



Johannes Herwig-Lempp

Resource-Oriented Teamwork

A Systemic Approach to Collegial Consultation



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With 10 Figures

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

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■ More Than the Sum of Its Parts

Teamwork has always been a preferred method of accomplishing tasks – in social work with its diverse areas of responsibility, in many service sector jobs and in production. While people don't rely on teamwork to work miracles, they do, however, expect an unusually high success rate in keeping with the saying: the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Teamwork is expected to generate synergies. The aim is to make the most of each team member's strengths and resources which, when channeled, become a valuable resource for the organization or company in achieving their goals.

From a systemic perspective, there is no doubt that each individual team member has a number of resources to draw on: firstly, these are his/her professional qualifications and skills that have been acquired and continually enhanced through training and work experience. However, due to differences in the lines of work including where the training took place, the specialists they were trained by and the members' individual strengths, a number of multifaceted competencies flow into the team. Each new experience in an individual's daily work shapes their professional character. Aside from career choices, life experience in general influences the way we see and experience the world around us; the opportunities and options at our disposal and which of these we can actually access when we need them. While talking to a Turkish client, we may suddenly remember our own experience in France when we felt that we were unable to communicate effectively. A social worker who has no children may experience different emotions and have different ideas while dealing with parents who have problems with their teenage son's puberty-related issues than his colleague who has two adult daughters. A psychologist will most likely be able to draw upon his/her past experience and knowledge in treating geriatric cases on an out-patient basis in the psychiatric ward – moreover, his/her knowledge and background provide a valuable source of reference for his colleagues. By the same token, a young intern in the same team and facility might, precisely because of his/her lack of work and life experience, pose

the rather naïve sounding question: “Why do you do it this way? Couldn’t one also approach it differently?” thereby providing the decisive impetus for further development. It seems also somewhat arbitrary to want to use all members of a team for their resources based on their various different qualifications and life experiences.

Collegial Consultation

The key question is how these resources containing multiple perspectives and competencies can be gainfully exploited and made accessible to the team. One possible option in this respect is collegial consultation.

Collegial consultation refers to reciprocal reflection among colleagues with the aim of generating new impetus for their daily work. Collegial consultation generally takes place on a voluntary basis and on equal terms. In practice, however, this approach can take many different forms and different people may not share the same understanding of what is expected, as is illustrated in the following examples.

- A team at an organization for adolescent services meets once a week to discuss colleagues’ “cases”: the purpose is partly to keep each other up to date, partly to seek advice and support in particularly difficult situations and decisions, and partly, to agree on specific services (a measure prescribed by management: decisions are to be made by the entire team).
- The employees of an adolescent psychiatric ward (physician, psychologist, caregivers, nurses, social educator) have a half hour at noon to hand over their duties, during which time they bring each other up to date on patients and how to proceed with atypical cases.
- Two street workers meet for coffee during their break and complain about the current heavy workload. They share experiences and empathize with one another.
- A caregiver in a geriatric ward asks his wife for advice about the condition of a patient in his care, upon returning home from work. His wife, a physician who works at another geriatric facility, asks a few questions in return and comes up with a few suggestions.
- The employees in a day group at a facility for social education meet on a weekly basis for two and a half hours to discuss organizational and administrative matters. If they have time, they talk about the children in their group and the plans they have for them in the near future – or they plan the next parent-child meeting.

- A therapist calls a colleague to ask for a few minutes of her time and to seek her opinion on a particular case she is dealing with at the moment.
- A group of two social workers, a physician, a freelance therapist, a caregiver and a supervisor, each working at different facilities, agreed to meet once a month for three hours at one another's homes to consult on work-related issues.
- A group of five students pursuing degrees in social work meet during their traineeship on a regular basis every four to six weeks in order to share practical experiences, problems, fears and their successes.

Collegial consultation is common practice in socio-psychological work: It can take place within or outside the work place, after hours or in a private setting. It can be official as an integral part of the work process in which specific times are set aside for discussion and two-way consultation, or it can be an informal affair over coffee or a telephone call. As soon as the meetings become an official *modus operandi* they take place on a weekly or bi-weekly basis within the scope of a team meeting. By the same token, consultations can take the form of group consultations: one or two colleagues from several teams or divisions meet to consult with each other.

