

*Kelly O'Donnell*

## **Tools for Team Viability**

[*Missionary Care*, 1992]

Missionary teams are groups--specialty groups--which exist to perform specific tasks. They come in all shapes and sizes, and vary in their focus, composition, life-span, and scores of other variables.

Some teams are long-term, highly selective groups, such as a Bible translation team living with an Amazon tribe. Other teams, like a relief ministry in a war-torn area, may eagerly take on qualified short-termers, or be willing to include staff belonging to another organization. Planning committees are teams; so are personnel departments. Teams can be comprised of multinational workers, children, home office staff, computer specialists. The point is that when we refer to teams in missions we are referring to entities which are as varied as the individuals which actually make up the teams.

My purpose in this article is to strengthen missionary teams by equipping them with tools to increase their viability. A viable team, literally, is one which is "likely to live." Viable teams are healthy, able to endure hardship and remain effective. I describe some 40 team-building exercises that most teams can use, and then discuss several guidelines for team development. The article closes with a case study highlighting common issues faced by church planting and other teams.

### **Team Dimensions and Viability**

Teams share three basic characteristics: they have members who must relate together (interpersonal dimension), they have specified purposes (task dimension), and they have a preferred way of doing things (ethos dimension). These dimensions are inseparable and constantly interact.

Team viability requires the careful development of the interpersonal, task, and ethos dimensions. The team ethos is especially key, as it influences how team members relate to each other (interpersonal dimension) and how they go about working on their goals (task dimension). The ethos also functions to integrate the interpersonal and task dimensions. This is an ongoing, precarious, sometimes frustrating process. For instance, at times the focus may need to be more on the development of members, as in pre-field preparation or dealing with a crisis situation on the field. Other times the focus shifts to the task; for example, when there is a project deadline to meet. Viable teams must be flexible, able to place their emphasis on any of the three team dimensions according to situational demands.

Viability also requires commitment, cohesion, and resiliency. These characteristics do not always come easily. For many teams it takes lots of hard work--harmonizing different goals, clarifying unspoken expectations, and dealing with relationship conflicts--to reach a point of viability. Teams become viable by going through the various ups and downs of team life and ministry. By God's grace they learn dependence on Him and on each other, and become more effective in carrying out their tasks. Viable teams are made, or better grown, step by step.

### **Tools to Help Build and Develop Teams**

There are many creative ways to strengthen missionary teams. The various tools that I describe in this article can be used by consultants, team leaders, and team members. Most of these tools involve team-building or team development exercises, the former which attempt to correct deficits in team function while the latter are less remedial in nature and provide opportunities for ongoing team growth (Kinlaw, 1991). The exercises call for group activity, self-disclosure, personal reflection, problem-solving, and mutual feedback.

Some of these tools I have developed myself, others I have borrowed from colleagues, still others I have picked up from some book or article and adapted it for use among missionaries. Feel free to modify them in order to fit the needs of your team.

## Tools for Teams 2

2 These tools are not cure-alls. They are catalysts to encourage change and growth. While most are engaging and even fun, some can entail a lot of challenging work and a sense of personal risk. It thus behooves the person using these tools to be sensitive to the feelings of team members, to have a good sense as to which dimension of team life to focus on (interpersonal, task, ethos), and to have a clear understanding of the process of team building and development.

### Tools Primarily Focusing on Team Relationships

#### *Introductions*

Getting to know each other is an important first step in blending together as a team. There are many effective approaches for doing this apart from the usual format of asking questions about where someone is from, how people met, and so on.

*Autobiography.* Have people write up a table of contents as if they were authoring their life story. What would the titles be for the sections and chapters? Include chapters for any future dreams and aspirations. Each team member can then use this table of contents as a springboard to briefly share significant aspects of his/her life history with others.

*Wallets.* Split up into pairs and look through each other's wallets. Ask questions about what you find and what you expected to find but did not, such as pictures, credit cards, and business cards. The goal here is not to learn everything about the other person, but to enjoy the process of getting to know one another. Switch partners a few times and repeat the above.

