

individual's personality, reputation, or rank. The attitudes of real team leaders reflect the following beliefs: (1) they do not have all the answers and therefore will not insist on providing them; (2) they do not need to make all the key decisions and do not attempt to do so; and (3) they cannot proceed without the combined contributions of all the other team members and so avoid actions that might limit members' inputs or intimidate them in any way. Ego is not a principal concern of real team leaders.

The viewpoint that "only the team can fail" begins with the leaders. Leaders act to clarify purpose and goal, build commitment and self-confidence, strengthen the team's collective skills and approach, remove externally imposed obstacles, and create opportunities for others. Most important, the leaders *do real work themselves*. At the same time, a critical balance must be struck between doing and controlling everything themselves and letting other people do work that matches their talents and skills. When observing the best real teams in action it is often difficult to pick out the nominated leader, as each member will be doing real work, making decisions, and taking on the leadership role throughout the various stages of the project.

One architect interviewed felt he had been part of a real team based on this shifting leadership pattern. The team was designing a new headquarters for a top U.S. automotive company. The team had no previous experience working together, and none of the members was on his "home turf." This leveled the playing field and avoided any preset hierarchy—a familiar hurdle to achieving real team levels of performance. The team had a clear mission and understood the implications of their designs on the working environment from the beginning. With an optimistic set of attitudes and a difficult performance challenge, the team spent "24-hours a day working and living all together in the war office." Within a few months, an interesting leadership pattern had emerged and continued throughout the effort. A project leader in week one was a follower in week three and then a leader again later on in the project. Thus, by applying the disciplines of team basics and shifting leadership roles, the project not only achieved its purpose and goals, but was also a very moving experience for all involved. Friendships were generated and nicknames were formed for team members.

Real team leader behaviors are not difficult to learn or practice. However, we are ingrained with the thinking that authority or leadership is to command and control subordinates and to make all the tough decisions ourselves. While these attitudes may succeed in a working group, they will ruin a poten-

tial team. Team performance requires the team to be decisive, the team to be in control, and the team to be a hero—not the leader or any single person. Taking risks, interdependence, constructive conflict, and trust will not occur if the leader calls every shot and always has the final say. A real team leader has to take risks by giving up some of the command and control. However, the leader suddenly stepping back and giving up all control rarely works either. He or she must relinquish decision space only when and as much as the group is ready to accept and use. The leader must show in everything he or she does, or does not do, a belief in the team's purpose and in the people who make up the team. It is essential that the team leader strike the right balance between providing guidance and giving up control, between making tough decisions and letting others make them, and between doing difficult things alone and letting others learn how to do them. In a very real sense, the best team leaders are essentially “gap fillers”—stepping in only when and where needed.

Working-Group Leaders

In contrast, with working groups it is always obvious who is leading the group because the leadership role will always be fulfilled by the same person. When time is of the essence, and the leader really does “know best,” this model can be fast and efficient. The leader will have been through a similar situation previously and therefore has the most experience in the group at handling the particular challenge. Although the individual inputs of other group members are important, the leader functions as the ultimate decision maker. Members are accountable *to the leader* for their individual work-products, and it is the leader who is responsible for overall group performance. The role of the group leader is more of delegation, motivation, and integration rather than actually being involved with other members doing real work. Conflicts, issues, and differences of opinion are resolved by the leader, and the goals and working approach of the group are established by the leader. As with teams, the group will benefit from the leader exhibiting good management practices.

Working-group leaders simply follow a different discipline than team leaders. That discipline contrasts with the discipline of teams as follows.

1. The size of the group can be much larger than for teams, because there is much less need for the group to do real work together. There are few “collective work-products,” since most of the work can be assigned to individuals to accomplish effectively and efficiently.