



PR  
34,2

246

Received January 2002  
Revised September 2003  
Accepted January 2004

## RESEARCH NOTE

# Investigating team work in the Egyptian context

Ghada El-Kot

*College of Management and Technology, Arab Academy for Science and  
Technology and Maritime Transport, Alexandria, Egypt, and*

Mike Leat

*Plymouth Business School, University of Plymouth, Plymouth, UK*

### Abstract

**Purpose** – The aim is to explore in the Egyptian context the incidence and pervasiveness of teamworking, the types of teams in use, and to gather information on some of the factors perceived by researchers in the West to be influential in determining team effectiveness.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper reports and discusses a preliminary inquiry in a sample of 20 manufacturing and service organisations in Egypt. The research was conducted by way of face-to-face semi-structured interviews with between three and five managers in each of the organisations. Comparisons are drawn with much of the western literature and further research needs are identified.

**Findings** – This initial survey has provided evidence of the utilisation of teamworking in a sample of employing organisations in Egypt, which in several respects appears to reflect trends and developments in the more developed economies of the West.

**Research limitations/implications** – In this survey only some of the factors identified as influencing team effectiveness were investigated and further research is required to examine in more detail the relevance of the various models of team effectiveness devised by researchers in the western context.

**Practical implications** – The research was exploratory and is the precursor to a wider and deeper study concerning team effectiveness in the Egyptian context.

**Originality/value** – The study reported is initial and exploratory in nature and, as far as the authors are aware, the first study of teamworking in Egypt.

**Keywords** Team working, Team performance, Managers, Egypt

**Paper type** Research paper

### Introduction

Team working became increasingly common in organisations in developed economies in the latter part of the twentieth century, for example, in America (Gordon, 1992; Alder, 1997; McHugh, 1997; Ankarlo, 1994; Elmuti, 1997; Bergmann and De Meuse, 1996; Osterman, 1994) and in the UK (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995; Cully *et al.*, 1998; Hayes, 1997). Many advantages have been claimed for teamworking including; it is a source of competitive advantage, enabling both cost reduction and improved quality (Niehaus and Swiercz, 1996; Parker, 1990), it facilitates the completion of increasingly complex organisational tasks, which frequently require capabilities and resources that are beyond the means of any one individual (Russ-Eft *et al.*, 1997), it enables the empowerment of employees as decision making is decentralised (Levi and Slem, 1995),



---

teams can be a positive force for change and encourage flexibility, efficiency and employees involvement (Hayes, 1997). Herriot and Pemberton (1995) reported that in many organisations teamworking was seen as an effective means of enabling organisations to respond to new challenges and opportunities within their business environment. Tayeb (1996) amongst others has made the point that in introducing teamworking many western managers were seeking to emulate what they perceived as the source of the success of many Japanese firms, yet it may be that teamworking is compatible with certain national and socio-cultural contexts but not with others.

### **Aim of the research**

The aim of the research reported here is to explore in the Egyptian context the incidence and pervasiveness of teamworking, the types of teams in use, and to gather information on some of the factors perceived by researchers in the west to be influential in determining team effectiveness. In regard to team effectiveness we examine in particular: the size of teams in use and management perceptions of: the degree of autonomy allowed to teams in their organisations, the degree of task interdependence and the nature of reward schemes. The study reported is initial and exploratory in nature and as far as the authors are aware the first study of teamworking in Egypt.

### **The Egyptian context**

The Egyptian economy has been transformed in recent years and Egyptian organisations now need to be internationally competitive and able to respond to the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly international and turbulent business environment. There has so far been relatively little research undertaken into the management practices employed in Arab countries and Egypt in particular (Atiyyah, 1992, 1993; Parnell and Hatem, 1999), and one of the latter's findings was that Egypt's business and management practices lag behind their Western counterparts. Atiyyah (1992) also argued that there had been little interest shown in Arab employees' attitudes and behaviour. Nevertheless there are two sets of reasons for thinking that as in the Western world team working may have been utilised more in Egypt in recent years. The first of these relates to the fact that more and more Arab managers had been to the west to be educated and to attend management conferences and training programmes aimed at enabling them to apply Western management methods and techniques in their companies (Atiyyah, 1993). The second relates to the influence of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Butter (1999) has noted that the Egyptian economy has been transformed in recent years. Hatem (1994) suggested that the Egyptian economy had changed as a result of two main developments, each of which increased foreign investment in Egypt. The first was the Open Door Policy introduced in the mid-1970s, which encouraged private and foreign companies in many different fields to invest in Egypt. The second was as a result of implementing an economic reform strategy that encouraged foreign investments. Hatem (1994) also noted that as a result of the foreign investment and joint ventures human resources and their management had become critical issues for Egyptian companies. Parnell and Hatem (1999) have acknowledged the influence of the open door policy referred to above and argue that

Egypt has changed in recent years with the enhanced exposure of Egyptian people to the values and beliefs held by inward investors and indeed to the management approach and practices of inwardly investing corporations. Improving and measuring the organisations' effectiveness had become a major concern for many Egyptian organisations as they seek to increase productivity, reduce costs and to compete globally. Nydell (1996) has also asserted that Arab countries have been subjected to various pressures from the outside world, which affect the way people behave in their work place, and in particular identified the influence of the effects of Western technologies and approaches to work, which she argued necessitated the adoption of Western values and social practices.

