# OVERVIEW OF METHODS USED FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF TEAMWORK PROCESSES

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**Abstract:** The topic if teamwork and teamwork dynamics is quickly gaining attention in the business world. But even though the attention given to teamwork is rising, the topic is often misunderstood, or it is not implemented to its fullest potential. As the needs of some business organizations evolve, their focus shifts to the work of small non-manufacturing teams. The shift can be mostly seen in organizations providing services using information technology. To survive and thrive, these organizations need to encourage their employees to come up with new, innovative and exiting solutions. Employee cooperation and teamwork can significantly improve said process, thus the importance of teamwork management keeps rising. In this article, author provides an overview of some of the current tangible methods that are being used to improve teamwork management in real organizations. The organizations in question are the trendsetters in the field of efficient and modern team management. Through an overview of these methods it is possible to see new trends in teamwork and teamwork dynamics. The main goal of the article is to present said new trends in teamwork management, to point out the importance or an effective teamwork and also to possibly provide a clear and tangible instructions for other organizations to imply presented methods into their own processes.

**Keywords:** teamwork, team management, monitoring, reporting, team learning

**JEL Classification:** M12

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Some aspects of teamwork have been researched for decades and a significant base of theoretical knowledge has been accumulated about the topic. When exploring the issue of teamwork, it is possible to draw from two basic sources of information. The first is extensive research in the field of psychology and social sciences, called group dynamics. Group dynamics examines the behaviour of individuals within smaller groups. The topic of group dynamics has been investigated for a long time and has produced a wide range of knowledge about the functioning of the groups. The second source of information is managerial science and applied social sciences. They explore the issue of work teams within organizations in order to streamline the teamwork process, thereby increasing the efficiency of organizations themselves. The information from both sources is very closely interconnected, complementary and mutually supportive. [1]

One of the simplest definitions of teamwork defines it as a community of people who have been assembled to perform some specific and organizationally relevant tasks. [2] Inside the theoretical base of knowledge many models of teamwork [3-4] and descriptions of internal teamwork processes [5-7] can be found. But the vast range and complexity of teamwork make it very difficult to effectively imply the theoretical models into real organization processes in a clear and tangible way. This is also one of the main reason why it is so hard for organizations to find a structuralized and clear teamwork methodology that incorporates all of its aspects. But even though a complex methodology for organization is not easy to find, simple methods that focus only on specialised aspects of teamwork have been invented. These methodologies present a clear and tangible set of steps to improve some aspects of teamwork.

## 2. METHODS USED FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF TEAMWORK PROCESSES

Market-based organizations are constantly striving to improve their competitiveness through improving teamwork in their processes. This fact encouraged the creation of a number of different methods used during team activities. An overview of some of these methods is conducted in this chapter. It should be noted that none of the methods is designed to include the whole and complex system of team collaboration in an organization. They are design to improve some separate tangible aspect of teamwork.

On the first glance may the narrow range reduce the importance and benefits of the methods, but the opposite is true. Since they are more tangible, they provide a set of clear instructions for organizations to effectively implement methods into their processes and improve them in a tangible way. While complex theoretical models and teamwork frameworks provided by literature cover a broader area, their tangible implementation into organization processes is much harder and its results may not be easy to evaluate.

### 1.1 Comprehensive training model of teamwork competence (CTMTC)

The CTMTC examines how individual team members contribute to the joint completion of the project. To properly use the method, team members need to communicate through information technology. The method is mainly used at universities. [8] The method focuses on examining individual team members and their team competencies during teamwork.

It examines, for example [9]:

− team leader behaviour,
− cooperation and competition between the individual members,
− the problems encountered during the process of teamwork,
− the individual member performance.

CTMTC represents a proactive method targeted on binding together three main aspects of teamwork learning. These aspects are joint knowledge creation, information technology tools and stages of team cooperation.

In the case of a small number of teams being observed, it is possible to carry out the monitoring of team competence in person. In most cases, the method is done through information technology tools. In order to be able to use information technology tools for CTMTC, it is absolutely crucial that team members are forced to work and collaborate using online environment.

The method evaluates team competencies based on quantitative variables such as:

− active time spent in the system,
− number of posts within the team, communication threads, team members,
− comments in posts,
− ranking among team members (to what extent the post was helpful),
− meeting deadlines.