*Personal Descriptions.* This exercise helps people examine how they present themselves to others. Write down 10 things you typically say about yourself when you meet someone new. Next, change your self-descriptions to represent something that really does not fit you. For example, replace the usual "I am an engineer, grandparent, bilingual, and sports fan" with something like "I am a plumber, single, English is my third language, and I prefer opera and museums over sports." After this, have group members introduce themselves to each other using their new descriptions. Discuss this exercise as a group, focusing on what the members have learned about themselves and others.

*The Seven C's for the Seven Seas.* This exercise explores seven important factors (selection criteria) needed to become part of the mission and team. Each criterion begins with the letter C, hence the name of this exercise. I primarily use it for newly formed teams as a point of departure to discuss who they are, their backgrounds, and their motivations and expectations for the team. It can also be useful for teams going through a major transition period, such as a change in ministry focus or the addition of several new staff.

Directions: Team members describe themselves to each other in terms of one or more of the selection criteria listed below. Questions for clarification are encouraged. An alternate version is to have members write out their responses beforehand, keeping them anonymous, and then circulate them during a team meeting. Members then try to figure out who wrote each set of responses. A discussion can follow.

1. Calling--by God, to work area, people group, and the mission.
2. Character--personality, temperament, strengths, weaknesses.
3. Competence--gifts and skills; preparation, training.
4. Commitment--to calling, team, the mission agency, missions.
5. Christian experience--relationship with God, past ministry.
6. Compatibility--doctrine, organization, culture, goals.
7. Confirmation--from family, church, the mission, and friends.

#### *Drawing Tools to Build Relationships*

Drawing tasks are primarily non-verbal experiences to encourage people to express themselves in new ways. As such they are often a welcome addition to the more cognitive team-building approaches that rely on a discussion format. Here are some samples that are easy to do and can help team members better understand one another.

*Family Trees*--Participants create a picture of their family of origin by drawing and positioning their parents and siblings in some type of tree. They are asked to be as creative and as spontaneous as possible. The activities of family members, their relative position to each other,

### Tools for Teams 3

3 and the type of tree that is drawn all yield important information about one's family experience and background. After all have finished, participants describe their trees to each other.

*Current Family Trees*--This can either be a family or a team exercise. Family members, including children, do the same exercise as above, but the subject to be drawn is the current family. Trees are then compared and discussed.

*Team Trees*--This can be a bit more challenging, as it requires team members to disclose some of their feelings about the group. Have staff draw trees and place the members in them. Share the drawings with each other, noting the distinguishing and interesting features of each drawing. Sometimes the drawings can be hung up to be viewed and reflected upon for a few days.

*Reconstructing Your Family House*--This is a fascinating non-verbal approach for team members to re-experience and share selected childhood experiences. Have each person draw the main house they lived in before age 12. Include as much detail as possible: rooms, furniture, colors, yard, and so on. Jot down what the rooms were used for and any significant memories or feelings associated with a room. Note the areas that cannot be drawn or else are not complete. After people finish their drawings, allow them to share what this drawing experience was like, and then let members talk about their drawings.

*This Is My Life/Team*--Participants draw a picture of their current life or of their team. It can be abstract, impressionistic, realistic, metaphorical. Give it a title. Discuss these and hang them up.

#### *Cross-Cultural Orientation*

This group activity is particularly useful for exploring cultural differences on multinational teams. Each person takes a brief inventory developed by Lingenfelter and Mayers (1986) to assess his/her position on six important value dimensions: time and event orientation, task and person orientation, dichotomistic and holistic thinking, status and achievement focus, crisis and noncrisis orientation, and willingness to expose vulnerability. The goal of this exercise is to help team members recognize and appreciate each other's differences and in so doing to work together more effectively. Additional exercises for understanding culture and cross-cultural differences can be found in Pierre Casse's (1981) excellent book entitled *Training for the Cross-Cultural Mind* and in *A Manual of Structured Experiences for Cross-Cultural Learning*, edited by Weeks, Pedersen, and Brislin.

#### *Supportive Group Experiences*

Team members, including children, can occasionally or regularly break up into smaller groups according to their different needs and areas of interest. Here are some examples.

