cement binds aggregate nations get built.

#### The Individual's Task is related to the Overall Intent of the Team.

The issue of benevolent intent operates on two levels. Firstly there is the issue of the benevolent intent of the organisation, and then there is the issue of the benevolent intent of the team. This second issue is, in a sense, a subset of the first. Let's review our GSK operator. If we want to be assured that his job is meaningful to him we need to tease the following logic out of him:

Q: "Why do you run the operation according to a standard operating procedure?"

A: "So that we produce the right amount of product to specification"

Q: "Why should the product be to specification?"

A: "Well, if the drugs do not comply to specification they don't save the lives we wish to save"

What this means is that the operator has to see the line of sight between the task that they do and the overall benevolent intent of the enterprise. Only once this line of sight has been established do we have a meaningful task. The difference between a meaningful and a meaningless task is not how menial it is. The difference lies in whether it makes a contribution to others.

If the member of the team is to go the extra mile for the requirements of the team, then going the extra mile has to be meaningful. What makes it meaningful is that the intent of the task is worthy, is benevolent. So, effective teams are teams where the individual in the team not only understand the benevolent intent of the team, but they also see how the task that they execute contributes to that intent.

A subset of this issue is the issue of measures. Measures are helpful because they able the team member to quantify the degree to which they are going the extra mile. These measures are only helpful, however, when they actually measure what the team can influence. This suggests that measures should operate on two levels. Firstly there are measures that are concerned with the overall effectiveness of the team, and then there are measures that reflect the key variables under the control of individuals in the team.

#### There is Mutual Respect among Members of the Team.

When people suspend their self-interest for the requirements of the team their demeanour is fundamentally co-operative. If co-operation between team members is the hallmark of effective teams then competition between members is its nemesis. When people are competing they are operating win/lose engagements with other team members which will eventually turn the ambiance of the team into a conflict ridden and hostile one. The outcome of this is that very quickly winning as a team member is pursued even at the expense of the overall success of the team.

The behaviour associated with competition between members of the team can best be described as 'playing the man and not the ball'. The reason for this is that the competitive team member engages other team members in a series of win/lose engagements with the intent of winning. This intention means that the competitive team member wants to come first, and the there member therefore by definition have to come second. This person engages the other with the intent to put the other down, to negate the significance of the other.

By contrast, a constructive team member confirms the significance of other team members. This does not mean that they are obsequious. It does not imply that they are putting themselves down in order to affirm the other. It is rather than they have made their own significance irrelevant. Rather, in every interaction with the other team members they grant significance to the other.

The single word that captures this skill of granting significance to the other is respect. This is associated with behaviours such as patience and listening. The reason for this is that a patient person who is able to listen is able to suspend their own agenda in order to give attention to the agenda of the other.

#### The Behaviour of Team Members is Value Driven.

When a person is value driven in their behaviour they are able to differentiate between what is expedient and what is correct in any given situation and they act on the basis of what is correct. This suggests that value driven behaviour is a subset of the requirement of team membership because it is yet another attribute of the capacity to act for reasons that are higher than self interest. This further implies that there is a clear understanding of and articulacy in core values among members of the team and what the behavioural implications of value driven behaviour are.

The limits of the legitimacy of the team's requirement to the team member's subordination to the team's agenda are reached when the team's agenda comes into conflict with core values. For example, when the requirement of the team is that a team member should do something which is fundamentally unjust to pursue the agenda of the team, then it is appropriate for the team member to break ranks and act on the basis of what is right, rather than what is in the interest of the team.

### The Process of Building a Team

Any team building exercise should be conducted in the light of the foregoing observations. A process should be constructed in terms of the requirements of the team, and will therefore not always include activities touching all four content areas, namely:

1. The benevolent intent of the team.
2. The benevolent intent of the individual's contribution.
3. The respect between the members.
4. The values of the team

This means that there should be a consultation with members of the team prior to an agreement of a process for a team building exercise being reached. Over and above this the process flow of the team building exercise should be as follows:

1. Definition of Criteria: The above named criteria are really common sense, and are easily solicited from team members at the start of a team building exercise. Sometimes it is not necessary to spend a lot of time on clarifying criteria because the team trusts the facilitator sufficiently for the facilitator to stipulate the criteria.
2. Diagnosis: What is the current state of the team in terms of the foregoing criteria? This diagnosis can be conducted both in terms of the overall state of the team and the contribution of individuals of the team. In seriously dysfunctional teams this process could also include a prognostic exercise. In other words, the question to explore is should no intervention be undertaken, what would happen to the team on the basis of the above diagnosis?
3. Remediation. The remediation can also be designed to cover either what needs to be committed to by the team as a whole, or what should be done by individual or both. It is very important to complete the team building process on a note which the participants experience as an affirmation. In other words, it is sub optimal to finish the process on a set of to do lists that really confirm what team members have been getting wrong. The very last piece of process should be experienced as affirming rather than negating. It should answer the questions 'why it is great to be a member of this team' or 'why it is great to have you as member of this team'.