Values exploring co-operation and team communication in the online environment are complemented by results from a questionnaire filled out by team members. [10]

### 1.2 Event analysis of systemic teamwork method (EAST method)

EAST is a method for analysing and evaluating teamwork from the viewpoint of so-called C4i aspects. The method deals with teams of employees but can also observe teams from a technical point of view as complicated aspects of technical elements and their cooperation. For this reason, it is mainly used in the field of transport and infrastructure and evaluates teamworking between people but also between people and intelligent systems.

As was already mentioned, it deals with C4i. This abbreviation includes:

− command,
− control,
− communication,
− computers,
− intelligence.

These 5 components represent the control infrastructure for any large, complex and dynamic system. In case of an efficient teamwork cooperation, it is not only the teamwork between individual members that creates synergy, but also the cooperation between employees and information technologies. This cooperation can be incredibly helpful but is only rarely studied and researched. Event analysis of systemic teamwork method is specifically designed to study teamwork in organizations in regard to both cooperation between team members and cooperation between team members and information technologies.

The use of information technologies must be exploited for the C4i, which also means that the EAST method is largely carried out using information technologies. The method answers basic questions about team collaboration:

− Who are the main players in team collaboration?
− When do the most important team activities?
− Where are activities carried out?
− How do actors communicate and coordinate their activities? [11]

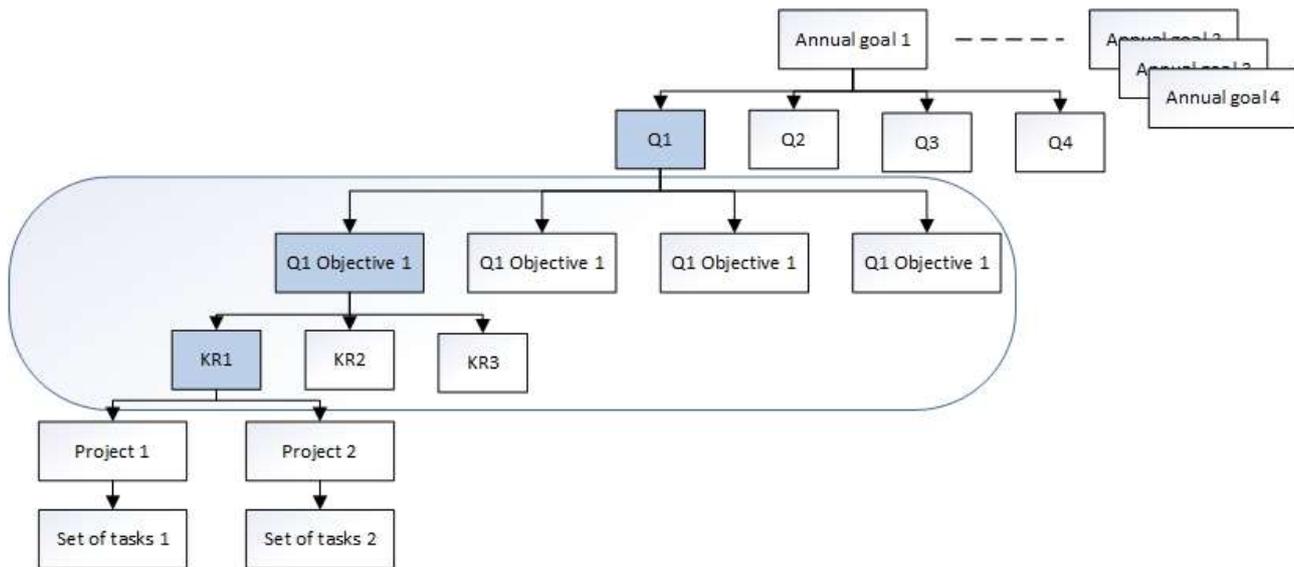### 1.3 Objectives and key results method (OKRs)

The author of this method is Intel's former chief executive officer, Andrew Grove, who was tasked with managing a crucial business transformation shortly after being put into charge. To successfully achieve said task, he created the OKR - Objective and Key Results method. Later, organizations like Google, Linked In, Twitter, Uber, and others took over this method and implemented it into their own processes. The whole point of the method consists of focusing on two questions that need to be answered:

− Where does the organization/team/individual want to get? Based on the response to this question a set of objectives is defined.
− What steps does the organization/team/individual need to take to get there? This answer leads to milestones or key results. The ideal number of KR for each target is 3.