Collegial consultation can be referred to in many different ways and can vary from team to team and facility to facility: team consultation, case consultation, case conference, intervision, peer supervision, collegial supervision and others. This variety also corresponds to a number of different proposals that were designed for this form of consultation (cf. Fallner & Grässlin, 1989; Holtz & Thiel, 1996; Haug-Benin, 1998; Hendriksen, 2011; Brinkmann, 2002; German Association for Public and Private Welfare, 2002; Franz & Kopp, 2003; Schlee, 2012; Tietze, 2012; Schulz von Thun, 2006; Lippmann, 2009; Natho, 2005; Kühl, 2007). Often too little notice is taken of the fact that collegial consultation is in itself a form of consultation so that the approaches used explicitly in work with clients could also be applied to it.

For me, a significant feature of consultation is that it takes place *prior* to a decision, regardless of who made it – and consequently can be seen as separate from it. In keeping with a systemic approach where the client makes his/her own decisions, colleagues engaging in collegiate consultation receive advice but in the end decide for themselves which option to choose. When team consultation is mentioned in this context, referral is most often made to consultation in general. I feel that there is a significant and fundamental difference between consultation and decision-making (“Are we giving you advice at this point or do we want to influence your decision?”), a factor that should be clarified before beginning the consultation process. A later

chapter will introduce options on how teams can deal with decision-making processes.

The place to pool and synergize individual employee resources is within the team where the individual's work becomes part of and contributes to both the common "product" and goal. It seems only logical and an expression of the team's synergy: the whole is more than the sum of its parts. A team that works well together is more likely to master assigned tasks than if each member tackles a problem on his/her own. However, one shouldn't forget that the opposite also holds true: the individual is not only a part of the whole but always much more than merely a member of the team. Each person has their own unique life experiences, background knowledge and skills. His/her special traits, characteristics, his/her distinctive perspective and thoughts are resources that make him/her a valuable team member.

There is a vested interest in teamwork involving expectations that teams outperform individuals. To this end, team members pool their respective resources to enhance a team's overall performance. Conversely, each team member can count on the team's support to do his/her best toward achieving the goal. Ultimately, a team is as effective as its members and the more the members enjoy the team's support and empowerment, the more likely they are to contribute to high-performing teams.

The purpose of this book is primarily to introduce a model of team consultation with a focus on it within a team. This form of counseling does not require the assistance of a professional clinical supervisor or "team facilitator". Rather, it is based on the collective input from team members. Together with a team of social educators from the Family Support Center in the Böblingen area, I created this model in the early 1990s. The idea came into being after many years of experimentation followed by extensive revision and further development in training programs with different teams and supervisors.

The History behind This Model of Team Consultation

This idea was conceived after noticing that while our team at the facility for family welfare worked together in a very resourceful, multifaceted, task- and goal oriented as well as structured manner, our regular team meetings fell short of this standard. While we did have time-consuming team meetings each week, they were becoming increasingly unpopular. We generally spent a lot of time discussing basic and organizational issues – and found that it left us too little time to discuss the real topics, the so-called cases and our work

with the families. Priority was given to “the most difficult cases”, which took up most of the remaining time so that other issues could not be addressed. One co-worker tended to give a detailed description followed by a whole host of questions interspersed by advice and personal experience, ending in a lengthy discussion about the best possible solution. In the end, everyone had to get back to their “real” work with “their families”.

Once we shared our feelings about how the team meetings were structured, it became clear just how far removed we were from what could be considered good consultation practice, at least where our client-counselor dialogues were concerned. Most of us had a basic background in the field (social work and social education) and had acquired further qualifications, often in systemic approaches. All of us had practice in structuring client-counselor dialogues and applying a variety of different approaches. It was important to us to identify and further develop each member’s resources in order to benefit from their contribution toward finding workable solutions, in the same way that we encourage our patients to discover and integrate their own solutions into the counseling process. We aimed to adjust to our clients’ needs and their own goals. We developed ideas and approaches to meet these objectives in a way that would best convey our respect for the client, an element that was entirely lacking in our own team meetings.

