PRODUCTIVE AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE ROLE BEHAVIORS OF TEAM MEMBERS

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There are necessary things that must take place for groups to function as teams. Someone has to take the responsibility for such actions as bringing up issues, notifying members about meetings, and providing background information when requested. Often these responsibilities are thought of as roles that members take or are assigned. It is more advantageous to think of them as behaviors that are needed or undesirable. Traditionally, roles are discussed in relation either task or relationship functions. Task-related role behaviors include those that help the team directly accomplish goals; relationship-related role behaviors deal with the participation of and cohesion among team members; and anti-team role behaviors thwart the team’s purpose or divide its members.

Some team members seem to gravitate toward combinations of these behaviors, or role sets. For team-improvement purposes, however, it is better to concentrate on needed and undesirable behaviors rather than on who is tasking what "role." The team can carry out problem solving on behaviors much more straightforwardly than on roles or personalities. Groups need a balance of task-role and relationship-role behaviors in order to function optimally as teams. They also need to confront anti-team behaviors in problem-solving ways, separating the behaviors from the persons engaging in them.

Task-Role Behaviors

• INITIATING. Proposing tasks, goals, or actions; defines team problems; suggesting procedures.
• INFORMATION GIVING Offering facts; giving expression of feelings; giving opinions.
• INFORMATION SEEKING. Asking for factual clarification; requesting facts pertinent to the discussion.
• OPINION SEEKING. Asking for clarification of the values pertinent to the topic under discussion; questioning benefits involved in the alternative suggestions.
• CLARIFYING. Interpreting ideas or suggestions; defining terms; clarifying issues before the team; clearing up confusion.
• ORIENTING. Defining the position of the team with respect to its goals; pointing to departures from agreed-on directions or goals; raising questions about the directions pursued in team discussions.
• SUMMARIZING. Pulling together related ideas; restating suggestions; offering decisions or conclusions for the team to consider.
• REALITY TESTING. Making critical analyses of ideas; testing ideas against data to see whether the ideas would likely work.

• FOLLOWING. Going along with the movement of the team; passively accepting the ideas of others; serving as an audience in team discussion and decision making.

**Relationship-Role (Maintenance) Behaviors**

• GATEKEEPING. Helping to keep communication channels open; facilitating the participation of others; suggesting procedures that permit sharing remarks with each other.

• HARMONIZING. Attempting to reconcile disagreements; reducing tension; getting people to explore differences.

• COMPROMISING. Offering compromises that yield status when his or her own ideas are involved in conflicts; modifying in the interest of team cohesion or growth.

• ENCOURAGING. Being friendly, warm, and responsive to others; indicating by body language or remarks the acceptance of others’ contributions.

• CONSENSUS TAKING. Asking to see whether the team is nearing a decision; sending up "trial balloons" to test possible solutions.

• STANDARD SETTING. Expressing standards for the team to attempt to achieve; applying standards in evaluating the quality of team processes.

**Anti-Team Role Behaviors**

• BLOCKING. Preventing team decision making through threats, promises of non-support, etc.

• RECOGNITION SEEKING. Clowning, joking, making sarcastic remarks.

• DOMINATING. Taking much of the team’s "air time" to get his/her way.

• AVOIDING. "Sitting on the fence," not actively pursuing what is best for the team or what must be done in a given situation.

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