Section I

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF COOPERATION
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TEAMWORK AND COOPERATION
FUNDAMENTALS OF ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

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UNDERSTANDING COOPERATION

A straightforward way to consider cooperation is in terms of its outcomes: cooperation occurs when people have strong relationships where they work together well so that they succeed at their tasks. They are not simply a group but have become an effective team. Their cooperation is clear from the results of their collaboration. The issue then is to identify the antecedents and conditions that give rise to this productive teamwork. Researchers often focus on the interaction that collaborators develop. The essence of cooperation is thought to be constructive, pro-social interactions. Cooperation involves helpful, supportive, and integrative actions that in turn help the team succeed at its task and strengthen interpersonal relationships.

In the 1940s, Morton Deutsch (1949, 1973, Chapter 2 this volume) defined cooperation in terms of how individuals and groups believed they were interdependent with each other. Considerable research has developed this perspective and shown how goal interdependence, interaction, and outcomes are related. Deutsch proposed that individuals self-interestedly pursue their goals, but how they believe their goals are related determines how they interact, and their interaction determines outcomes. Individuals may conclude that their goals are structured so that as they move toward achieving their own goals they promote the success, obstruct, or have no impact on the success of others. Deutsch identified these alternatives as cooperation, competition, and independence.

In cooperation, people believe their goals are positively related. They understand their own goal attainment helps others reach their goals; as one succeeds, others succeed. They then share information, exchange resources, and in other ways support each other to act effectively. Mutual expectations of trust and gain through cooperation promote ongoing efforts to support and assist each other (Deutsch, 1962). This promotive interaction results in relationships characterized by positive regard, openness, and productivity.
In contrast, people may believe that their goals are competitive, that is, one’s goal attainment precludes, or at least makes less likely, the goal attainment of others. People with competitive goals conclude that they are better off when others act ineffectively. This atmosphere of mistrust restricts information and resource exchange. They withhold information and ideas to increase their chances of winning the competition and may even actively obstruct the other’s effective actions. These interaction patterns result in mutual hostility, restricted communication, and mutual goal independence occurs when people believe their goals are unrelated. The goal attainment of one neither helps nor hinders the goal attainment of others. Success by one means neither failure nor success for others. People conclude that it means little to them if others act effectively or ineffectively. Independent work creates disinterest and indifference.

In most situations, all three goal interdependencies exist but it is the one that people emphasize that is expected to affect their interaction and outcomes most significantly. People have a choice of whether to emphasize cooperative, competitive, or independent goals (Evans, Chapter 3 this volume).

This theorizing suggests the potential of cooperation but also the demands in developing cooperative work. Competition and independence are viable alternatives that can be highly attractive to individual team members. Moreover, team members must also interact in ways that promote cooperation in order that the team can progress toward the success that reinforces mutual commitment to cooperative work. The next sections discuss the potential for, and challenges to, developing sustained cooperation.

COOPERATION FOR PRODUCTIVITY AND INDIVIDUALITY

Cooperation has been theorized to have a wide range of beneficial effects. Indeed, it provides the basic rationale for an organization and can bridge its two major interfaces: the organization with the environment and the individual with the organization (Fieschi, Chapter 4 this volume). By combining resources and ideas, cooperative work can help an organization innovate and produce value so that it can continue to gain necessary support from customers, governments, and other stakeholders (Dunne & Barnes, Chapter 25 this volume). By providing a rich and rewarding social environment, cooperative work can also integrate organizational members and gain their commitment. For example, specific benefits of cooperation are thought to include mutual assistance and support, division of labor, specialization of effort, accurate communication, open discussion of diverse views, identification of problems and shortcomings, creation of new alternatives, confidence in new ideas, effective risk-taking, and commitment to implementation (West & Hirst, Chapter 15 this volume).

Cooperative teams are practical mediums within which we can foster communication between diverse people and build coalitions that result in innovation. Teams help employees and managers share hunches, doubts, and misgivings and discuss emerging ideas and practices to solve and even find problems. Their mutual support encourages them to consider these problems as opportunities to exploit. They exchange ideas and suggestions that give them a fresh perspective, together withstand frustration, and integrate ideas in unique, effective ways. They share the work of collecting data on their solution, and together debate the virtues and pitfalls. Because they have challenged the idea from several perspectives they have the confidence they can be successful and believe they have the
resources and strength to see the idea through. Teams can involve and gain the commitment of representatives from the groups and departments who must implement the innovation.

Organizational members are also thought to gain a great deal through cooperation. They are fulfilled by superior achievement, feel supported, receive feedback, strengthen their self-esteem, and see themselves as part of a larger effort. They develop their individuality as they take on different roles and perform specialized duties. They express and defend their own perspectives and negotiate agreements that promote their self-interests. Rewarding interaction, individual fulfillment, and team success strengthen people’s commitment to cooperative goals and form a mutually beneficial cycle.