*Study Groups*--These are occasional or regular gatherings of team members interested in studying certain topics. Articles can be chosen to be read beforehand and then discussed. Teaching tapes can also be used. Some examples of topics would be the education of missionary children, world events, contextualizing the gospel, and the care of staff. Consider using some of the articles in this book as a point of departure. Keep these times informal and responsive to the concerns of team members.

*Devotions*--Take turns overseeing group devotions. Different people can rotate giving short Bible studies and leading group prayer and worship. Let people minister to one another through prayer and encouragement.

*Prayer Partnerships*--Prayer partnerships involve committed relationships between two or three members of the same sex for the purpose of encouraging each other's relationship with God. They usually occur anywhere from a few times each week to once a month.

*Fun Times*--These involve leisure activities to help team members relax and unwind. Some ideas: exercising together, playing team sports, having meals together, doing crafts and board games, attending cultural events and athletic activities, making home improvements, and traveling together. Don't forget to throw a party. Celebrate something good that happened.

#### *Past Relationships*

Team life, at both the conscious and unconscious levels, stirs up many associations with one's family of origin. This is a normal experience. For instance, leaders, in some ways, can be related

## Tools for Teams 4

4 to as if they were one's parents. Other team members can be viewed as if they were siblings. Teams thus serve as forums for "recreating" one's original family, stirring up past feelings and providing opportunities to work through unresolved family areas. It is helpful to discuss these factors as a team and to try to be aware of how one's family may in fact be influencing the current group context.

Doing family and team trees (previously described) can be effective ways to get at this process. It is also helpful to discuss some of the previous team experiences and personal relationships that members have had. Here are two exercises to try.

*Previous Teams*--Team members describe their experiences on three different teams. What did they like and dislike? How cohesive, resilient, and effective were these teams? What have you learned about teamwork and yourself as a result of your team experiences?

*Previous Roommates*--List a few roommates that you have had. How did you get along? How did you manage household tasks? How did you deal with differences? What did you learn about yourself and the way you relate to people?

### *Conflict Resolution*

Interpersonal difficulties are inevitable and a normal part of the team experience. Team life, like family life, involves ongoing adjustments, compromises, and joint efforts to remain strong. Here are some exercises for helping teams deal with conflicts in a healthy way.

*Affirmation*--Most of us appreciate all the encouragement we can get. During times of conflict, the tendency is to confront and highlight the negative. This exercise has the participants starting out the session by listing five positive things about the other parties involved. The purpose is not to minimize differences, but rather to create a more congenial atmosphere by affirming the good and contributions of others.

*Critical Incidents*--Form small groups and identify a significant past episode of conflict or difficulty on the team. Explore this incident in some detail. How was it handled? You could even try to role play the situation if it is not too threatening. Include this exercise as part of an annual review process for the team.

*Proverbs for Reflection*--I like to use the book of Proverbs to stimulate discussion about team life, especially in the areas of conflict and stress management. The use of Proverbs can get at concerns that have not yet been expressed.

I have found it helpful to start off with a discussion of Proverbs 24:3,4, "By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches" (NASB). The house here can be used as a metaphor for the team. We then go over a few previously selected verses from Proverbs, based on my assessment of the team's felt needs. Participants frequently share related verses. Here are some starters that are relevant to most teams: Proverbs 15:2, 16:2, 16:32, 18:13, 19:20, 19:22, and 20:25.

*Principles*--Have team members come up with a list of conflict resolution principles that work for them. Another approach is to go over the list below as a team and add to it. Periodically review the list and give each other feedback and constructive suggestions.

- a. Differences are opportunities for growth.
- b. Never assume you fully understand someone; vice versa.
- c. Most people have good reasons for what they do.
- d. You can seldom change anyone.
- e. Emphasize understanding and areas of similarity.
- f. Criticism must include constructive suggestions.
- g. Be aware of how you use the words *always* and *never*.
- h. Agree to disagree in an agreeable fashion.
- i. Keep short accounts with others.
- j. Uniformity is not necessary for unity.