However, many researchers have pointed up the significance of national culture as a variable influencing the universal applicability of management and behavioural theories developed in and appropriate to one macro environment (e.g. Hofstede, 1980a; Parnell and Hatem, 1999; Rahmati, 2000; Laurent, 1986; Ali, 1996 and Tayeb, 1996). Despite the influences of FDI upon values and norms and management practices in Egypt, we should not therefore necessarily expect theories and practices developed in the west with respect to matters such as employees attitudes and expectations in regard to motivation, job satisfaction, employee involvement and commitment and Quality of Work Life, all variously claimed to be enhanced through teamworking, to apply similarly in non-western countries and cultures. We should also not necessarily expect dominant management practices and attitudes to be consistent with the introduction of teamworking and any devolution of decision making that may be required in order to enable them to be effective.

Parnell and Hatem (1999) point out that the Egyptian culture is a blend of Islamic, Arabic and Middle Eastern influences. They also added the influence of Islam may be significant in explaining dominant values and attitudes, behavioural expectations and behaviour. A number of authors have referred to and examined the impact of Islam (for example: Hickson and Pugh, 1995; Ali, 1996; Parnell and Hatem, 1999; Yousef, 2001). Yousef (2001) argued that the Islamic work ethic (IWE) emphasizes and encourages hard work, and engagement in economic activity is perceived as an obligation. The IWE also stresses cooperation in work and consultation, the latter being seen as a way of overcoming obstacles or avoiding mistakes. Social relations at work are also encouraged, it is important to have good relationships at work with both equals and superiors. Yousef (2001) also comments that his research suggests that those who support the IWE are more committed to their organisations and more satisfied with their jobs. Another characteristic of Islam is an assumption that the future is best left to Allah, what Hickson and Pugh (1995) referred to as a latent fatalism, a feeling that as long as you live by the rules all will be well. In his original research, Hofstede (1980b) did not specifically examine work related values in Egypt, however, he does present findings relating to Arab societies in general. Nevertheless, a profile of dominant work-related values in Egypt can be constructed and it is possible to postulate implications that might impact on the appropriateness of teamworking and expectations in respect of autonomy and involvement in decision making.

Hofstede (1980b) classified Arab-speaking countries as demonstrating high power distance, moderately strong uncertainty avoidance, low individualism and moderate masculinity (compared with a profile for America and the UK, which were low, weak,

---

high and high respectively.) Extrapolating from this Arab country profile one might expect people at work to accept an unequal distribution of power and expect to be directed by their supervisors whose authority they respect and with whom they may be afraid to disagree; they are unlikely to value or expect individual autonomy or to be consulted, decision making is likely to be centralized and the management style is likely to be autocratic or paternalistic. They are also likely to welcome the security afforded by working for the same organisation for a long time, will feel a sense of belonging to their employing organisation and to their work group with whom they work together for survival, and are likely to adopt risk avoidance rather than risk taking approaches to their work. They will expect advancement to be based on seniority rather than on individual performance.

Al-Faleh (1987) identified common characteristics of Arab managers and in the main these were consistent with this interpretation of the implications of Hofstede's findings though there are also some signs of inconsistency or paradox which may be the product of the influence of Islam. In this latter regard, Hickson and Pugh (1995) referred to a paradox between the authoritarian style that one might expect given the high power distance score, and which would seem to be the reality, and the "open door" consultative approach which is aspired to by many Arab managers and which may be the product of the influence of Islam. Hickson and Pugh suggested that consultation in this sense is the wise consultation by those in authority as distinct from power sharing and they point out that Islam also stresses obedience to a responsibly wielded authority. Further support for the appropriateness of Hofstede's findings is also provided, for example, by Nydell (1996) who referred to respect for seniority in Arab countries and in Egypt, and Parnell and Hatem (1999) who noted employees often tended to agree with their supervisors and that seeking subordinate participation was regarded as weak management. Nydell (1996) also described people in Arab countries preferring working in the same business doing the same jobs over time, a possible reflection of the desire to avoid uncertainty.

As Tayeb (1996) asserted, teamwork is congruent with a collectivist culture in which employees are committed to one another and to the employing organisation and in which emphasis is placed upon cooperative rather than competitive relationships. If you take the Japanese model as the ideal then this collectivism, commitment and cooperation also needs to be accompanied by long-term employment and the feelings of security engendered, seniority-based promotion and team-based reward policies. If the team is to be granted autonomy in certain areas of decision making then the cultural profile should encompass values and attitudes on the part of both management and employees which are congruent with this.