However, cooperation has been thought to involve costly and potentially inefficient coordination. These costs may distract and nullify any benefits. Group members may only reinforce each other’s biases and inadequate reasoning (Coff, Chapter 23 this volume). Cooperative work can also result in significant obstacles and frustrations such as “group-think” pressures to conform, lowered motivation, social loafing, a willingness to “free-ride,” and shirking one’s own duties (Rutte, Chapter 17 this volume).

Deutsch (1962) argued that cooperation’s effects, even those that are generally useful, may prove counterproductive in the long term. Strong relationships can result in favoritism that discriminates against outsiders and resists necessary change. Cooperators can become overspecialized and unable to adapt to new roles and demands. They may be too open to influence and become vulnerable to exploitation. Cooperation creates dynamics that undermine as well as reinforce it. Moreover, competition has been theorized to promote motivation as people seek to be the best and to pose challenges that strengthen people’s resolve and confidence. Studies have shown that competition as well as independence can be constructive and promote productivity under certain conditions.

Recent meta-analyses of hundreds of empirical studies have clarified that over the situations and tasks investigated, cooperation is much more facilitative of productivity and achievement than competition and independence (Johnson & Johnson, Chapter 9 this volume; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Johnson et al., 1981; Stanne, Johnson, & Johnson, 1999). This general finding holds between groups as well as within them, though cooperation’s superiority appears to be less for simple compared to complex tasks. These meta-analyses also indicate that cooperation promotes social support, strong relationships, and self-confidence much more than competition and independence. These results reinforce the practice of relying on teams to accomplish vital organizational tasks.

Although the meta-analyses of the research do not support the claim that competition and independence are widely useful in organizations, they do not imply that cooperative work is always superior. We need much more research to identify the conditions under which competition and independence have important, constructive roles within and between organizations. For example, it may be that competition between groups and organizations is useful when it occurs within a more general cooperative framework (Stanne, Johnson, & Johnson, 1999).

Nor do the strong meta-analyses results imply that cooperation is a quick-fix solution that easily integrates individuals into the organization and the organization with its environment. In addition to identifying the conditions when cooperation is appropriate, teamwork must be well structured before its potential is realized. Cooperation’s beneficial cycle should be strengthened and its undermining effects dealt with. Managing cooperation so that it continues to promote individuals and the organization may be the most demanding challenge facing organizations.
Cooperation between two individuals each with his or her agenda and unique style is often emotionally and intellectually challenging. They must coordinate so that they both choose to cooperate, together develop practical and fair ways to assist each other, and manage their inevitable conflicts. Promoting cooperation within a group of diverse people under pressure to perform is usually significantly more challenging. Leading various departments, teams, and business units each with its own identity to work as a cooperative organization team to meet present demands and prepare for the future can be a most daunting goal (van Knippenberg, Chapter 18 this volume).

Managing cooperation is not getting easier. As chapters in this handbook attest, managers and employees are increasingly asked to work together across disciplinary, organizational, national, and cultural boundaries (Leung, Lu, & Liang, Chapter 27 this volume). They are often geographically dispersed where they must rely on technology to communicate and coordinate (Agarwal, Chapter 21 this volume). Multifunctional teams must coordinate with each other and deal with their discipline differences to develop new products quickly and efficiently (Drazin, Kazanjian, & Blyler, Chapter 22 this volume; Harris & Beyerlein, Chapter 10).

Ongoing trust in strategic alliances typically requires the commitment of both organizations and the individuals who must actually work together, as mistrust at one level can undermine trust at another (Currall & Inkpen, Chapter 26 this volume). Gray and Clyman (Chapter 9 this volume) identify and categorize the many significant obstacles and hurdles to developing integrative consensus with multiple parties. Power and status can be corrupting and invite exploitation (Coleman & Voronov, Chapter 12 this volume).

Research, though it does not specify plans for how managers and employees can manage cooperation, does suggest major ways to proceed. Positively related goals, mutually supportive and open interaction, and team and individual success are the reinforcing ingredients that managers and employees can develop. All participants, not just the leader, must choose to work cooperatively. They feel their destinies are mutually bonded together and that they “are in this together.” They trust that other team members will reciprocate. Cooperation involves interaction and procedures, but it also involves the internal, psychological commitment of individuals who also believe their goals are positively related (Young, Chapter 5 this volume). The organization’s structure, reward system, culture, and leadership style should reinforce this internal commitment.

Chapter authors have summarized research that can be used to develop the different components of cooperation. Organizational structures such as corporate governance and human resource management practices of recruitment, retention, and compensation are potentially powerful tools to strengthen cooperative interdependence and interaction (Stevens, Chapter 24 this volume). Organizations can develop compensation programs such as profit sharing that motivate teams to continue to make their contributions (Coff, Chapter 23 this volume). Task structures should also foster the interaction that promotes teams (Young, Chapter 5 this volume). Diversity within and between groups can make cooperative teamwork more productive but they must be aligned with the organization’s context and in other ways managed effectively (Joshi & Jackson, Chapter 14 this volume).

