

# Building and Managing Teams in the Public Sector in Kenya

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**Abstract:** *In the workplace, professionals must work together to complete a task or a goal. The purpose of the study is to attempt to review how managers in the public service can improve service delivery by creating teams to handle specified tasks. Public sector employees face complex, volatile, sometimes ambiguous and uncertain demands, usually with contradictory objectives, and if team work is not embraced, the poor delivery of service will continue, to the detriment of the citizens. This paper looks at referenced academic publications on teamwork and will address the theory of developing teams, propose ways to enhance teamwork, review the challenges to teamwork and propose possible solutions to address the challenges. This paper is informed by the traditional and hybrid approaches to building teams. This paper draws its examples from the public sector. The public sector includes the National Government, the County Governments and the Semi - autonomous Government agencies that generate money for the Government. Although, teamwork is a well researched field, its applicability in the public sector remains understudied. The ideal or optimum number of people to a team also remains an understudied area.*

**Keywords:** teamwork, public sector, service delivery, team development, challenges

## 1. Introduction

Managers in the public service should create teams to handle specified tasks in order to improve service delivery to its citizens. Public sector employees face complex, volatile, sometimes ambiguous and uncertain demands, usually with contradictory objectives, and if team work is not embraced, the poor delivery of service will continue, to the detriment of the citizens (Franken, Plimmer & Malinen, 2019). Public sector managers, however, sometimes are required to execute their jobs with scarce resources, time pressures, less motivations and poorly coordinated teams (Yimer, 2020). Various initiatives such as service charters, rapid results initiatives, Kaizen have been introduced in the public service to ensure effective and efficient delivery of service (Yimer, 2020). However, to achieve success in delivery of service, the public sector must embrace teamwork in all its spheres.

A team is where a group of related people perform tasks at work that ensure the completion of a common and specified objective (American Society for Quality, 2023). Patterson (2022), defines teams as “groups of two or more people who interact and influence each other and are mutually accountable for achieving common goals associated with organizational objectives and perceive themselves as a social entity within an organization”. Mostly, teams have a specified period of time in which to complete the task, for example, to develop a new project, or, to review performance and activities of an organization or a department.

Teamwork is a well - researched field where manager behaviour leads to organizational support and the employees also support their leader in order to achieve the wider organizational goals and objectives (Franken, *et al*, 2019). Leaders should ensure fairness and support to the team, for the organization to grow. In addition, leaders are also managers and do the “managerial duties of planning,

staffing, coordinating, supervising, negotiating, representing and evaluating” (Yimer, 2020). The supervision task is where the managers should harmonize work activities, analyze and evaluate the employees (Yimer, 2020). Due to the complexity of the work environment, organizations need teamwork as individual employees may not be able to achieve the objectives of the organization. In addition, teamwork enables the organization to rapidly achieve targets, be innovative and creative as well as achieve higher quality of results (Madrid & Patterson, 2020). During the early stages of the team, a coach or consultant to serve as an advisor, may be considered (Scheidgen, 2019).

### Teams

According to Patterson (2022), teams are normally interdependent and share information, materials and expertise. The concern for employees creates a team environment that encourages learning and resilient behaviours and they should be allowed to use personal strengths and capabilities, to have influence and discretion in their work, while being treated fairly and equally as well as given special consideration for special requests (Franken, *et al*, 2019). In teams, some team members may put in extra work in order to achieve greater team rewards and increase performance (Covin *et al*, 2020). Halvorsen, Knowlton, Handler, Schelly and Pischke (2019), correctly argue that due to the limited time and resources, professionals must find a reason for committing themselves to the group. This is because the members have to balance between their individual work and the team work. Team members are accountable to the team (Scheidgen, 2019). Good behaviour towards employees strengthens employee commitment to the organization and they respond by being supportive and reciprocate to the needs of the organization. Teams should also be recognized for accomplishments (Franken, *et al*, 2019).