**Tools Primarily Focusing on Team Ethos***Team Culture*

Team culture, also referred to as *team ethos*, refers to the assumptions, values, and patterns of behavior that characterize a group. It is both visible and invisible, and significantly impacts the ministry, lifestyle, and levels of satisfaction of team members. One of the most important ways to prevent the development of problems on a team is by assessing how one's background culture (social, ethnic, family, occupational, denominational) fits into the overall ethos of the team. Here are some of the main components of team ethos, along with some exercises to help explore them.

*Expectations.* List some of the spoken and unspoken, written and unwritten rules of the group. Explore things like the type of group people really want, the level of intimacy desired between team members, or preferences for leadership style. Many expectations shift with time, and need to be periodically clarified.

*Values.* How does the team spend most of its time? To what extent do stated values reflect team behavior? For example, if a team values language learning and social contact with a targeted people group, how much time do they actually set aside for these activities?

*Communication.* Identify the ways in which information is usually shared (memos, phone calls, verbally). Who serves as the main source of information? What types of self-disclosure are seen as appropriate? Discuss one important time in the last few months when communication broke down.

*Participation and Commitment.* To what extent are members engaged in and devoted to their work? Do they really like what they are doing? Some possible indicators include punctuality at work and meetings, rate of staff turnover, and involvement with each other outside of work. Any implications?

*Boundaries.* This refers to the different invisible parameters that influence the level of contact that team members make with themselves and with others. What types of people are allowed to be part of this team? Who has access to leadership? How much privacy do individuals and families on the team have? How much time do members spend with other groups within the mission and the local community?

*Accountability.* To whom do people formally or informally report? Have team members list the people on the team or outside the team to whom they report, with whom they can communicate at a deep level, and to whom they would talk to in time of need.

*Feedback.* How is staff performance and well-being monitored and evaluated? Is this system effective? Do members feel the freedom to give each other suggestions? One way to explore this is to let members briefly describe the last time they received some significant input from another team member. Can any team patterns be recognized?

*Development.* What types of opportunities are available for staff care and growth? In what ways are the mission and the team committed to the development of the skills, character, and spiritual life of its staff? As an exercise members can identify the helpful services they have utilized and list any additional ones that they believe would be helpful.

*Process Observation*

It is important to look at both the content and the process of communication on a team. The content deals with what is said, while the process deals with how the content is expressed. Process also involves the invisible interactions which go on in a group setting, and sheds light on the team ethos.

*Directions:* This technique looks at 15 process areas that influence a group or team experience. One member of the group is selected to act as a "fly on the wall" during a team meeting. This person remains silent, observes the group, and listens carefully to how things are said and what is not said. He or she takes notes, and then reports back to the group at the end. This can be done every few meetings, using a new observer each time. Here is a list of some of the main areas to observe and a few examples.

1. Physical set up--temperature, noises, seating arrangement.
2. Type of communication--languages used, questions, clarity.
3. Frequency of communication--those who speak much or little.
4. Transitions--changing topics, opening and closing process.

## Tools for Teams 6

6. Alliances--sub-groupings, coalitions, mediators.
7. Roles--those who confront, harmonize, question, distract.
8. Tension points--differences and how they were handled.
9. Emotions expressed--laughter, frustration, body language.
10. What did not get expressed--anger, preferences, opinions.
11. Values reflected in the experience--loyalty, openness.
12. Team dimensions--focus on relationships, task, and/or ethos.
13. Unresolved areas--concerns that were avoided or not resolved.
14. Themes--the topics, their order, and any patterns.
15. Additional observations--any other areas that seem important.

### Tools that Address Team Relationships, Tasks, and Ethos

#### *Sentence Completion*

This exercise can be used at almost any point in the team's life cycle. It is especially helpful when a team is stuck in an area and when a moderator or consultant is available to help.

Directions: Team members are to complete the following sentences by writing down some of their spontaneous thoughts and feelings. Responses are confidential although members are encouraged to share some of them with the group. After everyone has written down their answers, volunteers share their responses to the first item, discuss it, and then do the same with the remaining items.

