



Selected Aspects of Building and Developing a Modern High-Performing Team

Mieczysław ŚLÓSZARZ¹⁾

¹⁾ Dr eng. AGH University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Mining and Geoengineering, Department of Economics and Management In Industry, 30 059 Cracow, Poland; email: slosarz@agh.edu.pl, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6775-3774>

<http://doi.org/10.29227/IM-2019-01-45>

Submission date: 11-07-2018 | Review date: 02-05-2019

Abstract

The publication presents selected issues related to the creation, development and retention of staff teams. It discusses team building stages and the characteristics of modern teams. Another discussed aspect is the identification of team characteristics according to Belbin's concept and their relevance for the selection of team members. Outdoor training is presented as a form of team development. The publication also presents conflicts in a team, their causes and conflict-solving methods as well as the characteristics of a good leader.

Keywords: management, teams, personality traits, conflict

Introduction

In contemporary times human resources management has become an essential but difficult task. On the one hand, civilisational progress and increased worker mobility facilitates labour force acquisition from other regions of the country. On the other hand, the said mobility creates a risk of losing the current employees to other business entities. Another player on the Polish job market is made up by a numerous group of employees from neighbouring countries, especially from Ukraine and Belarus. It is estimated that in 2018 the Polish job market included approx. 2 million legal workers from Ukraine alone. A considerable number of incoming workers has had a substantial impact on the Polish job market. A vast majority of them are blue-collar workers, but they are also found in sectors requiring specialised education, such as the medical or IT sector. The high worker supply forces Polish employees to undertake extensive measures to protect their job positions and employers to retain their best employees, who are looking for better jobs, also in other cities or towns or even in other countries.

The mentioned factors should also motivate human resources managers in companies to ensure stable employment and to take steps to retain the most valuable employees. This can be achieved in a number of ways, including formal and legal, economic and motivational mechanisms. A mining company differs in work characteristics from other companies, especially as far as underground work is concerned. However, it resembles other sector in terms of staff rotation, which is present in this industry as well. More and more often the hired individuals do not have a mining education background. This is partially a result of a considerable limitation of the number of occupational schools in Poland. In mining it is often the case that underground works are outsourced to external companies whose employees sometimes lack a mining-related education background. While in many branches of industry employees can be provided with supplementary training suitable for a given job position fairly quickly and

safely, the process is much more complex and associated with greater risk in the mining industry.

With the above circumstances in mind, it seems sensible to build effective teams capable of long-term cooperation. The fulfilment of tasks set before a group of employees (a team) often determines the success of the whole project in which the team is involved. However, one could ask about the difference between a group of people who perform tasks together and a team. How to build an effective team and manage it efficiently? This study focusses on aspects of this process.

Stages of building a high-performing team

The objective of human resources management is for the company to achieve success thanks to the people hired by it. The main objectives of this process include: [1]

- to provide a number of services supporting the company's objectives and constituting an element of the organisation governance process,
- to acquire and retain qualified employees,
- to improve and develop people's inborn capabilities – their input, potential and the ability to find employment through providing training and continuous development opportunities,
- to create an atmosphere contributing to harmonious relations between the managerial staff and employees facilitating mutual trust,
- procedural justice – dealing with all issues related to how – people are treated,
- transparency – openness and explaining to employees the proposals, decisions and procedures established by the managerial staff.

At present one of the key factors impacting the selection of candidates in a recruitment process involves their predispositions for team work (one of the pillars of recruitment at Toyota). In turn, the employee selection philosophy at Phil-