While other methods focus on how the objectives should look like (e.g., Key performance indicators method), the OKR method is different in defining milestones, key intermediate smaller objectives that lead to the main objectives. Objectives are set on a quarterly basis. Objectives and ways to reach them are determined at all levels of organization. This means from the strategic goals to the goals of individual employees and team members. A lower level goal is always built to meet the key result defined by the level above it. Objectives and key results are most often determined for the annual and quarterly periods. Annual OKRs may gradually slightly evolve, but the quarterly ones do not change. [12]

The process of defining the objectives and key results starts with defining the set of annual goals. Then every annual goal is divided into four quarterly goals. Now when the quarterly goals are defined, for every one of them a set of clear objectives is defined and subsequently for every objective a set of key results is defined. The key results serve as a measurement for every objective. When the objectives and key results are defined, the organization/team/individual must start creating tangible projects designed to effectively achieve defined objectives by accomplishing the required score of the key results. When the projects are launched a list of required tasks must be set. The graphical representation of the process of defining OKRs can be seen in Figure 1.

The correct definition of key results is critical for their precise measurability. It is the precise measurability that you makes Objectives and key results method such a useful teamwork tool because the individual team members an the team as a whole can accurately evaluate the achievement of their goals. To elaborate Google uses a scale from 0 to 1. [14] Ideal teams achieve results in the range 0.6 - 0.7.

**Figure 1** Process of defining objectives and key results.
Source: [13]

If the rating is too high (0.9-1), it means that OKRs were not ambitious enough, while if it is too low (less than 0.4), it indicates some significant problems in the teamwork processes.

An important aspect of the Objectives and key results method is transparency. Every team member can see the OKRs of all the other team members, all other teams and employees at all levels of management (from general staff to the chief executive officer).

Based on the historical evaluation of the OKRs, it is possible to evaluate employees and teams, to create new teams and to decide on the career growth of employees. [12]

### 1.4 Plan, Progress, Problem method (PPP)

Plans, Progress, Problems method is a management method designed for a clear communication between individual team members and regular monitoring of progress in regard to the team tasks. This technique is used by organizations such as Skype, Ebay, Facebook and Seedcamp to streamline communication channels between managers and team members and also between team members themselves. [15]

Every week, or in some special cases every day, the team member will publish a brief and transparent report that lets others know what they've been doing in the last week or day, how far have they managed to progress in their tasks, and what problems they have encountered during their progress.

A brief report is then efficiently viewed and analysed by the team leader, senior manager or by his or her teammates.

The content of the report is very simple and is based on the method name:

- Progression represents an indication of achieved accomplishments and a summary of completed tasks or produced products for the defined time period.

- Plans can be defined as goals and tasks for the next defined time period. Plans from the last week should be transformed into the progress category of the next one.

- Problems are the emerged issues that a member of the team could not solve in this time period and needs someone else 's help to solve them.

PPP method helps to create a culture based on achieving goals in the team. It also creates a sense of transparency, and everyone in the team knows exactly what other team members are doing. [16] The method also creates a history of team activities in a simple and an effective way. History helps track the progress of the team and, if some adverse events are encountered along the way, it helps to clearly define the responsibility for their formation.

The main advantage of the PPP method is that it saves considerable amount of time for unnecessary team meetings and helps the team advance without unnecessary delay. In most organizations, the method is performed through specially designed applications that remind a member of the team to create a PPP report, offer a structured and transparent form to fill it out, and clearly interpret individual reports for everyone who has access to them. [17]

### 3. CONCLUSION

In this article four teamwork methods are presented. All of them are being currently used by companies around the world, and all of them can be implemented by other organizations. It is necessary to mention that none of the methods encompasses the whole system of teamwork but focus on a specific aspects or functions of teamwork. Said aspects and functions are for example team learning, planning, mutual control between team members, reporting and monitoring.

By inspecting presented methods, it is possible to notice new teamwork trends emerging in organizations. The most significant trend is streamlining some of the teamwork processes by using the information technologies. While implementation of teamwork can by itself help organization run more efficiently, implementing information technologies into teamwork can create an important competitive advantage.

Another trend seen in the methods is transparency. Transparency simplifies the processes of reporting and

monitoring. Transparency inside the team and the whole organization motivates employees to higher performance, supports innovations and helps to create synergy both on team and organizational level.

Providing some tangible teamwork methods based on the teamwork principles defined by the theoretical research can show real benefits of teamwork to organizations and help to raise awareness about real potential of teamwork.

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