1. Life for me right now
2. Our team is good at
3. It is hard to
4. I am most fulfilled when
5. Our team needs
6. My best coping strategy
7. Our biggest team problem right now
8. I am anxious about
9. Three years from now
10. Team communication
11. If only they knew
12. If I were in charge

#### *Consolidation*

This tool is used to periodically review a team's group experience and ministry. It gets at the essence of who the team is, why it exists, and how members want to work with each other. I start off the exercise with a discussion of Ephesians 2:10: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (NASB). I then draw the diagram below, and as a group we relate this verse to three areas central to team life: identity, goals, and strategy. Identity relates to the interpersonal dimension, goals to the task dimension, and strategy to the ethos dimension.

### INTERPERSONAL-----ETHOS-----TASK

Who are we?  
(identity)

How will we work?  
(strategies)

What will we do?  
(purpose, goals)

*Identity.* We are God's workmanship. What type of team are we? How has He fashioned us as a team? What skills and personality characteristics do we have as individuals and as a group? List these. What have we gone through together as a team? Draw a time line and plot the key events in the history of the team.

*Goals.* We have been created in Christ Jesus for good works. What is it specifically that we are to do? Have each member develop a two or three sentence purpose statement for the team.

## Tools for Teams 7

7 Compare these. What has been accomplished in the last six to twelve months? Discuss the ways in which members think they are on course or off course with the team's objectives.

*Strategy.* We are to walk in the works that God has prepared beforehand for us. How are we to do these works? Do a "SWOT" matrix. That is, as a group identify your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for, and threats to accomplishing your goals. Also look at the procedures, policies, and work-styles that you have adopted to facilitate your task. Divide up into pairs and write down the roles of your partner as you see them, discuss these roles, then change partners until each member has interacted with everyone else.

### *Group Enactments*

Enactments involve novel activities that can add zest to what would otherwise be a routine team meeting. They shed light on important aspects of team relationships and build understanding between team members.

*Sculpting*--This exercise comes from the family therapy field. It can be used with teams to look at different members' perceptions of the team. One person is chosen to be the sculptor. He or she then places every person in the group in a certain stationary position as if they were doing something, and in relationship to each other. There is no talking until each person has been "sculpted." Participants then discuss their feelings and reactions. When the discussion is finished, another person can volunteer to be the sculptor. This exercise works best with an outside consultant directing it.

*Role Playing*--Team members take on a variety of roles and act them out. They can become each other, neighbors, leaders, other mission workers, or almost any person. The purpose is to try to experience what life for another person is like, and to give each other feedback by the way the roles are acted out. Typically two or more people act out the roles in front of the other team members. Each role playing session usually lasts from five to 10 minutes. A director can also be used to oversee or intensify the drama.

*Trust Walk*--Members pair off. One person is completely blindfolded. The partner that can still see leads the other on a five to ten minute walk, holding his/her arm or hand. Partners then change roles and repeat the exercise. For a variation, blindfold most of the team, have them join hands, and then have one or two people lead the team on a walk. Still another variation is to do the trust walk with no verbal communication. Debrief at the end.

*Group Stories*--Gather an assortment of about fifty large pictures from magazines and place them face down in the middle of the group. The facilitator starts off by saying the first three lines of a story. Members then take turns adding to the story by picking up the top picture and spontaneously coming up with two or three sentences based on the picture. Hold off making comments until the end of the story. Story lines can be chosen according to the needs of the group or just for the fun of it. For example, the team could pretend that they were delegates at an important council of the early church, Franciscan monks in Europe during the Black Plague, exiles at a refugee camp in Africa, or a group traveling together on a caravan. They could also try to envision what the team will be like five years from now, or chose a story with an issue similar to one they are trying to resolve on their team.

*Panels*--Have a few people volunteer to serve on a panel at the next team meeting. This is a chance for people to express their ideas and share their wisdom with the team using a different format. A topic and a moderator is chosen in advance. The moderator asks the panel members several questions related to the topic. Comments are permitted from those listening to the panel, and interaction is encouraged. Here are some possible topics: stress management, time management, maintaining a successful devotional life, friendships, raising children, conflict resolution, understanding the host culture, performance appraisals, building strong teams, and spiritual warfare.