On the face of it then, if the encouragement of FDI, the increasing exposure of Egyptian managers to western ideas, theories and practices, and the need to compete on the international stage have encouraged the introduction of teamworking in Egyptian organisations, it would seem that the social-cultural context in Egypt is congruent, though whether it is as appropriate for the introduction of a measure of autonomy or self-managing teams is more problematic. In the Egyptian socio-cultural context, we have no reason to expect people to seek control over the task that they perform at work, or to be motivated by the prospect of such autonomy, indeed there might be reason to suspect that autonomy of this kind would have a negative impact

upon individual happiness and satisfaction with their work given the values and attitudes that appear to dominate.

In order to provide a framework for this initial study a review was undertaken of the literature on team definitions, types and factors influencing effectiveness.

**Team definitions**

By reviewing the literature, it appears that, there is a relatively high level of agreement between different authors on the definition of a team as presented chronologically in Table I. The findings from Table I can be summarised around six common features of a team, as presented in Table II.

From Tables I and II, it could be concluded that it is possible to use these findings to produce a composite definition of a “team”:

A team consists of two or more people who are interdependent and together have a social identity, who have complementary skills and who work towards and share responsibility for the achievement of common or shared objectives.

Source	Team definition
Francis and Young (1970, p. 8)	“An energetic group of people committed to achieving common objectives and producing high quality results”
Dyer (1984, p. 134) in Russ-Eft <i>et al.</i> (1997)	“Two or more people with a common goal, specific role assignment, and interdependence”
Adair (1986) in Sinclair (1992, p. 612)	“A distinctive class of group, which is more task-oriented than other groups, and which has a set of obvious rules and rewards for its members”
Morgan <i>et al.</i> (1986, p. 24) in Morgan <i>et al.</i> (1993)	“A team is a distinguishable set of two or more individuals who interact interdependently adaptively to achieve specified, shared, valued objectives”
Sundstrom <i>et al.</i> (1990, p. 120)	“A small group of individuals who share responsibility for outcomes for the organisations”
Bartol and Hagman (1992, p. 24)	“A group of employees who are charged with working together to identify problems, form a consensus about what should be done, and implement necessary actions in relation to a particular task or organisational area”
Hogg and Abrams (1993, p. 184) in Lembke and Wilson (1998)	“A social identity as a collection of individuals who classify, define and evaluate themselves in terms of common social category membership”
Greenberg and Baron (1996, p. 270)	“A group or a small number of people with complementary skills and are committed to a common purpose or set of performance goals for which they hold themselves mutually accountable”
Lussier (1996, p. 314)	“Two or more people interacting to achieve an objective”.
Cohen and Bailey (1997, p. 241)	“A collection of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks, who share responsibility for outcomes, who see themselves and who are seen by others as an entity embedded in one or more large social systems”

**Table I.**  
Definitions of teams

Common features	Author(s)
Group of people	Francis and Young (1970); Dyer (1984); Adair (1986); Morgan <i>et al.</i> (1986) cited in Morgan <i>et al.</i> (1993); Sundstrom <i>et al.</i> (1990); Bartol and Hagman (1992); Hogg and Abrams (1993); Greenberg and Baron (1996); Lussier (1996); Cohen and Bailey (1997)
Achieve common goal	Francis and Young (1970); Dyer (1984); Morgan <i>et al.</i> (1986) cited in Morgan <i>et al.</i> (1993); Greenberg and Baron (1996); Lussier (1996)
Share responsibility of outcomes	Sundstrom <i>et al.</i> (1990); Cohen and Bailey (1997)
Complementary skills	Greenberg and Baron (1996)
Social identity	Hogg and Abrams (1993); Cohen and Bailey (1997)
Interdependence	Dyer (1984); Morgan <i>et al.</i> (1986) cited in Morgan <i>et al.</i> (1993); Cohen and Bailey (1997)

**Table II.**  
Common team features

In the literature, the terms “team” and “group” are sometimes differentiated and sometimes used interchangeably. In this short research note we do not seek to differentiate between them and use the term “team”.

### Types of teams

In addition to reviewing the literature regarding definitions of teams, we also reviewed the literature with respect to whether there were different types of teams and whether there was consistency in the types of teams identified by different researchers. Greenberg and Baron (1996) concluded that teams could be categorised according to four major dimensions. These dimensions are: purpose, the length of time that the team is operational, the degree of autonomy, and whether the teams extend across organisational functions or not. Hayes (1997) and Keritner *et al.* (1999) concentrated on function or purpose and have both differentiated: production or service teams; action or negotiation teams; project and development teams, and advice and involvement teams.

