

"Teamwork and Problem Solving"

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The S.T.R.E.E.T. Toolbox

The S.T.R.E.E.T. Toolbox

*EPN CONSULTING, ENGIM, TRANSPADANA,
ALPINE PEARLS, AND OBČINA BLEĐ*

*STEFANO MAINERO, SARA CIONI, FRANCESCA
CARMAGNOLA, ROBERTA RICHIERO, MARCO
MUZZARELLI, IDA CAPPELLETTI, LUIGI LA
RICCIA, GIOVANNI VASSENA, EVA
GRABENWEGER, BOJANA LUKAN, AND MATJAŽ
BERČON*

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you will be ready to invest time, money and hopes in a high-profile social media marketing activity, which will allow you to take measurable actions in line with your pre-set goals.

5.2 – Teamwork and problem solving

5.2.1 – Teamwork

Let's start from the literal meaning of "Teamwork" which is, in fact, the crucial point. It is a group of people working in synergy to reach together one or more common objectives. Working together is the best way to build something, to realise a project, to present a proposal to a consumer/user. But it is not always easy to get along and in harmony with the different facets of the individual characters.

The word TEAM can be considered as an acronym "Together Everyone Achieve More". In TEAM the individuals do not retain their individuality but unite themselves and their skills in favour of the "goals" to be achieved; it is a group of individuals working together to solve a problem, meet an objective, or tackle an issue.

Working in a team generates several advantages:

- The whole is more than the sum of parts: the advantage is that of working with a group of people with different experiences and skills who work together to achieve one or more common objectives
- Individuals contribute with different talents, knowledge, experience, contacts, etc.: opening up to the possibility of learning from each other; but also enhancing the skills of each individual, which improves learning from other colleagues
- Working as a team imply better results can be achieved:

this is always valid! An effective team is based on grouping and matching of individuals with some skill sets, with the intention of reaching a specific goal and working on the different problems in order to find the best feasible solutions.

Although individual thinking can, in some cases, be effective in solving certain problems, working in groups can generate innovative ideas and solutions. Teamwork, on the other hand, can bring positive aspects:

- increasing overall efficiency
- improving the performance of all members
- developing and distributes skills
- building confidence in success
- reducing stress and increases motivation
- allowing the leader to focus on the big picture
- bringing innovation and satisfaction
- finding the right role for each member
- improving the quality of final result

Therefore, when an individual is included in an effective and active team, they generally acquire intangible benefits such as feelings of self-esteem, happiness, satisfaction, and even a sense of realisation and intellectual learning.

What is the best way to build an effective team? We have collected a list of 5 tips to identify the right people to join in a team:

1. Do not create a group with homogeneous figures: the strength of a group is the different skills of each component that, together, can make an essential contribution to achieve a common goal
2. Build consensus on team's purpose: it is important that each team member has a clear understanding of which

goals to achieve. Only in this way will s/he be able to give such an effective contribution that the group can reach them

3. Identify available resources: it is very important that everyone knows the different responsibilities each “team member” is required to take
4. Establish shared rules of behaviour: all must be constantly aligned with the progress of work to take corrective measures in case of problems and needs
5. Establish periodic monitoring reports: it is periodically useful to check whether the team work is in line with the objectives that were initially identified

Obviously, these are just some of the many “rules” that should be followed to create a successful team, however these ones are very useful to make teamwork efficient. Individuals who are part of the team can achieve better results than the sum of individual contributions, generating synergies that allow even better performances.

A teamwork can be considered in two ways: a “short-term team” and a “long-term team”.

For example, there are teams that work for a short period of time to achieve a specific goal. Once the goal is achieved, the team dissolves and moves to a new goal. Other types of teams are more complex because they operate for a longer period of time and because they set more specific objectives to design a larger strategy, defining a precise sequence of deadlines to be respected. We should remember that a goal, even if very specific and apparently simple, can greatly stress the team. The achievement of a set of goals is possible only if consensus is built and individualism is avoided within the work team, as Michael Jordan reminds us (NBA, 2017):

“Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships.”