### *Team Stages*

Most teams go through fairly predictable stages during their life cycle. Some teams cycle through these stages several times during their life span. This is especially true for long-term teams or teams that experience several major transitions. Other teams never make it through the full cycle, as in the case of the team which gets stuck at stage two (adjustment) and disbands

## Tools for Teams 8

8 before it works through member differences. Note that working through stage two is essential before a team can really function together effectively.

1. Beginning
  - a. forming--setting up the team, admittance, initial norms
  - b. warming--developing relationships and a sense of team
2. Adjustment
  - a. differing--experiencing and struggling with differentness
  - b. harmonizing--working through basic areas of difference
3. Viability
  - a. working--doing the team task and relating together well
  - b. developing--maturing as a team and becoming effective
4. Ending
  - a. debriefing--reviewing the team experience and phasing out
  - b. moving on--leaving the team or disbanding all together

I like to have teams assess which stage they are at, discuss what past stages have been like, and anticipate future stages. What will the team look like one year or five years from now? It is also interesting to have members modify these stages if they feel they can come up with a set that more accurately represents their experience.

### Testing Tools

There are a wide variety of tests available to assess interpersonal characteristics, personality, workstyle, and group dynamics. Most of these tests need to be administered by a mental health professional, and are normed for only a certain population group, such as North Americans. Here is a description of six tests that can be particularly helpful for the members of missionary teams to understand themselves and each other. They are most useful when done as a group and the results are shared and compared.

*Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO-B)*--This test assesses three basic characteristics of interpersonal relationships: inclusion, control, and affection. It also measures how comfortable one is with expressing these characteristics and how comfortable one is when others express them.

*Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)*--This test explores the way individuals take in information and make decisions, how they focus their attention, and how they orient themselves to the external world. The test results yield one of sixteen possible profiles, referred to as *types*.

*Personal Profile System*--This tool examines work styles and the type of work environment that is needed for maximum productivity. It is especially useful for understanding the different motivational environments required by those with different work styles.

*Personal Style Indicator and Job Style Indicator (PSI and JSI)*--These are informal, self-report questionnaires to help match people with jobs. The *PSI* produces a self-appraisal of one's preferred modes of responding to people and the environment in most situations. The *JSI* explores the work style requirements of a particular job, as well as the strengths and difficulties that one experiences in a particular work role. Both tests require computer scoring and interpretation.

*Work Environment Scale and Group Environment Scale*--These scales look at the "personality" of a particular work setting, and how the social climate (ethos) affects people's behavior, feelings, and morale. They are objective means to get at how team members perceive their work situation.

### Stress Management

Dealing with stress is a major concern of most missionaries and teams. There are various tools that can be used to help teams manage stress more effectively. Here are four that I regularly use.

*CHOPPSS*--This exercise identifies the major sources of stress for missionaries, and requires them to think of strategies to deal with stress. *CHOPPSS* is an acronym for seven common stressors: cultural, human, organizational, psychological, physical, support, and spiritual. A fuller description of this tool is found in chapter eight of this volume.



9      *The Lord's Strategies*--How did the Lord deal with stress? There are at least 25 practical ways in which He balanced the demands of His life and ministry. See how many the team can identify. How do these strategies relate to your life and team?

*Burnout Scale*--Burnout refers to the state of physical and emotional exhaustion resulting from chronic exposure to stressful experiences. One way to assess how close one is to burnout is to use the inventory found in Myron Rush's (1987) book *Burnout: Practical Help for Lives Out of Balance*. It consists of 20 items and can be completed in about five minutes. Take this inventory about once each year and compare your scores.

*Family Inventory of Life Events (FILE)*--This tool assesses the impact of changes on a family's coping resources. It is basically a type of checklist which each parent fills out on the family experiences during the last 12 months. Responses are compared and any differences in perceptions of family strains can be discussed. It is available in McCubbin and Thompson's (1987) edited work entitled *Family Assessment Inventories for Research and Practice*.