Keritner *et al.* (1999) noted that advice teams make recommendations for managerial decisions while production and action teams carry out the management’s decisions. Cohen and Bailey (1997) also described four types of teams which are similar to those identified by Hayes in that they are distinguished by purpose but they also incorporate team membership as a dimension: work teams, parallel teams, project teams, and management teams. A work team consists of full time workers with a stable relationship whom are responsible for producing goods or providing services, parallel teams consist of people from different work units to perform certain functions and solve certain problems, project teams tend to have a limited life and consist of different members from different functional units who are focused on a particular project, and a management team consists of the managers from each unit who are responsible for the overall performance of the organisation.

Banker *et al.* (1996) adopt a different approach and categorised team types according to autonomy ranging from low to high, though they also incorporate other of the dimensions used by others above. The types identified are: traditional work groups, quality circles, semi-autonomous work groups, self-managing teams and self-designing teams. Traditional work groups perform the production activities without any management responsibility. In quality circles, membership should be

---

voluntary and the members are drawn from a particular department with a responsibility for making suggestions without authority to make decisions. Semi-autonomous work groups consist of members who manage major production activities, while others perform support activities like maintenance. Self-managing teams consist of a group of individuals with control over their tasks. Self-designing teams are similar to self-managing teams but with control over the design of the team.

It is clear from the work of Banker *et al.* (1996) that there is a difference between teams having a measure of autonomy and teams being self-managing, the latter being identified as a particular and separate category or type, and this is reinforced by Elmuti (1996, p. 9) who defined self-managed teams as “a group of employees (five to 12) with all technical skills as well as the authority needed to direct and manage themselves”. However, this distinction is often confused or blurred in the literature and one expects in practice. In sum therefore common dimensions used to differentiate types of team are: purpose, nature of membership including whether the team membership is cross functional and the degree and nature of autonomy allowed to the team. A number of the researchers identified the work team as the most common type used, (Greenberg and Baron, 1996; Hayes, 1997; Cohen and Bailey, 1997; Banker *et al.*, 1996).

### **Team effectiveness**

A review of the literature revealed a broad range of factors perceived to influence team effectiveness and these factors can be broadly grouped into three categories: team design factors (task design including autonomy, interdependence, work design and technology; composition design including tenure, size; and context design which include, supervision and reward); interpersonal factors (team members' behaviour, participation and involvement level) and a wide range of internal contextual factors (team values, beliefs, team vision, team spirit, team goals, management support, organisational and team culture) (Gladstein, 1984; Agrell and Gustafson, 1996; Cohen and Bailey, 1997; Guzzo and Shea, 1992; Hackman and Oldham, 1975; Hackman, 1987; 1990; Sundstrom *et al.*, 1990). Banker *et al.* (1996) focused on the importance of team autonomy, team reward and team size as important factors that contribute to team effectiveness. While Belbin (1981), Margerison and McCann (1985) and Parker (1990) argued for the importance of the team styles or roles that each team member plays in a team. They added that team members should have an ability to adopt different styles, as circumstances require. They also addressed the issue of having a mix of team player roles or styles in each team to ensure team effectiveness and to this extent these could be perceived as additional team design factors.

### **Method**

In commenting on the relative lack of research in Egypt, Parnell and Hatem (1999) noted that among the reasons were the restrictions and difficulties that face researchers collecting both primary and secondary data. In Egypt collecting primary data for any research requires special permission from the government and secondary data is often either not available, inaccurate or not up to date. Collecting data in Egypt is made even more difficult because of the lack of co-operation of companies and managers themselves. Telephone interviews and postal survey have in general not been widely used as data collection methods in Egypt. Furthermore observation, as a data collection

method, is not easily accepted in Egyptian companies because it needs permission from the company to observe people at work and this is usually rejected. Hatem (1994) noted that questionnaires were the most widely used method of data collection in Egypt but pointed out the need for sensitivity in the design of the questionnaire so as to avoid any question that might not match with the Egyptian values and culture. Parnell and Hatem (1999) and Tessler (1987) pointed out the need to take account of local culture when designing research instruments.

An initial review of available documentation and records yielded no information on the utilisation of team working in Egyptian organisations and suggested that no academic research had been undertaken into the use and effectiveness of teamworking (Fiani and Partners, 1998-1999). Therefore, personal and professional contacts were used to establish a number of employing organisations located in Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt that were using team working and an exploratory study was undertaken. The organisations in this exploratory study were 20 manufacturing and services companies (see Table III).

The research was conducted by way of face-to-face semi-structured interviews with between three and five managers in each of the organisations. Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1991) have argued that the interview is often the best method of gathering preliminary information and suggested that face-to-face interviews provide the opportunity to acquire rich information. However, (Hatem, 1994) warned that in Egypt the interview must be used with a high level of sensitivity since many people are often afraid to give any information about their organisations or their salary or even the procedures of their work. The allowed time was between 20 to 30 minutes with each manager. A small number of specific questions were used to guide the researcher during the interviews. These questions are:

- When did your company start to implement teams?
- In which department were teams used?
- What team types are used?
- What sizes are the teams?
- What are the factors that facilitate team work in their organisations?
- What are the reward systems?
- Do top management support the team concept?
- Are there any characteristics that they could recommend for facilitating effective team work?