Eventually we began to realize that we could benefit from our joint expertise in our own team meetings and that collegial consultation was in fact a form of *consultation* which opened up the option of applying and implementing the approaches we used with our patients to consultation within our team. We began with a few simple structural changes. For instance, we scheduled the current case studies for the beginning of the meeting. By addressing them during the first half of the meeting, we made sure the important items were given enough time and agreed on taking turns at facilitating the session: at the end of the meeting, we agreed on a person to chair the next meeting. The previously detailed minutes, which no one ever bothered to read, were revised to include only the essential points and taken by a different member each time. Refreshments were prepared before the meeting – and a break was scheduled halfway through. Although these slight modifications were merely of an organizational nature and had no significant influence on the session itself, they lead to a noticeable improvement within the team.

This improvement was particularly evident during our case discussions, a definition we changed to “team consultation”: on the one hand, because we wanted to talk about people (us as a team and our clients) instead of “cases”, and on the other, to underline the changes that had developed and thus reinforce them for ourselves. We then agreed to integrate new structures and

approaches into our collegial consultation sessions, granting the discussion leader the mandate and permission to call team members to order and ask them to adhere to the terms of the agreement.

The first step in structuring our collegial consultation began with the request for a question on which to base the session. Then, the issue was briefly outlined and limited to the most important information. The members were invited to ask a few follow-up questions before the beginning of the session. Finally, the time allocated to discussing concerns was agreed upon (thereby setting a limit) in advance. The actual consultation took place with the help of standard systemic (or other) approaches: establishing hypotheses, circular questions, discussions, exchanging advice, suggestions on how to make the situation *worse*, etc.

The success that we experienced for ourselves and in our work validated our new approach. This is not to say that the members' problems and concerns automatically disappeared (also not the case in our previous approach), but the atmosphere (as well as the participants) felt more "relaxed". Our main objective had been realized: new perspectives had opened up for the team members seeking advice. Furthermore, several more team members had a chance to speak up, the sessions were more varied, stimulating and also entertaining and members actually enjoyed attending. We continued to experiment by bringing in, modifying and creating new approaches that we adapted to our consultations.

Together with a team of colleagues, among them Ute Große-Freese (later Fernis), Ludger Kühling, Cornelia Münch and Annette Glück, I introduced this model into training seminars. The former team at the Social Education and Family Assistance Facility in Böblingen (1990 to 1998) was also instrumental in the development of this model. Moreover, I used this model in supervision and organizational consulting and introduced it occasionally there as such. Many teams expressed interest in adopting these ideas: although collegial consulting is generally given a high level of importance in social work, there are often only vague notions about how this form of consultation can be meaningfully implemented.

Definition of Terms

Language serves to describe reality. However, it is not a one-to-one exchange rather it assists us in constructing our message depending on the definition we use (and the meaning we attribute to it); we also perceive the reality it is

meant to describe differently. As far as I'm concerned, there is a difference between whether I refer to "cases", "concerns" or "practical examples". Or whether I "take measures", "offer options" or "provide services" in work with adolescents. For this reason I would like to briefly discuss here the terms "model" and "team consultation".

The definition of "model" in this sense does not refer to a closed form of collegial consultation – that underlies criteria of right or wrong. When introducing the models in this book, I may use the imperative form, e.g. "one should ...", "he must ...", "she's not allowed to ...", however, my point is merely to capture a precise definition of approaches that have proved successful for myself and the team with which I have worked. It does not mean that it can't be modified or entirely changed. I would like though, to draw a parallel here between this approach and playing the violin or guitar: it's a good idea to learn all the rules for playing such instruments and spend years practicing before attempting to improvise.

Continual development on a given model is a natural consequence. Models provide the basis for further reflection and discovery. My intention is to provide the impetus for further experimentation and perhaps to generate new ideas and new forms of collegial consultation.

The second note concerns the term "team consultation". Sometimes the idea of "team consultation" within the field of social education is confused with external consulting (similar to supervision), measures for team development or a team meeting to discuss cases chaired by a supervisor. Since the term is not protected by copyright, has already been widely adopted within the context of our team meetings and our trainings, and furthermore, hits the nail on the head with regard to our work, I will nevertheless continue using it.