The stage concerning the team building involves 6 key aspects to consider (Northouse, 2016):

- understanding the team purpose (end result)
- determining how the team will be organised
- delegating responsibilities and accountability
- discussion of milestones or short-term goals
- outlining team rules including future meeting dates
- discussion of available resources

To ensure that it works properly and that they are able to pursue the objectives set, the Team Members should always maintain positive behaviour that is indeed necessary to keep the group's morale high, to recognise the different skills and experiences and to lead them to a single goal. Relationships within a team, focused on trust and respect, are crucial to achieve the final result. In general, we can summarise a positive behaviour in:

- the ability to always offer and accept constructive criticism
- keeping the communication open and independent
- establishing clear rules of behaviour
- adapting attitudes to support and trust the other members of the group

Despite positive attitudes, some factors of conflict can always emerge (Fig.5.6). Conflicts and, in general, negative behaviours can emerge above all in the phase of the so-called *storming*, that is the debate around the resolution of a given problem.

This happens because very often there are ideas, ways of working, values and opinions also very different from each other: but we must say that conflict can often be very useful for the identification of a problem and the search for possible solutions, but should not reach too high levels. In fact, if

negative behaviours take the upper hand and conflicts are not adequately managed, they can eventually lead to confrontation and influence the entire functioning of the team. During conflicts, team members can become increasingly frustrated and lose motivation of the activity or project.

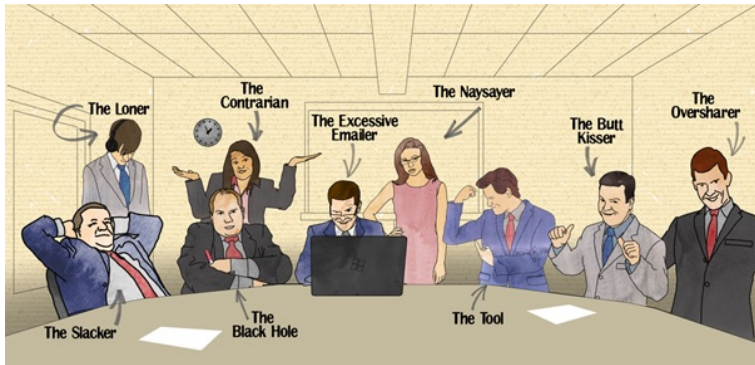


Fig. 5.6 – The 9 most despised teamwork personalities (Source: www.workfront.com)

To build a successful team we realised that: *ambitious goals cannot be achieved on their own.*

Diversified skills and competences can be put in place; the process of elaboration of shared solutions is simplified. This can only be possible knowing how to bring together, effectively and efficiently, the work of many individual professionals, better if distinguished from different professionalism, in a single synergistic assembly, a team immersed in an environment that can also favour “inspiration” and “creativity”, elements that have become indispensable to win the challenges.

The only way to build a successful team is to put together a good team, composed of elements each with a defined role and useful for the purpose. A team needs its leader, a person who can preserve it over time and inspire it to work better together. It is therefore essential:

- getting each team member constantly involved
- taking advantage of contributions given by all members
- stemming most dominating personalities
- allowing all members to express their ideas freely and clearly

In any case, conflicts are a component (also essential) of team work. It is not possible to imagine a relationship, a team, a group without a conflict.

In particular, conflict situations may arise depending on:

- individuals attacking personalities or ideas
- constant criticism of others' viewpoints
- showing anger
- showing contempt
- unwillingness to share workload
- poor participation
- gossip

Conflict Management in a project is therefore an important task for every leader who must be able to lower the level of emotionality and bring attention to the rational aspects.

On the other hand, teamwork often involves people with different experience, competence, culture, values, personal power and level of delegation. This can determine very different expectations, attitudes and perceptions among the project team members. Conflict by itself should not be considered a negative factor. Indeed, in some cases it can bring out issues that are not sufficiently evaluated. Instead, it becomes problematic when it becomes a confrontation between the parties to make one opinion prevail over the other. Therefore, it is not the conflict itself that constitutes a problem, but the wrong way of managing it or the fact of not managing it at all.

Conflict Resolution implies more than just a role of

arbitration and the leader must limit the emergence of conflict situations by:

- always informing the team about the direction of work or project
- explaining the general objectives, motivations and constraints or communicating any changes in a clear and timely manner
- clarifying the expectations of the team members as a whole
- assigning tasks to be carried out without ambiguity or overlapping skills

5.2.2 – Problem solving

In order to introduce problem solving, the following diagram (Fig. 5.7) illustrates the entire problem-solving process working in a team (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004). First of all, we must identify and define the problem to be solved and then analyse in detail its nature. We must then propose more general solutions to the problem and generate all the alternative hypotheses. From here we proceed to the adoption of the best solution and its verification. Finally, we must evaluate the results of the solution adopted and, if it does not meet the expectations, return to generate a valid alternative.