### Guidelines for Working With Teams

How do teams go about using these and other tools effectively? Here are some perspectives and suggestions that can help.

To begin, team development is something to regularly plan into your schedules. It is an ongoing process, involving much more than the initial orientation period or annual performance appraisals. A team development event every one to three months should be standard for most teams.

Team development helps prevent major problems erupting within the team by dealing with issues that may otherwise not be discussed. They are a necessary complement to regular times of prayer together, fellowship, annual retreats, and conferences. Some teams benefit from special team sessions that are extended over two to three days, even when there is not some kind of crisis.

Team exercises work best when the team ethos encourages openness and speaking into each other's lives. Team members, especially leaders, must be willing to take some risks with each other and be willing to show weaknesses.

Choose one or more "growth facilitators" on the team who can coordinate team exercises. These should be individuals who are sensitive to the needs of others and to group process. Facilitators usually serve as moderators for these times, drawing people out and keeping things on track. They need not be the team leader nor a pastoral counselor to be effective.

Be aware of the team's *current focal point*--that is, the area which is the immediate concern of the group at any given time. This is the point of interest that a team would usually move towards if there were minimal resistance or reluctance to do so. It also represents the next step towards growth as a team seeks to become more viable. Sometimes the real focal point only becomes apparent during the middle of a team session or series of sessions.

The focus of the sessions will change as the needs of the team change. Make sure that you are really dealing with felt needs of the team members, not just someone's good ideas. Frequently an issue or particular theme needs to be addressed over a period of time.

One important goal in almost any session is to help people speak and listen to one another in new ways. Another goal is to encourage people to make contact with each other at fairly deep levels. People usually want to put aside their work roles and be themselves. Effective team exercises allow the real person to emerge from the role.

Keep team development and team building times as practical and enjoyable as possible. Experiential approaches can produce more insights and change than simply sitting around and talking about "things." Use some novelty to keep people motivated and engaged. Make sure everyone on the team is included and contributes without feeling forced.

Find ways to elicit group competencies and call on the collective wisdom of the team. No one should dominate. Important resources lie within the group, not just in some outside specialist.

Encourage people to try new behaviors. Respect any hesitations to do an exercise. Sometimes people may need to be gently challenged; other times it is better to modify or change the exercise.

10 Children are members of teams too. Do not overlook their need for growth and involvement in team exercises. They can also contribute a lot to the overall group.

When giving feedback, be an encourager. People need to know their contribution. Avoid using generalities, so be specific and direct. Avoid making statements about intentions. Try using statements prefaced by "I think" or "I feel" rather than "You are."

Always debrief at the end of the session. Discuss what it was like, what was helpful, not helpful. Let people express their thoughts and feelings and put closure on any unfinished matters.

Consider using a coach or consultant from time to time, preferably someone with an ongoing relationship to the team. This person helps to clarify issues, gives permission to look at hard questions, mediates, brings in fresh perspectives, encourages, and equips.

### Case Study

This fictitious case highlights several aspects of the interpersonal, task, and ethos dimensions of team life. Many of the issues affecting the church planting team discussed in this case are also relevant for other types of teams.

The case study can be used as a team exercise. Read through the case and discuss it together as a team. Refer to the questions at the end. Another approach would be to do a role-play. For example, your team members can become any of the eight team members described in the case, and interact with each other in these new roles. A third idea is to discuss this case or do a role play from the perspectives of a home office administrator, personnel director, team leader, or visiting pastoral counselor.

#### *Team North Africa*

For the last two years a five person missionary team has been working as tentmakers in the capital city of a North African nation. The purpose of this team is to plant a house church for Muslims which could then plant other churches around the country. The original goal was to plant a church within three years, which has subsequently been extended to five years due to minimal response to the gospel.

The team members belong to the same mission agency and include:

**Tom and Mary**, the leaders, both aged 35, Americans, spent 10 years working with Muslims in Manila. They run a travel agency and have three daughters, ages six, three, and one.

**Robin**, aged 42, Australian, is an engineer by profession, was divorced four years ago, and has a burden for students in the university where he teaches.