By team consultation I mean professional collegial consultation, which includes one-on-one consultation as well as issues and concerns that are dealt with within the team: What can I do differently/better in my next encounter with Ms. C? What means do I have at my disposal to assist in Ms. C's development? What can we do in our next time off? How should we handle appraisals? What changes in our plans are on the horizon? – In contrast, we refer to *official meetings* in this book where the exchange of information and general internal messages, independent of consultation is concerned; the professional knowledge of each team member isn't required in this case. An understanding of team consultation and an official meeting differs from team to team.

How to Read This Book

Central to this book are the methods of team consultation, a model of systemic collegial consultation. We begin with a rather theoretical chapter about teamwork and an introduction to the basics of systemic work. Following the detailed description of possible procedures and methods of team consultation, we discuss how to organize team meetings and consultations: What has proved effective in the past? In closing, we deal with the issue of “team development”: What can teams do to evolve and change the way they work together?

This book introduces a model of team consultation intended to stimulate teams and their individual members and show how to generate ideas and develop new forms of collegial consultation based on this model. The author suggests different methods of dealing with change in the hope of encouraging users to take the first step and experiment as they go. Team consultation is no great mystery and it does not take years of expensive training to be able to experiment with the ideas we have introduced.

While my premise is based on teamwork within the scope of social education and family assistance, the form of team consultation introduced here is not limited to work with adolescents or social work. Experiences with supervisors, educators and organizational consultants have shown that these methods are suited to any number of teams within all conceivable professional fields. Furthermore, they can be applied in group settings for the purpose of reciprocal collegial consultation.

I encourage you to experience for yourself the integral role collegiate consultation plays in professional and quality-conscious social work. Like continuing education and supervision, it encourages us as professionals to keep up to date through continual development in the field. Once we recognize this, collegial consultation can serve as a training ground for our work with clients and vice-versa, our work with clients can enhance our collegial consultation.

Reading an entire book on the subject may not exactly give the impression of being compatible with a practical approach: the text contains theoretical parts (“Does one really have to read the whole book before understanding the approach?”) as well as a variety of methods (“How can I remember all of these?”), so that the reader may indeed lose the general overview and perhaps even his/her motivation to continue reading. Do not despair – there is no need to read through the book chapter for chapter, instead skim through it and let yourself be inspired, highlighting parts here and there that you may want to refer to later. Perhaps you’ll want to try out one thing or another or

suggest that your team experiment with an idea. The main thing is: do it. Best of all, try out your idea before you continue reading. Dare to suggest the experiment to your colleagues on the team.

Treat this book like a cookbook: Look through it and stimulate your appetite, remember your own experiences and ideas that were actually quite good and that may now prove enriching to the group. Let yourself be inspired to experiment with whatever strikes you as interesting. Try not to reject ideas on the spur of the moment; some approaches should be given more time before deciding whether or not to include them in one's repertoire.

Suggestions on How to Use This Book

- Look through this book and select those parts that you would like to try out in your own team or collegial consulting group.
- Before testing the exercises and approaches suggested in this book with others and within the team, make sure all participants agree with the plan.
- Try out methods that you feel comfortable using, that are simple to use and interest you.
- Experiment with new methods when nothing or very little can go wrong, e.g. where simple matters and questions are concerned or where problem-solving has run aground.
- When in doubt, be sure to stick with proven methods or fall back on them when the new method doesn't seem to work.
- It's not unusual for things not to work out the way one thought they would on the first try. Be brave enough to calmly repeat your approach two or three times.
- Don't hesitate too long. Just try it.
- Be patient with yourself when you "really" wanted to try something new but then decided not to or if things just don't work out the way you expected them to.
- Contact me if you are (dis)satisfied, your attempts were (not) what you expected them to be or whether or not this book proved useful in your work. You will find my address at the back of the book.

■ Team and Teamwork

“A good crew was like an elective family in which everyone in the little hot world of the kitchen stood on equal footing and every cook had weirdnesses concealed in her past or in his character and even in the midst of the most sweaty togetherness each family member enjoyed *privacy* and *autonomy*: she loved this.”
Jonathan Franzen, *The Corrections*, 2001, p. 378

What Makes a Group a Team?