Interventions can also focus on promotive interaction among team members. Group identity and attachment foster effective teamwork (Korsgaard, Brodt, & Sapienza, Chapter 6 this volume).
Aligning members’ thinking can help develop the team cognition that facilitates decision making (Glynn & Barr, Chapter 12 this volume). Team mental models can help members operate on the same basis so that they can communicate successfully (Langan-Fox, Chapter 16 this volume). Team identity is important to the organization and individual but it should reinforce rather than oppose the identity of other groups (van Knippenberg, Chapter 18 this volume). Focusing on quality customer service and effective customer relationships can bind organizational groups together (Dunne & Barnes, Chapter 25 this volume).

Learning to become a successful team can be a vital cooperative goal that binds people together for the long term. However, learning is risky so that people need considerable psychological safety to experiment and receive feedback (Edmondson, Chapter 13 this volume). Training can also be useful by helping team members understand how such elements as individual accountability and group reflective processing strengthen cooperative teamwork (Johnson & Johnson, Chapter 9 this volume).

Misunderstandings, disputes, and other conflicts provide a critical test that, if handled well, can strengthen cooperative teamwork but, if handled poorly, undermine it (Deutsch, Chapter 2 this volume). Team members must understand the types of conflicts and their choices of how to approach them (De Dreu & Weingart, Chapter 8 this volume). Accurate, shared schemas about the value of open, cooperative approaches facilitate the productive use of task conflict and reduce interpersonal misunderstandings (Rentsch & Zelno, Chapter 7 this volume).

Power and cultural differences must also be faced. Making power positive and avoiding the oppressive effects of power differences are important team skills (Coleman & Voronov, Chapter 12 this volume). People with diverse cultures can develop a framework for collaboration through understanding of each other’s ways and together learning how to develop common methods (Leung, Lu, & Liang, Chapter 27 this volume).

Managers and employees then have powerful methods that they can use to strengthen their cooperative work. However, structures and interaction patterns can undermine as well as strengthen cooperative teamwork (Clark, Chapter 20 this volume). Ineffective communication and conflict management threaten to reinforce competitive elements. Developing cooperative work requires persistence as well as skill.

**INTEGRATION**

Trade-off, “either-or” thinking, has dominated organizational theorizing. Societies and organizations value either the collective group or the individual: what is good for the organization costs individuals. Organizations prosper through discipline and conformity whereas individuals thrive on self-expression and relationships. But cooperation research summarized in the following chapters reveals the limits of this theorizing. Although there may be some trade-offs, the individual flourishes and the organization delivers value to stakeholders through open, spirited cooperative work.

The choice is usually posed as to be for the self or for the team, to act selfishly or altruistically. Although some situations require such a choice, many situations in organizations allow and promote working for mutual benefit. In cooperation, people have a vested interest in each other’s success and encourage each other to act effectively. When they exchange their
abilities and discuss their differences cooperatively, they all benefit by working together to reach goals. Cooperative work melds the value of individuality with the power of group action. By combining their opposing ideas and perspectives, people in cooperation take effective action. Within a strong cooperative team, individuality and freedom of expression very much contribute to the quality of group life and the productivity of the organization.

Leaders often believe that they have to choose between “tough” productivity-oriented or “soft,” people-oriented approaches. But cooperative work points to a contemporary style of leading and changing organizations. Cooperative teamwork is soft in that it requires people to be respectful and sensitive to each other and develop strong, trusting relationships, but it is also tough in its demands on completing common tasks and confronting problems and struggling to work through conflict. In this way, leaders empower individuals to get vital organizational tasks done.

Cooperative work can also integrate traditional rivals. Organizations that compete in the same market are learning how they can work together to strengthen their industry and together participate in other markets. Suppliers and manufacturers are forging long-term relationships that improve quality and reduce costs.

A most pressing need is to channel our organizations to help integrate diverse people so that they value their differences and learn from each other. Our global world has opened up great potential for new cooperative work. Indonesians are joining forces with European and Indian people to develop global products and solve global problems. Editors from England, the United States, and China, along with authors from around the world, together developed this book published in England and distributed worldwide. But our global world has also made direct warfare and terrorism to revenge ancient and emerging injustices more possible.

Will we have the long-term vision, the insight, and discipline to put cooperation into place to realize these integrations? Confidence may not be warranted but hope is essential. Although we need much more research on fundamental cooperative processes as well as professional practice and documented procedures, researchers and practitioners have worked hard to develop a knowledge base for cooperative work. We believe the ideas and research summarized in the following chapters provide a realistic basis for hope.

Because we are traveling on the same ship, we will either sail or sink together.

(Chinese proverb)

REFERENCES