## Results and discussion

The main findings of this survey are summarised in Table III.

Table III shows the 20 companies within which the research was conducted, there is a non-Egyptian dimension to the ownership/origin of seven of the 20. The information obtained from the interviews with managers confirmed that in some of the organisations teamworking had been implemented from the 1970s though in the main implementation had occurred somewhat later than this. This is consistent with the trends in America and the UK and noted in the introduction whereby team working

**Table III.**  
The Egyptian pilot  
survey

Organisation title	Org. type	Nationality	Team types	Departments	Team size	Team autonomy	Reward	Task interdependence
Coca-Cola	M	American-Egyptian	Work teams	Sales	8	Low	Money, recognition for all employees	High
Nabil Ain Shams	S	Egyptian	Work group Production team and project teams	Finance, technical and marketing	4-8	Moderate to high	Commission and fixed ratios	–
Colorox	M	American-Egyptian	Production teams	Product and supply	5-22	High	To a best team	Moderate to high
Fine Foods	M	Egyptian	Cross-functional teams, project teams and quality circles teams	Marketing, finance, commercial, sales, manufacture, supply chain	5-8	High except work schedule is low	Depends on each team's objectives	High
Iron & Steel	M	Egyptian-Japanese	Work teams, quality circles, cross-functional, self-managed teams	All	2-30	Moderate to high	Based on each team's work	High
Mobimil	S	Egyptian	Service teams	Marketing, R&D	4-6	High to moderate	Based on team efforts and outcomes	Moderate to high
Xerox	M	American in Egypt	Work teams	Service, sales and marketing	6-8	High	Money + self-esteem rewards	–
Zahran	M	Egyptian	Production teams	Technical and packaging	4-7	High	On individual bias	–
Heinz	M	American in Egypt	Temporary teams, production teams and SMT	R&D, sales, marketing, finance, HR and export	4-6	High	Bonus for best performing teams	–
Sumed	S	Egyptian and Arabs	Work groups	All departments	5-10	Moderate to high	Individual bias	High
Niaza	M	Egyptian	Work teams, quality circles, project teams	All departments	4-12	High	Team biased rewards	Moderate

*(continued)*

Organisation title	Org. type	Nationality	Team types	Departments	Team size	Team autonomy	Reward	Task interdependence
General Motors	M	Egyptian branch	SMT	Supply and production	6-10	High	Teams and individuals rewards	-
USA for pharmaceutical industries	M	Egyptian	Work group	Production, marketing, finance, HRM	5-7	Moderate to high	For excellent team	-
PC-link	S	Egyptian	Work groups	Sales, maintenance, finance, store	2-10	High	Depends on the job	High
E+Shamadan	M	Egyptian	Work teams, SMT	Marketing, sales, export and import	10-30	High	Bonus	High
Arab Contractors	M	Egyptian	Work teams, SMT, project teams and quality circles	All	10-20	High	Depends on the work	High
JIL	M	Egyptian-French	Work teams	Accounting, manufacturing, sales and development	4-6	Moderate	Depends on performance	-
TEXALEX	M	Egyptian	Functional teams	Sales, purchase and all departments	2-4	High except work criteria	Teams and individuals	High
Mantrac Co.	M	Egyptian	Work teams, self-managed teams, quality circles	All departments	4-7	Moderate-high	-	-
Aluminum Alahram Co.	M	Egyptian	Work groups and quality circles	Sales, production and export	3-6	High	Depends on team performance	-

Notes: M = manufacturing; S = service

Table III.

---

was introduced into many organisations towards the end of the twentieth century, (for example: Procter and Mueller, 2000; Alder, 1997; Ankarlo, 1994; Herriot and Pemberton, 1995; Cully *et al.*, 1998 and Hayes, 1997). There is also consistency here with the assertions identified earlier that the Egyptian economy has been opened up to foreign investment since the 1970s and that Egyptian managers have travelled more extensively to the west for information and education and the impact that these both may have had upon Egyptian management practices and perspectives (Atiyyah, 1993; Hatem, 1994; Nydell, 1996; Parnell and Hatem, 1999 and Butter, 1999). The relatively widespread use of teams in these organisations might also be taken as support for the suggestion made earlier that the dominant socio-cultural context in Egypt is consistent with a team based approach.

Teams are used in many departments and many of the organisations use teams in service functions such as sales, marketing and finance, as well as in the more traditional production functions. In most of the organisations studied, the size of the teams varied between two and ten, though there were also examples of teams comprising 20 or more individuals. In general, the size of teams is thought to be important from two directions; on the one hand the size of a team needs to be enough to enable the task to be completed effectively and to enable an appropriate mix of team roles (Belbin, 1993; Margerison and McCann, 1985), yet the team size should not be larger than necessary given that overly large teams have been found to have negative implications for performance and the task of coordination (Steiner, 1972; Mullen *et al.*, 1987). Whether the teams identified in this research have been designed with this advice in mind was not pursued in this initial study but doubts are raised about the effectiveness of teams as large as 20-30.