Opinions differ on what constitutes a team, the function it should serve and at what point it can be considered a team. The scope ranges from the number of members a team should have and the type of tasks involved to whether or not the team should have a leader. As is the case with all concepts and definitions, it is important to remember that definitions are “created” and are neither “objective” nor “exist in the real world”. A definition is based on subjective interpretation – if I imbue the definition with meaning, then I commit to the description. Definitions are neither “true” nor “false” – they are simply tools that may or may not prove useful, depending on where and how they are applied.

It is usually helpful to agree on definitions based on specific functions and the purpose they serve. Meaningful definitions are determined by different purposes and whether one speaks of teams, task groups or groups depends on the intended meaning and message.

The term “team” originates from Old English and referred to a team of horses or oxen, hitched to a wagon for a specific purpose (see figure 1). Today, in both English and German, the term is used to indicate a group of individuals who collaborate on a task at the organizational level or when referring to a sports team, where individuals group together to compete against other teams.



Figure 1: A team of oxen

What follows is a brief overview of the definitions and descriptions commonly applied to the terms team and teamwork in the literature: “Teamwork describes a gathering of individuals within a group who pool their expert knowledge and personal skills and agree to adhere to a set of specific rules in order to achieve a common objective. In such situations, the team is usually a part of a larger organization with a commitment to the former’s objective and overall goal” (Stahmer, 1996, p. 621).

“A team is a small group of people whose abilities complement one another, who are committed to a common task and agree on a common approach while assuming collective responsibility” (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p. 70, quote from Kriz & Nöbauer, 2008, p. 24).

Francis and Young (1992, p. 9) define a team as “a high-performing task group whose members are actively interdependent and share common performance objectives. Not all groups are teams. Notice that the definition includes the expressions ‘high performing,’ ‘actively interdependent’ and ‘share common performance objectives.’”

“In contrast [to ‘work groups’], teams not only share information but team members also collaborate and communicate as a unit. Decisions are geared toward enabling members to work together effectively on a common task with the goal of creating tangible products and services. On the whole, tasks and goal orientation are more prevalent in the team than in work groups. The original meaning of the Old English term, ‘a team of work animals pulling a load,’ illustrates this analogy. In other words, a team is a group of individuals with common interests who are ‘harnessed’ or ‘bound together’ for the purpose of achieving a specific task” (Kriz & Nöbauer, 2008, p. 23).

“A team is a group of employees, responsible for a specific work process, which delivers the results of their work in the form of a product or service to an internal or external beneficiary” (Bender, 2002, p. 17).

Francis and Young (1992, p. 10 ff.) speak of energy, objectives, output, structure and mutual support when referring to some of the “characteristics of an effective team”:

- *Energy*: “In an effective team, members gain strength from another. Collectively, they feel more potent and find that team activities renew their vitality and enjoyment.”
- *Objectives*: “Every team needs a purpose that is understood, shared, and considered worthwhile by its members. This purpose can be described as the team’s *mission*.”
- *Output*: “The ‘acid test’ of a team is its capacity to deliver the goods. High standards are essential. A team is capable of achieving results (both in quality and quantity), that its members cannot achieve in isolation.”
- *Structure*: “A mature team has dealt with thorny questions about control, leadership, procedures, organization, and roles. The team as structure is finely attuned to the tasks that are undertaken.”
- *Mutual support*: “Members of an effective team develop a distinctive team spirit that encourages mutual respect, support, and simple enjoyment of one another. Team members identify themselves with their team.”

Kriz and Nöbauer (2002, p. 23 ff.) elaborate on a number of core features of teams (setting them apart from work groups) for which there seems to be some consensus in the literature:

- *Goals*: “Work teams have specific and very clearly defined performance work goals. Work groups, on the other hand, tend to formulate more general and all-encompassing goals”.
- *Synergetic effects*: “Often cited metaphorically as an important indication of a team’s existence is the maxim, a team is more than simply the sum of its parts. This means that the team shows positive synergy in its performance. [...] A team is expected to recognize potential threats to the group dynamic well in advance, to generate measures to remedy the situation by drawing on appropriate competencies within the team, to initiate a decision-making process and to formulate an action plan to ensure effective group cohesion.”
- *Team member skills*: “Work teams [...] require that the members’ expertise and skills complement each other in order to reach the defined goal.”
- *Multidisciplinary skills*: “A variety of different competencies as well as the ability to assume different perspectives play a greater role in a team than in a work group.”