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Due to technological innovations and globalization, the business environment has become uncertain and complex. To meet the demands of the changing environment, employees must respond to the changes effectively without necessarily waiting for their supervisors' direct intervention (Peng & Wu, 2021). This concept is of being proactive where employees make things happen instead of watching things as they happen. This involves being self - initiating and looking into the future to improve the productivity of the work place (Peng & Wu, 2021). The interests and motivation of employees will trigger their productivity in the workplace and involves anticipating challenges and looking for innovations to improve the future.

### **Building Teams**

Team building is a very important factor in the development of an organization (Ranjibar & Hassanpoor, 2020), as it leads to improvement of the profitability, productivity and service delivery (Mehek, 2020), but also largely dependent on the team selected (Mehek, 2020). Ranjibar & Hassanpoor (2020), define team building as "the process of integrating a group of experts and diverse experienced individuals as well as turning them into a proficient and unified work. " The authors further state that in team building, the members must be cohesive, effective and ensure conflicts are resolved promptly, avoid misuse of resources and define roles of the team. Team is the forming of a work culture where the team understand and believe that the work is better when done cooperatively (Mehek, 2020).

In building teams, the manager can use either the traditional and hybrid approaches, where in the traditional approach, the leader is chosen from the team while focusing on the relationships and customer need. They are able to select their leader who is best suited depending on his professional and mental ability, attitude and commitment. The hybrid approach looks at the relationship of the members and the harmonious working arising from the relationship (Ranjibar & Hassanpoor, 2020).

### **Managing Teams**

Team management is not an easy undertaking but team work produces better results than individual performance (Mehek, 2020). The manager should relate the work to the team in order to have a shared purpose (Chaney, 2021). The roles and responsibilities of each team member should be established, considering each member's strength and expertise, but allowing members to interact and grow. Chaney (2021) correctly argues that the team's values must be shared. Such values include mutual respect, safe environment to voice their concerns, holding each other accountable, open lines of communication so as to communicate early enough.

Peng *et al* (2019) and Mehek (2020), gives the benefits of managing teams as increase in production and creativity thus giving better outcomes, synergy in the decision making, performance objectivity in analyzing problems, greater motivation and more flexibility to change increase in work efficiency, thus achieving the common goals. The team will also allow individual members to learn new perspectives, enhancing their problem - solving skills, improved knowledge of the process, enhanced skill sets and feeling

satisfaction from their involvement as well as increasing their trust in the team. Conflicts are also resolved easily when teams are managed well.

### **Public Service in Kenya**

Public Service is defined as "a single, clearly defined service, delivered by a single provider to a clearly defined customer, in a single location" (Ferguson, 2019). Examples of services offered include payment of income tax assessed by the taxation office for a company, renewal of a person's passport, delivery of mail by the post office. These services are mainly tailored to an individual or company. Governments conduct their businesses mostly as monopolies and can also be offered by multiple departments in collaboration.

Teamwork in the public service is required because the tasks are mostly interdependent in a chain pattern. In order to ensure efficiency, the chain should not be broken (Mehek, 2020)

Public sector in the Kenyan context refers to the National Government, County Government and its entities. In the public sector, achievement of performance must be pegged to the delivery of various teams. Government has structured departments with different responsibilities and portfolios. In Kenya, there are Ministries, State Departments and agencies each attached to a State Department (Executive Order No 2 of 2023), that varies in scale and scope and thus their contributions to the government business.

### **Enhancing Teamwork**

As teams are set up, there must be careful consideration of the principles on developing trust among the team members (American Society for Quality, 2023). Teamwork is where managers' behaviour leads to organizational support and the employees support their leader in order to achieve the wider organizational goals and objectives (Franken, et al, 2019). Leaders are expected to project ethical behaviours at the workplace as it helps the team to have positive job attitudes thus having good quality on its performance (Peng *et al*, 2019). Teams should be cohesive, goal focused and have the required skills to complete the task (Patterson, 2022).