Consistent with the findings of Greenberg and Baron (1996), Hayes (1997), Cohen and Bailey (1997), and Banker *et al.* (1996), the most commonly used team type is the work team, but according to the managers interviewed, other types of team were in use including: quality circles, self-managed work teams, cross-functional teams and project teams and in some of the organisations, quite a wide range of different types of teams were in use. While there may be doubts about the extent to which the self-managing teams identified would comply with the definitions of Banker *et al.* (1996) and Elmuti (1996), there is consistency again between the finding that managers in six of the 20 organisations say they are using self-managing teams and the trends towards the use of self-managing teams in the USA and UK identified by Levi and Slem (1995) and Procter and Mueller (2000), who stated that in the 1990s the use of self-managed work teams had occurred in half of the largest US organisations, while in the UK 40 percent of managers reported that they had used some self-managed teams. Levi and Slem (1995) suggested that the focus of teamwork activities was changing and that companies that had been successful in developing teams were continuing their organisational change efforts by trying to make teams more self-managing and by giving them more autonomy and control over the task.

In addition to the use of self-managing teams it is also of note that the managers perceived generally quite high levels of team autonomy, even where the team types used were not depicted as self-managing, and this is suggestive of a decentralisation of task-oriented decision making in the organisations studied, which again is consistent with earlier findings which suggest both that team working empowers and involves employees and that such decentralisation yields benefits in terms of organisational

---

performance and competitiveness (for example, Levi and Slem, 1995; Hayes, 1997). Whether the decentralisation of decision making implied by these findings is consistent with the wishes and expectations of employees, as implied by the Islamic work ethic and profile of dominant values and expectations in Egypt projected from the work of Hofstede, is arguable. It may well be of course that these findings are evidence of change in these values and expectations. Rahmati (2000) has pointed out the difficulty of applying the findings of Hofstede's (1980b) study in the 2000s and suggested that change might be expected on both the individualism and masculinity dimensions, and Nydell (1996) has argued that the influence of western technologies and approaches to work necessitated the adoption of Western values and social practices. Relatively high task interdependence within teams was also noted as a feature in about half of the organisations, task interdependence being a feature of several of the definitions of teams examined earlier (for example: Dyer, 1984; Morgan *et al.*, 1986 (cited in Morgan *et al.*, 1993); Cohen and Bailey, 1997).

In their analysis of team effectiveness Banker *et al.* (1996) focussed upon the relevance of reward systems and Procter and Mueller (2000) pointed to reward systems as one of the areas of practical difficulty with team working. The findings from this survey provide evidence that many of the organisations are using some form of team-based reward scheme though there was some variation in the basis and nature of the rewards offered. In one or two organisations, a competitive element had been introduced with rewards for the best team performance and while this can act as an incentive to team performance, there are also potential negative consequences for those teams that aren't winners. Hardingham (1995) identified some of the dangers of introducing competition between teams and Tayeb (1996) has noted that team working requires a cooperative rather than competitive environment. More common were reward schemes that were team based but which linked reward to output and other measures of performance. Many of the organisations used a combination of monetary and other rewards, and a mix of individual and team rewards, and in a couple of the organisations rewards had remained individual, even though team working was in use. In such cases it may well be that opportunities are being missed to design a reward scheme that enhances team effectiveness.

The Egyptian managers noted that top management usually supported the team concept in their organisation, a factor identified earlier as influencing team effectiveness, because they believe in the benefits of teams on organisational performance, a belief consistent with the findings of researchers such as Hayes (1997) and Cohen and Bailey (1997). The managers also argued that each task needs certain skills and the complementarity of these skills within the team is important to the achievement of the task; a point emphasised by Greenberg and Baron (1996) in their definition of a team. It was also commented that team work needs harmony among all team members to reduce and to avoid any problems; this latter was sometimes achieved through team members working with their friends and relatives as much as possible. Again, this may be perceived to be a reflection of the dominant values associated with the IWE and the relatively low individualism identified by Hofstede.

Factors recommended by the Egyptian managers which seem to increase team effectiveness in their organisations and which have been identified earlier as design, interpersonal and contextual factors influencing team effectiveness, are:

- a suitable organisational culture that creates a suitable environment for encouraging work in teams;
- team members' satisfaction is another important factor for team effectiveness and this is often related to rewards;
- clear team goals and clear team vision that facilitate the team members working towards specific targets; and
- more team responsibility in making decisions is important but this also depends on the team members's skills and qualifications and their ability to make decisions.

Interestingly, none of the managers made specific reference to team player styles or roles (Belbin, 1981; Margerison and McCann, 1985; Parker, 1990) or team leader behaviour (Proctor and Mueller, 2000).