- *Responsibility*: “Responsibility is shared among team members of a work team. Decision-making is handled in a collegial manner via participatory decision-making processes. There is no separation between individuals doing the work and those who make decisions. Leadership responsibilities are also shared among members.”
- *Self-organization*: “The team is flexible where team structures, methods of achieving the goal or work styles is concerned. Reaching decisions and problem-solving, as well as supervision, reflection and the coordination of work processes are determined by the team itself.”

Haug offers a broader definition: “In this sense, ‘team’ represents an exceptional group,

- that is high-performing due to the synergy of each member’s strengths even under difficult conditions,
- that is goal-driven thanks to each member’s unyielding sense of responsibility and willingness to put team interests before their own,
- in which the members motivate one another, thus achieving a synergetic effect, e.g. the overall performance is greater than the sum of individual performances,
- that knows how to split and coordinate tasks into smaller units of individual skills and expertise in order to achieve the objective,
- in which an atmosphere of mutual trust and candor exists, and individual members can strongly identify with “their” team and
- in which members communicate on the basis of mutual understanding, allowing optimal integration of information and a guaranteed forum for different points of view” (Haug, 2009, p. 19).

Often, the initial reaction to these definitions is uncertainty, as people might feel unsure about living up to these expectations. Conspicuously enough, most definitions of the term “team” tend to *idealize* its function and in most cases refer to “extraordinary” (!) teams. This leads “normal” teams to draw the discouraging conclusion “We don’t function like that – and so it seems we’re not a team.” This becomes particularly apparent when the members have not yet succeeded in assessing themselves from a resource oriented point of view: Which of these criteria do we meet? Very few teams manage to defy these criteria and simply claim: “We *are* a team!”

Just taking a look at some of the features ascribed to teams: “exceptionally effective”, “mutually stimulating”, “high-performing”, “team spirited”, “ideally connected” and also the “ability to communicate openly”, “enthusiasm” or “sharing responsibilities”: if one were to take a critical view, it would seem

almost impossible to meet even a few of these criteria. Seen from this perspective, these idealized concepts (according to the principle “Only a *good* team is a real team!”) are usually unhelpful even if they may seem to temporarily motivate the team. A number of teams have reported back to me in all seriousness: “We aren’t really a team because we aren’t really sincere with one another nor do we work together effectively.” Other teams have spent hours discussing whether or not they actually are a team because they have a leader. Aside from serving one’s own understanding, such standardized definitions are of course impractical. It is as if an organization (and a team is a form of organization) doesn’t merit this description unless its traits are *good* or *excellent*.

As far as I can see, a work group can thus also be defined as a team even if the requirements are only partially met. Actually, the only prerequisite is that the group considers itself a team – and manages to agree on an effective *modus operandi*. An important and very helpful step in the team’s further development can be set in motion by a team exchanging their views on,

- what the members believe constitutes a team,
- to what extent they believe that they meet their own criteria and
- what they can agree upon to further develop the team in the future.

Or, more to the point: even if the members of a work group argue about whether or not they actually meet the prerequisites of a team, they are in fact contributing significantly to building the team.

Exercise

With contributing to the development of your own team in mind, discuss the different definitions of teamwork by, for instance:

- each member giving their opinion on the subject,
- the pros and cons of each definition being listed,
- reaching agreement as to what extent you as a team conform to this definition – and deciding, for the time being, on a plan of action in order to comply with it.

My suggestion of a definition for the team is: A team is a work group,

- that uses its members’ diverse resources,
- to work toward one or more common goals,
- in a controlled, structured and organized way and
- reflects upon this structure and organization (at regular intervals).

As far as I'm concerned, this also applies when a team does not adequately meet the criteria, but would like to. The decisive factor is if a group wants to develop in this direction. Then, questions can be answered, such as: May a team have a leader? According to this definition it is possible. A team can then strive for or even achieve the above requirements regardless of whether there is a team leader. Similar conditions apply to the size of a team. The maximum size of a team is commonly set at between seven and nine members. This question, too, can be decided by the team itself (or the work group for that matter if they are unwilling to be considered a team on the basis of the number of members).

