

TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

Structural and Compositional Foundations

Hackman · Katzenbach & Smith · Belbin

PAPER 01 / 03

A Furtherance reference compendium on the intellectual traditions behind organisational design, leadership, execution, and culture.

IN THIS PAPER

This paper opens the Team Effectiveness series in Furtherance's reference library. It covers the structural and compositional foundations – how a team is designed, defined and composed before any question of dynamics arises. The question it answers: what has to be true of a team's design for it to have a chance of performing?

Hackman shows that enabling conditions matter far more than in-the-moment leadership. Katzenbach and Smith define what actually separates a team from a mere group. Belbin addresses composition – the mix of behavioural roles a team needs. Together they say: build the team right before hoping for chemistry.

J. Richard Hackman *Leading Teams, 2002*

Organisational psychology · the conditions for team effectiveness

CORE THESIS

Team performance is determined mostly by **enabling conditions** set in advance, not by how a leader behaves in the moment. Get the design right – Hackman put it at roughly sixty per cent design, thirty per cent launch, ten per cent ongoing coaching – and good performance follows.

FRAMEWORK

Enabling condition	What it requires
A real team	Bounded, stable membership with genuine interdependence
Compelling direction	A clear, challenging, consequential purpose
Enabling structure	The right task, norms and composition
Supportive context	Information, resources, rewards and training
Expert coaching	Help with teamwork, at the right moments

METHODOLOGY

Decades of empirical research across analytic, service and executive teams, including senior leadership teams.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

The rigorous, evidence-based foundation of the field, and a decisive shift from team dynamics to team *design*. The critique: the conditions are demanding to establish, and the model says relatively little about moment-to-moment interaction.

Katzenbach & Smith *The Wisdom of Teams, 1993*

Team performance · the discipline of teams

CORE THESIS

A **team** is not the same as a **working group**. A real team is a small number of people with complementary skills, committed to a common purpose, performance goals and working approach, for which they hold themselves **mutually accountable**. Teams require a specific discipline that groups do not.

FRAMEWORK

Element of the team “basics”	Meaning
Common purpose and goals	A shared, specific reason and measurable targets
Complementary skills	Technical, problem-solving and interpersonal
Mutual accountability	“We hold ourselves”, not just each individual
Small size + common approach	Few enough to work as one, with agreed ways of working

Their **team performance curve** ranks working group, pseudo-team, potential team, real team and high-performance team – with pseudo-teams performing worst of all.

METHODOLOGY

Practitioner research across dozens of teams, presented as a set of working principles.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

The classic, still-cited definition of a team and the discipline that distinguishes it. The critique: it is practitioner-derived, though its core distinctions have worn well.

Meredith Belbin *Management Teams, 1981*

Team composition · the nine team roles

CORE THESIS

Effective teams need a **balance of behavioural roles**, not just able individuals. People gravitate to preferred **team roles**, each with a contribution and an “allowable weakness”, and teams fail when the mix is unbalanced or duplicated.

FRAMEWORK

Group	Roles
Thinking	Plant (ideas), Monitor-Evaluator (judgement), Specialist (expertise)
Action	Shaper (drive), Implementer (delivery), Completer-Finisher (rigour)
People	Coordinator (chairing), Teamworker (harmony), Resource Investigator (contacts)

METHODOLOGY

Derived from business-simulation studies of management teams and a self-perception inventory.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

Hugely popular for building composition awareness and a shared language for contribution. The critique, noted below, is that the psychometric properties of the self-perception inventory have been questioned, and role preferences are less fixed than the model implies.

A NOTE ON EVIDENCE

A note on measurement: Belbin's team-role inventory is valuable as a conversation and self-awareness tool, but its psychometric reliability and validity have been repeatedly questioned in the literature. Use it to build shared language about contribution, not as a precise diagnostic or a basis for selection.

Synthesis

Contribution	Focus	Key idea	Evidence
Hackman	Design conditions	Five enabling conditions	Strong; decades of research
Katzenbach & Smith	Definition and discipline	Team vs working group	Practitioner; durable
Belbin	Composition	Nine balanced team roles	Popular; measure questioned

FOR THE OPERATOR

Effective teams are built, not hoped for – through the right enabling conditions (Hackman), the discipline that separates a team from a group (Katzenbach & Smith), and a balance of behavioural roles (Belbin). For the operator, the instruction is to fix the design first – a real team, compelling direction, enabling structure – before worrying about chemistry. The next paper turns to what happens once a well-built team starts working together over time.