

Developing teams for optimal performance in modern workplaces



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Team leadership, theories, tools and techniques

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Developing teams for optimal performance in modern workplaces

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Introduction

The book, *Team leadership, theories, tools and techniques*, offers a compendium of theories, tools and techniques for team leaders facing the challenge of optimising their teams' performance. The author succeeds in differentiating between the utility of theories (i.e. overarching explanatory lenses for understanding phenomena), tools (e.g. assessment instruments) and techniques (i.e. practical behaviours and actions) in maximising team performance in modern organisational life. Anchored in sound theoretical and research-practice (evidence-based) foundations, the book serves as a novel example of 'pracademic learning' (Kriek, in press, p. 8). Academic stances on team development are made helpful and practical for team leaders by demonstrating the utility of a number of selected classical theories and assessment instruments in daily organisational life. Each chapter closes with a brief outline coined as 'tips to team leaders' on the usefulness of the theory, tools and/or techniques offered. Further reading options for deeper exploration of sources consulted are also provided. In this regard, the book offers the reader and team leader the choice of drawing from the book whatever they find most appropriate and useful for application in their unique team contexts.

General overview

The book is divided into 20 chapters, with each chapter representing a specific theme relating to team development.

The first three chapters contextualise team development. Chapter 1 ('Developmental frameworks') presents classical theory on the stages of team development while chapter 2 ('Constituent frameworks') outlines the building blocks or elements of teams. Chapter 3 ('Organisational context') positions the theme of team development within the organisational-system context with an emphasis on external or internal contextual factors, organisational culture and the value chain in the organisation.

Chapter 4 ('Team assessments') introduces a number of tools for conducting team assessments, including tools to assess the composition of the team (i.e. Team Excellence Questionnaire, the Klein Group Instrument and Team Architect) and the team climate (i.e. Team Climate Inventory'). The chapter also reviews instruments for assessing team effectiveness (i.e. Team Effectiveness Assessment, Team Effectiveness Profile and Team Diagnostic Survey). Subjective assessment tools for helping teams evaluating its own performance and gauging team members' views are also reviewed.

Chapter 5 ('Team design'), chapter 6 ('Individual assessment instruments'), chapter 7 ('Team roles') and chapter 8 ('Team tasks') focus on theory, tools and techniques relevant to setting up teams for success and principles of team composition. The chapters review various assessment instruments as practical tools for leaders in designing teams.

Chapter 9 ('Teamwork'), chapter 10 ('Diverging techniques') and chapter 11 ('Converging techniques') focus on the interaction between team members. Theory, tools and techniques relating to facilitating innovative and creative team problem solving and functioning are reviewed.

Chapter 12 ('Conflict management'), chapter 13 ('Communication'), chapter 14 ('Emergent states'), chapter 15 ('Motivational states') and chapter 16 ('Motivation theory') deal with crucial aspects that affect the dynamics of team functioning. Again, the book approaches these themes from a sound theoretical foundation while offering tools (assessment instruments) and behavioural techniques that leaders can apply in practice to optimise the functioning of their teams.

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The last four chapters elucidate the role and tasks of team leaders, including their role in terms of coaching and team building. Chapter 17 ('Team leadership') reviews various theories of team leadership, while chapter 18 ('Tasks of team leaders') reviews principles and techniques for leading and managing personal and team change. Chapter 19 ('Coaching') reviews the practical utility of various coaching frameworks and models in team coaching. Finally, chapter 20 ('Team building') reviews the philosophy, principles and approaches to team building, including, for example, activity-based team building and positive tools and techniques for team building (e.g. appreciative inquiry).

Contribution and value-add

The book is a valuable addition to the team leadership literature and bridges the gap between current academic (theory-based or research-based) and popular self-help team leadership literature by its 'pracademic learning' approach (Kriek, in press, p. 8). The rich theoretical and evidence-based foundation of the book may appeal to academics teaching classes on team leadership and team performance. Practitioners involved in leadership development programmes and team-building interventions may also find this book helpful. The unique 'pracademic learning' approach makes general academic, theoretical stances towards team development accessible to both managers and individuals working in team contexts. The book is based on the personal experiences of the author and, therefore, adds richness to the evidence-based practice literature on team development. The comprehensiveness of the framework of themes on team development is laudable. Practitioners and team leaders may find the book as an invaluable guide in designing and facilitating optimal team performance in the modern day workplace. As a high-minded compendium on team development, the book is worthy of inclusion on the list of must-read material for

scholars and practitioners in the field of industrial and organisational psychology.

Overall impression and conclusion

The author is realistic in acknowledging that the theory, tools and techniques offered in the book do not represent a panacea for solving all problems and challenges relating to maximising team performance. Some of the limitations of the book may be its lack of a review on ethical practices in conducting assessments and applying techniques in team development processes. Moreover, more attention could have been given to the practical relevance of the theories, tools and techniques for the developing country contexts such as Africa-South Africa. Real-life case studies would also have provided deeper insight in the application of the theories, tools and techniques. Africanised philosophies on team development could have further enriched the value of the book's content.

Notwithstanding the overt limitations, the definitive boundaries of the book are clearly delineated. The book is a much welcomed addition to modern literature on team development with its well-chosen selection of key theories and tools that are embedded in research and practice. The developmental focus of the book is novel by its demonstration of how leaders, managers and team members can utilise the variety of theories, tools and techniques to improve their teams' performance, as well as their own personal functioning and effectiveness. As also pointed out by the author, the selection of themes, theories, tools and techniques offers alternative views to team development and may serve as an incentive to invest in further research on the topic.

References

Kriek, H. S. (in press). *Team leadership, theories, tools and techniques*. Randburg, South Africa: Knowres.