A Team Uses the Resources of Its Members

A team's unique strength is based on the manifold increase in available resources due to the number of members. Not only can more people achieve more in less time due to their sheer number, but they also benefit from more experience, knowledge and perspectives than a single person. The added value is not only a result of quantity but more importantly a difference in quality. Furthermore, more people are available to take on a given task and share responsibility, take the burden off any one individual's shoulders, four eyes are better than two, more brains generate more ideas, and different points of view contribute multiple perspectives. The different resources that each member brings to the team due to their diverse educational backgrounds, expertise, job and life experience and their ensuing intuition are key to the team's strength. The differences may be a result of age, education and approach but also of work experience, temperament, ability to handle conflicts, observation skills, communication skills and life experience. Thus, work in adolescent psychology benefits not only from the interaction between different fields of expertise (physicians, psychologists, caregivers, educators, social workers, music therapists), as well as professionals from different age groups, with experience abroad and previous work experience: each individual can contribute their unique experiences and views of life.

Exercise

Which ten resources can I contribute to my team? And which five resources do I believe each colleague brings to the team? (If you do this exercise as a team, we suggest that you note down your opinions for yourself first, before you share them with the team.)

A Team Has a Task, a Common Goal

This definition implies that there can be several tasks and goals involved. Within the scope of social work, teams consist of employees in a facility or department who are responsible for creating a work-friendly environment and making sure that the work gets done: they consist of caregivers who supervise in-house facilities, teams designated by department heads in charge of centers for the handicapped and professionals (social educators, physicians, nurses, psychologists) who provide psychological services. All of them are responsible for the service they provide to their patients, including counseling support, ensuring that the facility presents itself in a positive light, that finances are in order, and of course, that the services and care provided remain a sought-after resource. Teams are frequently required to take on a number of tasks and fulfill different expectations, not to mention the expectations and tasks the team may have for themselves (that, at first, are not necessarily compatible).

In addition, it's also possible that teams might be tasked with a particular short-term assignment (developing a new proposal, creating and staffing a new ward), after which the team splits up. Or, a group of individual employees decide on the task they want to accomplish (development and implementation of vacation activities for patients within a larger facility), after which they go their separate ways.

Frequently, one task or accomplished goal will lead to further related assignments. In addition, the teams set goals for further development such as effective collaboration in a pleasant atmosphere, projecting a positive image and remaining competitive with other teams.

Exercise

Name the tasks that you as a team or the team itself must fulfill. You can differentiate between assigned or self-assigned goals, and primary and sub goals. One suggestion is to limit yourself to six to ten goals.

A Team Organizes Its Own Form of Collaboration

A team functions according to structures and rules and what "effect" it has – in this sense it is organized. These rules and structures relate to how the team is put together, the type of processes in place, the rules of communication and so on. It's possible that these structures and rules are defined or are implicit.

Thus, decisions differ according to whether the secretary or volunteer workers should also belong in a team. Occasionally, the same individuals will answer this question differently depending on the context in which the question is asked: volunteers may not attend meetings, although they and the secretaries are included in the team when visitors are invited to the facility. Interestingly, in this case one could actually refer to two separate teams, thus avoiding (or creating new) confusion and misunderstanding.

When organizing a team, it's important to agree on whether and how the team is to work together: Does one always think of oneself as a team or only during the actual meeting? Do sub-groups count as partial teams or entirely new teams? How is communication handled within the team? Is there a leader? What are the leader's responsibilities in the team?

How are the meetings and get-togethers handled: are they organized or free-form? Is there a facilitator or is responsibility shared? Do they take place on a regular basis? Is the tone formal or informal? Is there a seating plan, how is the room set up (tables, chairs), what is the policy on refreshments, mobile phones and snacks during the meeting? How are discussions and decisions dealt with?

A team needn't necessarily be responsible for the entire organization. To a certain extent, this can be done by the facility, supervisors or other departments (e.g. if the meeting is chaired by the department head or if it's obvious that the secretary takes the minutes).

Exercise

Think of eight to ten structures and rules (according to priority) that have proven effective in the past. First, generate thoughts on your own and then together with your teammates.