**Laura**, aged 28, is single, has a call to work with Roman Catholics as well as Muslims, and has previously participated in several short-term outreaches to a tribal group in South America. She is from Chile, and is trying to find a new job before her current visa expires.

**Joan**, aged 22, is an American who recently joined the team after having finished her bachelor's degree in international studies. Joan works with Tom and Mary in their travel agency.

Before departing for the field, each team member went through a three week program in language and culture learning principles in the United States. They also met regularly for six months to strategize and pray about their upcoming work. Besides English, the languages spoken by the team before their arrival were Spanish (by Laura) and some Tagalog by Tom and Mary. Their initial goal as a team was to immerse themselves in the culture and learn as much French and Arabic as possible.

The first two years have proved to be tough ones. Progress in Arabic has been slow although everyone is at least conversant in French. Team members live on their own with the exception of Laura and Joan who live with local families. They all live within a 20 minute walking distance from each other.

The team has met once a week for prayer, worship, and discussion of their work. The basic church planting strategy has three parts: to make friends with Muslim families who are respected in the city; to participate in "salat, zakat, and sawm" (prayer, almsgiving, and fasting); and to

11 eventually hold a weekly Bible study. Tom and Robin have tried to pray in the mosques but each time have been asked to leave since they were not Muslims. The team also has agreed to abstain from pork, alcohol, and to dress like the nationals. Laura and Joan attend a weekly Bible study for expatriates held at the Catholic church.

There have been several "converts" from among the more marginalized of the city--i.e. the very poor and homeless. Three others have professed faith in Christ but are fearful of being rejected by family members if they openly share their faith.

Team relationships are generally good, although sometimes marked with tension. One of the basic problems seems to be that Robin and Tom have different views on the direction for the ministry. Some team members also feel that Tom and Mary are too involved with their kids, that Robin is too task oriented, and that Laura is distant from the others. Tom and Mary are considering going on a three month furlough, which has also stirred up some concern among the team.

There are a few other issues of concern to the team. These involve how to make decisions with less friction, whether to have a team of university students from the USA work with them for one month next summer, whether to become more involved with the local Catholic church, whether to try to live together in community as a way to make their finances go farther, and how to improve their Arabic and spend more time with their contacts.

In spite of some of their struggles and challenges, each team member is committed to the team and the church planting goals. Robin, however, is the only one who says he is really satisfied with the work he is doing. The others feel satisfied occasionally but usually need to really work at persevering on the field.

### *Questions for Discussion*

1. What are some of the issues for this team?
2. What are some of the sources of stress?
3. Which team tools would be useful?
4. What recommendations would you make?
5. How does this case relate to your current team situation?

### **Suggested Readings**

- Adler, N. (1991). *International dimensions of organizational behavior* (2nd ed.). Boston: PWS-Kent.
- Casse, P. (1981). *Training for the cross-cultural mind* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: The Society for International Training, Education, and Research.
- Dyer, K. (1985). Crucial factors in building good teams. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 21, 254-258.
- Foyle, M. (1985). Missionary relationships: Powderkeg or powerhouse? *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 21, 342-351.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). Motivation, leadership, and organization: Do American theories apply abroad? *Organizational Dynamics*, Summer, 42-63.
- Kinlaw, D. (1991). *Developing superior work teams*. San Diego: University Associates.
- Lingenfelter, S. & Mayers, K. (1986). *Ministering cross-culturally: An incarnational model for personal relationships*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- McCubbin, H. & Thompson, A. (Eds.). *Family assessment inventories for research and practice*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Reapsome, J. (1988). Choosing a mission board. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 24, 6-13.
- Rice, W., Rydberg, D., & Yaconelli, M. (1977). *Fun n games: A sourcebook of games for the whole family*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Rush, M. (1987). *Burnout: Practical help for lives out of balance*. Wheaton, IL: Victor.
- Sundstrom, E. (1990). Work teams: Applications and effectiveness. *American Psychologist*, 45, 120-133.
- Weeks, W., Pedersen, P., & Brislin, R. (Eds.). *A manual of structured experiences for cross-cultural learning*. Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press.