### Conclusion and further research

This initial survey has provided evidence of the utilisation of teamworking in a sample of employing organisations in Egypt which in several respects appears to reflect trends and developments in the more developed economies of the West. This may well have been facilitated by the increasing exposure of Egyptian organisations and managers to the dominant beliefs and work practices of their western counterparts as well as by the increasing need for Egyptian organisations to be competitive on the international stage. In general, teamworking appears to be consistent with dominant religious and cultural values and expectations in Egypt, though there are questions concerning the socio-cultural appropriateness of affording teams increasing autonomy. As noted, it may be that the autonomy apparently afforded to teams in these organisations may be reflective of change in the dominant values and expectations of both managers and employees in Egypt consequent upon the increased exposure and need to be internationally competitive mentioned above.

In this survey we were able to address only some of the factors identified as influencing team effectiveness and further research is required to examine in more detail the relevance of the various models of team effectiveness devised by researchers in the western context.

Further research is also needed into work-related values and beliefs in Egypt, with a particular focus on whether they continue to reflect the IWE and Hofstede profiles and if not, the direction of change. In addition to providing information on the cultural appropriateness of introducing western approaches to management and work organisation, such research may also illuminate the debate concerning the impact of the process of globalisation for cultural convergence.

### References

- Adair, J. (1986), *Effective Teambuilding*, Gower, Aldershot.
- Agrell, A. and Gustafson, G. (1996), "Innovation and creativity in workgroups", in West, M.A. (Ed.), *Handbook of Work Group Psychology*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester.
- Alder, P.S. (1997), "From Taylorism to teamwork", *Perspective on Work*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 61-5.
- Al-Faleh, M. (1987), "Cultural influences on Arab management development: a case study of Jordan", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 19-33.

- 
- Ali, A.J. (1996), "Organizational development in the Arab world", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 15 No. 5, pp. 4-18.
- Ankarlo, L. (1994), "The best value in training", *Career Track*, pp. 12-16.
- Atiyyah, H.S. (1992), "Research note: Research in Arab countries", (published in Arabic), *Organization Studies*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 105-12.
- Atiyyah, H.S. (1993), "Management development in Arab countries: the challenges of the 1990s", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 3-12.
- Banker, R., Field, J., Schroeder, R. and Sinha, K. (1996), "Impact of work teams on manufacturing performance: a longitudinal field study", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 39 No. 4, pp. 867-90.
- Bartol, K.M. and Hagmann, L.L. (1992), "Team-based pay plans: a key to effective team work", *Compensation and Benefits Review*, Vol. 24, pp. 24-9.
- Belbin, M. (1993), *Team Roles at Work*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.
- Belbin, M. (1996), "Team roles and a self-perception inventory", in Billsberry, J. (Ed.), *The Effective Manager: Perspectives and Illustrations*, Sage Publications, London.
- Bergmann, T. and de Meuse, K.P. (1996), "Diagnosing whether an organization is truly ready to empower work teams: a case study", *Human Resource Planning*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 38-47.
- Butter, D. (1999), "Meed Egypt: special report", *Meed Middle East Economic Digest*, Vol. 43 No. 15, pp. 17-35.
- Cohen, S.G. and Bailey, D.E. (1997), "What makes teams work: group effectiveness research for the shopfloor to executive suite", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 239-90.
- Cully, M., O'Reilly, A., Millward, N., Forth, J., Woodland, S., Dix, G. and Bryson, A. (1998), *The Workplace Employee Relations Survey: First Findings*, DTI, ACAS, ESRC, PSI, London.
- Dyer, J.L. (1984), "Team research and training: a state-of-the-art review", in Muckler, F.A. (Ed.), *Human Factors Review*, Human Factors Society, Santa Monica, CA.
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, P. and Lowe, A. (1991), *Management Research: An Introduction*, Sage Publications, London.
- Elmuti, D. (1996), "The perceived impact of team based management systems on organizational effectiveness", *International Journal of Manpower*, Vol. 17 No. 8, pp. 4-17.
- Elmuti, D. (1997), "Self-managed work teams approach: creative management tool or a fad?", *Management Decision*, Vol. 35 No. 3-4, pp. 233-9.
- Fiani and Partners (Eds) (1998), *Kompass Egypt Financial Year Book*, Al-Ahram Commercial Press, Kalyoub.
- Francis, D. and Young, D. (1970), *Improving Work Groups: A Practical Manual for Teambuilding*, University Associates, La Jolla, CA.
- Gladstein, D.L. (1984), "Groups in context: a model of task group effectiveness", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 29, pp. 449-517.
- Gordon, J. (1992), "Work teams: how far have they come?", *Training*, Vol. 29 No. 29, pp. 59-65.
- Greenberg, J. and Baron, R.A. (1996), *Behavior in Organizations: Understanding and Managing the Human Side of Work*, 6th ed., Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Guzzo, R.A. and Shea, G.P. (1992), "Group performance and intergroup relations in organisations", in Dunnette, M.D. and Hough, L.M. (Eds), *Handbook of Industrial and Organisational Psychology*, 2nd ed., Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, CA.