A Team Regularly Thinks About How to Improve Their Collaboration

A team determines at least partially its own rules and structures it will adhere to. Team members do not merely rely on formal structures when they work together as a team. Instead, they create their own team culture within the structure. They think about how they can effectively achieve their goals. The flexibility of different teams varies. Quite often, however, the available resources are not sufficiently exploited – because the individuals involved fail to react in time or don't think it's necessary to share views on the existing structures and regulations, for example, over their suitability for working toward the common goal. While team members often feel that it makes sense

to structure their meetings in a more effective way (e.g. beginning on time, facilitation, agenda and finishing on schedule), no one thinks to take matters in hand. A policy of this nature could be considered a meta-organization. On the one hand it is evident that a team could very well have a meta-organization, i.e. the ability to create or modify their own structures and rules, and on the other, the team chooses not to exert its influence in this direction.

Often, teams realize quite quickly which organizational elements they *can't* influence themselves because they are prescribed by the sponsor, the facility or long-standing regulations. In the process, they lose sight of the available latitude. Once a team realizes that it has structural elements at its disposal to work more effectively and can directly influence the way the team is organized and works together, they jump at the opportunity to implement this option.

Exercise

Think back to the last time your team shared views on its own internal organization and possible modification in the way you work together, in the structures and rules.

The concept of what constitutes a “team” is not entirely arbitrary but corresponds to existing definitions and descriptions (see above). Teams differ from other groups along these lines. A team can exist as a team even if it chooses not to question its existing rules and structures. Not all criteria have to be fulfilled according to the same standards, giving rise to each team's identity: Do we consider ourselves a team? Do we want to consider ourselves a team? And: What do we consider a team? The answers to these questions or the differences in opinion expressed by members when answering these questions are significant factors in the team's development.

The Team as a System

We would like to emphasize the different approaches to creating and transforming teamwork and the varying ways in which each member's resources and commitment can contribute to the team effort. To this end, we would like to take a closer look at the way a team functions in abstract terms as a system and differentiate between three phases of complexity, depending on how closely we examine the system: the team as a machine, as an organized system and finally, as a self-organizing system.

The Team as a Black Box

If a team is perceived only in terms of the goals and tasks it accomplishes, it can be described as a “black box”, which serves a particular function within a larger entity and as such operates as a machine. In this case, what is important is simply the “input” (nature of the task) and “output” (results). Everything else “within the machine” is expected to function on its own without further input (figure 2).

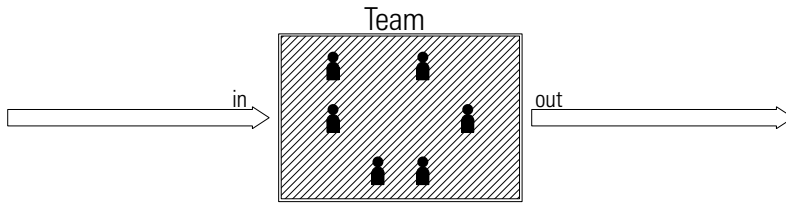


Figure 2: The team as a black box

The director of a facility telling a team: “As long as you do your work and the kids in your in-house groups are well taken care of (or the finances are in order, or we present a positive image), I’m not interested in what you do or how you do it”, illustrates one attitude towards a black box. The team members can take such an attitude as both positive if they are happy with a more open structure, and at the same time feel it is cynical and disinterested.

The Team as an Organized System

Taking a closer look *inside* this black box, the observer can identify and describe both the individuals who make up the team as well as the rules and structures to which it adheres. He/she might perceive the team as an organized system that functions more or less effectively. From an outside observer’s perspective he/she possibly begins to notice where individuals, rules and structures function particularly well – and where improvements could perhaps be made (figure 3).

Teamwork is expected to be a highly successful way to create synergies in organizations and companies. Yet all of us have had the experience of sitting through inefficient team meetings, spending too much time on organizational issues. Clearly collaborative consultation in its various forms is a common part of our daily work life. But does one organize working effectively in a team and as a team?

On the basis of his long-standing experience as counselor and supervisor Johannes Herwig-Lempp developed his own systemic approach to team support. In this book he shows how to easily learn, adapt and practice his techniques.

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