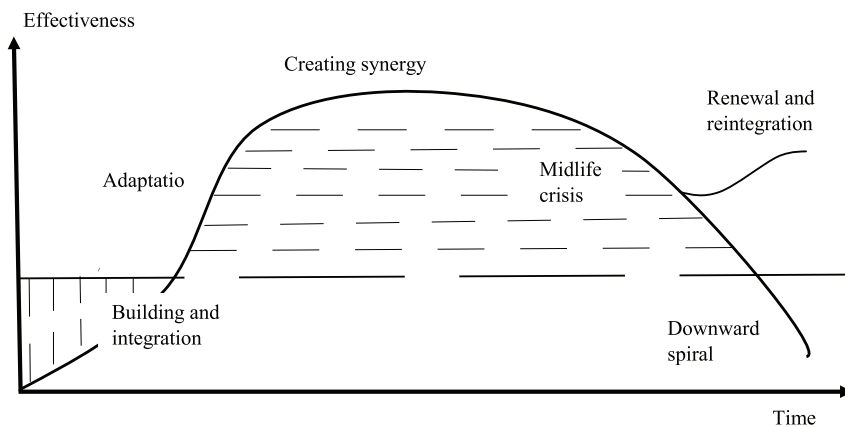


Fig. 1. Life cycle of a team. Source: [7]
Rys 1. Fazy życia zespołu. Źródło: [7]

lip Morris is based on the assumption that candidates should have communication and cooperation skills.

When embarking on the task to manage a group of people with common goals, cooperation should begin with transforming the group into an effective team. This requires some effort and does not always bring the expected results. However, team building should take advantage of the synergy effect (the result of the work of closely cooperating people is greater than the sum of results achieved by each of them individually). In addition, team work increases the effectiveness of communication and is more motivating.

Teams are not created automatically and good cooperation does not arise spontaneously – team building is a process which requires considerable effort. The first step towards effective team building is to realise what a group is, how it functions and what its characteristics are. Teams usually have basic and supplementary characteristics.

1. Basic characteristics:
 - A common goal,
 - A good leader,
 - Willingness to cooperate,
 - Good communication,
 - Division of tasks in a team,
 - Good team relations.
2. Supplementary characteristics:
 - Intrinsic motivation of the members,
 - Trust towards other people,
 - Mutually established operation rules,
 - Building on differences,
 - Flexibility and openness to change,
 - Continuous improvement.

Each team goes through a life cycle. Fig. 1 presents the typical life cycle of a team.

In the “Building and integration” phase, the team’s effectiveness is lower than the cost of maintaining it. This is a typical phenomenon resulting from the incomplete integration between its members, which reduces team effectiveness. Attempts should be made to reduce the duration of this phase to the maximum possible extent. Usually high emphasis is placed on training (such as outdoor training sessions). This

is a time for identifying team members’ skills and predispositions and for verifying the selection of group members, inter alia through shifting human resources between teams, promoting leaders and building positive relations between team members. It is important for team members to accept the fact that their personal goals are less important than those of the entire team.

In the second phase, i.e. “Adaptation”, group members become more and more familiar to each other, and personality differences become evident. Rules of team work are developed. Disputes and clashes between team members may be observed, which is a natural phenomenon in this phase of a team’s life cycle. The first arguments and crises take place.

The key stage in the life cycle is the third phase, in which team synergy is used to achieve the set objectives and tasks. This phase should last as long as possible. Attempts should be made to maintain the highest possible effectiveness. The basic tasks of a team manager include setting goals, avoiding unnecessary interventions, delegating authorisations, motivating, individual coaching and monitoring the team’s work.

Even a well-performing team can go through a “Midlife crisis”. There are visible first symptoms of the crisis, which should draw the manager’s attention. These include fatigue and boredom, low motivation, the lack of a sense of development, falling into a routine, team members’ burnout or attempts to find something new (if they don’t find it in the team, they often start looking elsewhere). This is a very important moment in a team’s life cycle. When it is overlooked, the team may move on to the “Downward spiral” phase. If leaders respond early enough to the crisis symptoms, there is a chance for the group to renew and reintegrate. The leaders’ role is to take measures to rebuild motivation in the group. This may involve a change in the range of duties, assigning new tasks to the team, introducing a new person, promoting selected team members, increasing the degree of delegating authorities and responsibilities, involving the team in planning, consulting ideas, training and team building trips.

However, if the management does not respond effectively at the right time, it may seem necessary to accept the fact of the team’s disintegration and the necessity to rebuild it.