Shared positive and negative feelings affect the teams' productivity, where the feelings are directed towards the tasks being performed and focus on the work. The teams' emergent state are cohesion, safety and trust. Cohesion is the collective identity of the team members (Madrid and Patterson, 2020). Employees are motivated to work together when cohesion is present. Trust is when people feel good intentions in their interactions, have enhanced information sharing and delegation of duties among themselves (Madrid & Patterson, 2020).

Due to technological innovations and globalization, the business environment has become uncertain and complex. To meet the demands of the changing environment, employees must respond to the changes effectively without necessarily waiting for their supervisors' direct intervention (Peng & Wu, 2021). This concept of being proactive where employees make things happen instead of watching things as they happen. This involves being self - initiating and looking

into the future to improve the productivity of the work place (Peng & Wu, 2021). The interests and motivation of employees will trigger their productivity in the workplace. This involves anticipating challenges and looking for innovations to improve the future. Although innovation in Government centres is considered to be problematic, the present - day Government must consider it in order to achieve its mandate and purpose (Peng & Wu, 2021). Today's environment that involves stakeholder participation calls for public service to make informed decisions in a more collaborative manner.

Although some team members may put in extra work in order to achieve greater team rewards and increase performance, the success of the organization should be delinked from individuals and attributed to the greater team (Covin et al, 2020). The team must be committed to the organizational goals and trust their leader. Managers should give each employee a role in the team as survival for the fittest does not work well with teams, where employees want to be recognized for their individual contribution (Belbin & Brown, 2022).

According to Madrid and Patterson (2020), teams should be provided with resources as well as training to be effective in its duties. Resources include technological means, finances and materials necessary for work. Team members should be able to voice their concerns in order to solve problems, take advantage of emerging opportunities and improve procedures. Teams become successful when they bring together people skills such as education, knowledge, experience and skills (Scheidgen, 2019). Teams should consider adding new members with specialized skill set in order to boost the team.

The use of technology to deliver service is a powerful tool especially post Covid - 19. When services are delivered online, it has a broader audience and has more user interactions than the physical form of service delivery (Agostino, Michela & Melisa, 2021). The team can harness technological advancement to deliver service to the citizens as well as use technology when designing the tasks to be implemented. The team must be provided with adequate technological resources. The Government seeks to provide free Wi - Fi in all market centres to deliver services closer to the people.

Madrid and Patterson (2020), further say that conflicts among team members should be avoided or resolved promptly. Any conflict on the team has an effect on the team and its work. A team should have trust as anyone can come up with a good idea for research and implementation (Swanson, Rabin, Smith, Briceno, Ervn - Kassab, Sexton, Mitchell, Whitenack & Asato, 2019).

### Challenges to Teamwork

Public sector employees face complex, volatile, sometimes ambiguous and uncertain demands, usually with contradictory objectives (Franken, *et al*, 2019). Sometimes, teams fail due to failure of management to support the team with time, resources, information, training of members, group dynamics, ideas not fully accepted and supported (American Society for Quality, 2023). Conflicts among team

members is due to members' perception that they are not compatible in their interests, work content, interactions, motivations, values and viewpoints. Any conflict on the team has an effect on the team and its work (Madrid and Patterson, 2020). Sometimes, team members may have conflicts identifiable with the stage of the team development that the team is in (Patterson, 2022). Interpersonal conflicts can have significant impact on team relationship (Smith, 2019).

The lack of leadership and shared norms and rules will impact the team's ability to perform in a timely and cohesive manner (Halvorsen, *et al*, 2019). Team members may also feel discriminated and disrespected when some members feel superior to them, due to their training or social status (Halvorsen, *et al*, 2019). When working with diverse teams, the team will include highly trained professionals and lower - level managers. The power dynamics in the group may affect the bonding of the group for effective delivery. The team may then forward academic/ theoretical solutions to the problem, while the actual implementers just watch the professionals make mistakes (Halvorsen, *et al*, 2019). For example, the designers of road will have to amend the designs during implementation if they do not include locals during the design stage.