- 
- Hackman, J.R. (1987), "The design of work teams", in Lorsch, J. (Ed.), *Handbook of Organisational Behaviour*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Hackman, J.R. (1990), *Groups That Work and Those That Don't: Creating Conditions for Effective Teamwork*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Hackman, J.R. and Oldham, G.R. (1975), "Development of the job diagnostic survey", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 60, pp. 159-70.
- Hardingham, A. (1995), *Working in Teams*, Institute of Personnel and Development, London.
- Hatem, T. (1994), "Egypt: exploring management in the Middle East", *International Studies of Management Organisation*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 116-36.
- Hayes, N. (1997), *Successful Team Management*, International Thomson Business Press, London.
- Herriot, P. and Pemberton, C. (1995), "Teams: old myths and a new model", in Billsberry, J. (Ed.), *The Effective Manager, Perspectives and Illustrations*, Sage Publications, London.
- Hickson, D.J. and Pugh, D.S. (1995), *Management Worldwide*, Penguin, London.
- Hofstede, G. (1980a), "Motivation, leadership, and organization: do American theories apply abroad?", *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 42-63.
- Hofstede, G. (1980b), *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*, Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.
- Hogg, M.A. and Abrams, D. (1993), "Towards a single-process uncertainty reduction model of social motivation in groups", in Hogg, M.A. and Abrams, D. (Eds), *Group Motivation: Social Psychological Perspectives*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, NY.
- Keritner, R., Kinicki, A. and Buelens, M. (1999), *Organisational Behaviour*, 1st European ed, McGraw-Hill Co., London.
- Laurent, A. (1986), "The cross-cultural puzzle of international human resource management", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 91-102.
- Lembke, S. and Wilson, M.G. (1998), "Putting the team into teamwork: alternative theoretical contributions for contemporary management practice", *Human Relations*, Vol. 51 No. 7, pp. 927-44.
- Levi, D. and Slem, C. (1995), "Team work in research and development organizations: the characteristics of successful teams", *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 29-42.
- Lussier, R.N. (1996), *Human Relations in Organizations: A Skill-Building Approach*, Irwin, Chicago, IL.
- McHugh, P. (1997), "Team-based work systems: lessons from the industrial relations literature", *Human Resource Planning*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 44-7.
- Margerison, C. and McCann, D. (1985), *How to Lead a Winning Team*, MBC University Press Ltd, Bradford.
- Morgan, B.B., Salas, E. and Glickman, A.S. (1993), "An analysis of team evolution and maturation", *Journal of General Psychology*, Vol. 120 No. 3, pp. 277-91.
- Mullen, B., Johnson, D.A. and Drake, S.D. (1987), "Organisational productivity as a function of group composition: a self-attention perspective", *Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 127, pp. 143-50.
- Niehaus, R. and Swiercz, P.M. (1996), "Do HR systems affect the bottom line? We have the answer", *Human Resource Planning*, Vol. 19 No. 4.
- Nydell, M. (1996), *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Westerners*, Intercultural Press, Yarmouth, ME.

- 
- Osterman, P. (1994), "How common is workplace transformation and who adopts it?", *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 47 No. 2, pp. 173-88.
- Parker, G.M. (1990), *Team Players and Teamwork: The New Competitive Business Strategy*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, CA.
- Parnell, J.A. and Hatem, T. (1999), "Cultural antecedents of behavioural differences between American and Egyptian managers", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 36 No. 3, pp. 399-418.
- Procter, S. and Mueller, F. (2000), *Teamworking*, 1st ed., Macmillan Business, London.
- Rahmati, N. (2000), "Teaching information systems and international students: a qualitative examination of the cultural differences in computer support group work", *Proceedings of the 15th Annual Conference of the International Academy for Information Management*, Brisbane, 8-10 December.
- Russ-Eft, D., Preskill, H. and Sleezer, C. (Eds) (1997), *Human Resource Development Review: Research and Implications*, Sage Publications, London.
- Sinclair, A. (1992), "The tyranny of a team ideology", *Organization Studies*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 611-26.
- Steiner, I.D. (1972), *Group Process and Productivity*, Academic Press, New York, NY.
- Sundstrom, E., de Meuse, K.P. and Futrell, D. (1990), "Work teams: applications and effectiveness", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 45 No. 2, pp. 120-33.
- Tayeb, M. (1996), *The Management of a Multicultural Workforce*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY.
- Tessler, M.A. (1987), *The Evaluation and Application of Survey Research in the Arab World*, Westview Special Studies on the Middle East, Westview Press, Boulder, CO.
- Yousef, D.A. (2001), "Islamic work ethic: a moderator between organizational commitment and job satisfaction in cross-cultural context", *Personnel Review*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 152-69.