

John Adair: Action-Centred Leadership



1. **The achievement of a goal or task.** This may be the completion of a very practical activity or it may be a less tangible goal. We know that effective teams have clear goals shared by all members. Often the task is what brings the team together in the first place.
2. **The group of people performing the task.** It is likely that the task will only be achieved if all members of the team work together to the common good. Therefore, the team itself has to be understood as an entity in its own right.
3. **Each individual member of the team involved in the task.** While the team will take on a life of its own, individuals do not lose their own identity. Their needs as people must continue to be met if their allegiance to the team, and their motivation to achieve the task, is to be sustained.

The leader has to balance the needs from each of the three elements. The effective leader is the one who keeps all three in balance. If any one element is ignored, the others are unlikely to succeed.

At the same time, the three elements can conflict with each other. For example, pressure on time and resources often increases pressure on a team to concentrate on the task, to the possible detriment of the people involved. If team and individual needs are forgotten, much of the effort spent on task may be lost.

Similarly, taking time creating a positive team spirit without applying effort to the task is likely to mean that the team will lose its focus through lack of achievement.

Adair's eight functions for team success

For a leader to get the best from their team it is necessary to balance the needs of all three elements as follows:

1. Identify and evaluate the task: using SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Constrained) to set a clear objective.
2. Planning: Identify and evaluate the requirements of the task using an open minded, positive approach. Contingencies should be planned for and plans should be tested.
3. Communicate these to the group and gain their commitment for example via Team Briefings. This will create the right atmosphere, foster teamwork and motivate each individual.
4. Controlling: Leaders need self-control, good control systems in place and effective delegation and monitoring skills in order to get maximum results from minimum resources.
5. Evaluating: Assess consequences, evaluate progress of the whole group, appraise and train individuals
6. Motivate, including feedback to the group and support, praise, encourage individuals.
7. Organising: able to organise themselves and their team
8. Setting an example: The best leaders naturally set a good example. If effort needs to be made it will slip and a bad example is noticed more than a good example

Task Functions

- Define the task.
- Devise a workable plan.
- Brief team members on the task and their role.
- Delegate work to team members.
- Allocate resources.
- Check the quality of the work.
- Control the pace of work.
- Keep the team focused on the plan.
- Evaluate progress and modify the plan accordingly.

Team Functions

- Set standards and an example.
- Maintain performance levels
- Build team spirit.
- Maintain morale.
- Give encouragement.
- Motivate members to achieve success.
- Keep open communication.
- Deal constructively to resolve conflicts.
- Appoint sub-leaders where appropriate.

Individual Functions

- Involve all team members in discussions and activity.
- Seek out and use individuals' abilities.
- Bring in the quieter members.
- Control overactive members
- Train in appropriate skills.
- Use specialist skills.
- Establish previous experience.
- Offer constructive feedback.
- Praise, support and encourage.

Adair's eight basic rules of motivation

- Be motivated yourself
- Select motivated people
- Treat each person as an individual
- Set realistic but challenging targets
- Understand that progress itself motivates
- Create a motivating environment
- Provide relevant rewards
- Recognise success

How do you measure up?

- Which of Adair's eight functions for team success are you already practising?

- Which of them would you like to improve your skills in?