The need to achieve rapid results during times of crisis has led to massive corruption as due diligence, accountability and oversight mechanisms are overlooked (Duri, 2021). This is especially true where procurement of drugs and food by government officers concerned. The biggest beneficiaries of corruption in government are firms that have political connections, insider information on economic measures to be implemented, unavailable / unverifiable data on beneficiaries, weak procurement systems, poor financial management, companies with offshore tax havens accounts. Corruption has great impact on delivery of service to the countries' citizens. (Duri, 2021).

Teams can exhibit decision biases especially when the time is limited and where employees could lose their individual interests in pursuit for the common good. This is especially realized during times of crisis, when the team has to make difficult decisions (Thurmer, Wieber & Gollwitzer, 2020). Other factors that may limit teamwork include lack of clarity of the expectations of the task, lack of trust among the team members, some members may withhold information from their co - workers, reduced engagement during the task, lack of motivation to team members and lack of employee recognition for work well done (Birt, 2023).

### Possible Solutions to the Challenges to Teamwork

Due to pressing issues and inadequate resources that the Government is facing today, there is need to be innovative, in order to address the challenges, it continues to grapple with (Lewis, McGann & Blomkamp, 2020). Managers should facilitate team members to achieve productivity by providing resources and a good working environment (Smith, 2019). The manager should coach the team members in order to influence behaviour, work related skills, employee learning and ability. This will cultivate good working relationship and good performance (Smith, 2019).

For teams to achieve success, there must be effective communication and mutual respect of the different sectors and disciplines in the team (Halvorsen, *et al*, 2019). All members must feel that they are valued and are bona fide members of the team. When selecting a team, it would be important to select some of the officers who have worked together successfully before (Halvorsen, *et al*, 2019). For example, in a team of ten members, three or four should be people who have had a positive working relationship in the past, so as to set the tone for the rest of the group (Halvorsen, *et al*, 2019). When you have to incorporate a difficult co-worker or a worker who is a loner, it should be because of his specialization or expertise and the team should be willing to accommodate his style of working (Halvorsen, *et al*, 2019). The manager must intervene in conflicts to ensure that the conflict is resolved without disrupting the tasks (Smith, 2019).

During crisis, teams should communicate more effectively and coordinate their actions more systematically. The teams should also revise their course of action as more information become available (Thurmer, *et al*, 2020). It is important that the leader provides all necessary information to the team at the start of the assignment and emphasizes that the team to share all important information so as to boost the team spirit (Birt, 2023). The leader should also organize team building activities in order to establish trust among the team members.

Team members should identify the stage of the team development they are in in order to address the issues that they faced during the task, such as dissatisfaction, coping, anticipation, optimism, reducing strains and tensions (Patterson, 2022). It is the leader's task to convene the group and also define the roles played by each member. The leader will also have to motivate, reward and rebuke the members during the task. The team must understand the deadlines, how work products will be shared, what to expect of their leader and how to communicate within the group (Halvorsen, *et al*, 2019).

Teams should purpose to begin their work early in order to deliver good results (Halvorsen, *et al*, 2019). Since group members must sacrifice their time, it is important to start the exercise early and commit themselves to the task otherwise the delivery will be rushed and thus substandard. The heads of Government departments need to start by setting the anticorruption tone, where the Government communicates that it will not tolerate corruption in its business (Duri, 2021).

## 2. Conclusion

This paper has looked at the leader, the team, ways to develop teams, ways to enhance teamwork, the challenges to teamwork and possible solutions to the addressing the challenges. Since Government operations involve the creation of teams, some diverse, some permanent and some ad-hoc, it is important for the managers to take the necessary precautions when creating the teams, addressing the team issues during their development stages, motivate, reward and rebuke the team members. At the end of a successful operation, celebrate the team. The success of an

organization comes from the success of the team and the leaders.

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