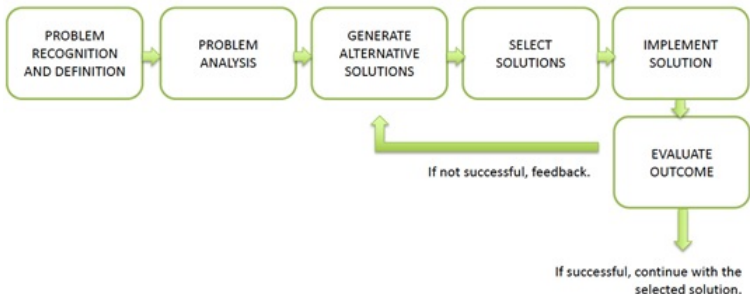


Fig. 5.7 – Rational Problem-Solving Approach (Source: authors' elaboration)

The value of the structured approach to solving a problem clearly depends on the type of problem we face: the more complex and unstructured the problem, the more teamwork is useful to find solutions to it.

Identification, definition and analysis of the problem are key steps: but, unfortunately, even when a team has identified and analysed a problem, it can be misinterpreted. The ability to identify and analyse a problem depends on three fundamental aspects:

- the nature of the problem
- the team
- the work context

Problems vary in terms of complexity: the most common problems are those that are more easily identified; while new or more complex problems are those that are more difficult to interpret. Often, because complex problems are difficult to analyse and interpret, the team can try to select only a part of the problem, simplifying it (even if this may not be the method that completely solves the situation).

The search for an effective solution to a problem always depends on the development of alternative quality solutions. This also depends very much on the knowledge and ability of the team as well as on the climate or context in which it operates. Techniques such as **brainstorming** are often used to generate alternatives: an important factor is the participation of all members and the ability to manage ideas that are very divergent one from the other. In fact, too often compliance leads the team to adopt non-innovative and often ineffective solutions. After generating the alternatives, the team must consider how to determine the best adoptable solution, considering the positive and negative effects of each alternative.

A good solution is often determined by:

- a correct balance between the ideas proposed by all team members
- limited resource consumption (including time)
- a process that depends on a situation of harmony and sharing within the team

One important thing: once the solution has been adopted, one must not stress the merits of each one. This could generate new conflicts.

Once the team has acquired information, analysed the problem and generated possible alternative solutions, the next step is to examine these possible solutions from different perspectives. Precisely for this reason, the **Solutions Matrix** can be a useful tool to help you do this: for every possible solution it is useful to identify:

- the cost (high, low) not only in terms of resources but also in terms of time
- the ease of implementation, considering all the operational aspects that are to be considered in order to implement the solution
- any support from other team members or external members

Tab. 5.1 – Solutions Matrix (Source: authors' elaboration)

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	COST (HIGH/LOW)	EASE OF IMPLEMENTATION	SUPPORT FROM OTHER TEAMS (EXTERNAL SUPPORT)

The adoption phase of the chosen solution is a delicate step that must be carried out considering that the consensus on

the solution to be approved is built on the majority of opinions expressed by all the team members and that each member must eventually accept the solution chosen on the basis of consent even if their opinion is different.

After the team has selected a decision, it is always best to organise a new meeting to review the decision. Even when a team decides by consensus, it is convenient to have a second meeting to prevent the decision from being influenced, inappropriately, by a single thought group.

Adopting and evaluating the chosen solution nullifies the differences between the current and desired status but, if a problem occurs again, it is necessary to go back to generating new ideas and new adoptable solutions, and even to reformulate the initial problem.

5.3 – Entrepreneurship

5.3.1 – Developing the entrepreneurial skills

Who is an entrepreneur? An entrepreneur is someone who starts a business venture by providing goods or services to individuals or businesses for payment. A “good entrepreneur” should have some personal qualities which include:

- curiosity and creativity
- motivation and self-confidence
- willingness to take risks
- eagerness to learn
- ability to co-operate
- ability to identify opportunities
- ability to innovate
- determination to overcome obstacles
- ability to learn from mistakes.