A key element in the team building process is the selection of its members. Diversity in a team is crucial – according

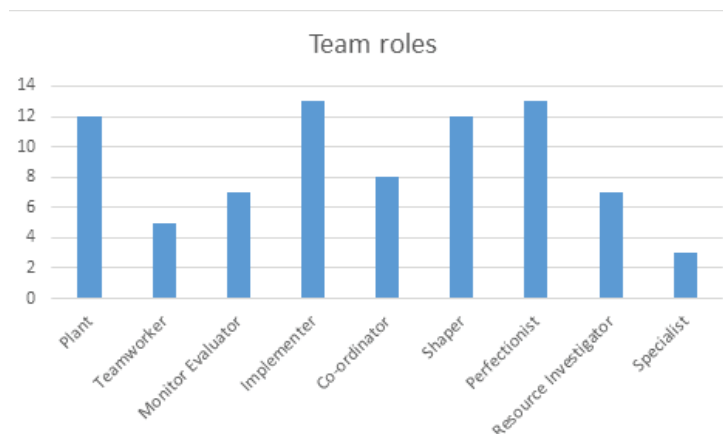


Fig. 6 Safety certificates in an enterprise. Source: prepared by the author, 2019

Rys. 4. Struktura zatrudniania wg płci i wieku w GK LW Bogdanka SA. Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie [23]

to the author only a proper level of diversity makes it possible to achieve the set outcomes. Errors are often made in the team building process, consisting in assigning similar roles to all team members and imposing roles on team members by using a top-down approach.

One of the methods used in the selection of employees is Belbin's concept. It is based on identifying (analysing) the predisposition of a given team member to perform one of the team roles mentioned in Belbin's test. The test can be carried out even before the formal assignment of members to the team. Belbin's test provides information on the possibility for specific individuals to function in a team. Team role diagnosis can be used for building a new team, adding a new person to a team and increasing the effectiveness of team operations. Belbin identified 9 typical team roles; through analysing the test results, it can be determined with a fairly good accuracy which role a given person is suited to play in the group.

Belbin provided a list of the following roles: [2]

- Plant

Plant's role is mainly providing new ideas and solutions to problems. Typically the most creative and intelligent person in the team. Often involved in the process of initiating new stages of the project or adjusting the existing assumptions during its implementation. Too many Plants in a team can lead to conflicts. Plant's strengths include innovativeness, imagination and seriousness. Possible weakness are changing moods, from euphoria to discouragement, a tendency to be chaotic.

- Monitor Evaluator

The Monitor Evaluator is great at analysing problems, developing concepts and suggestions. Good at analytical tasks. Can be viewed as a slow and boring person who lacks enthusiasm. Performs well in difficult moments for the team. Monitor Evaluator's strengths include being practical and composed.

- Co-ordinator

Good at leading and co-ordinating work in a highly diversified team. Able to effectively cooperate in the team, organise discussion in the group, usually able to solve problems in a practical way. Good at utilising human resources and poten-

tial. Strong points: goal-oriented, enthusiastic, trusting and composed.

- Implementer

Very useful in a group due to reliability and ability to adapt. Effective and intuitive. The Implementer sees to the completion of tasks which should be fulfilled. Often involved in passing information on team's tasks and operations. Implementer's strengths include discipline, practicality and being able to provide support. The weak points are submissiveness and the lack of flexibility in action.

- Completer Finisher

The Completer Finisher is particularly valuable for tasks which require concentration and a high level of precision. Typically best at paying attention to details in the team's work. Sees to the keeping of deadlines, monitors the performance of tasks as per the schedule. Precise, able to execute ideas and tasks. Aware of the tasks and goals set for the team. Completer Finisher's strengths include being disciplined, composed and striving for perfection in his/her actions.

- Shaper

Typically a good leader. Thrives on pressure, demonstrates a proactive approach. Able to motivate the team to action. Capable of taking action when complications arise. Takes action quickly and usually effectively. Action is his/her priority. Good at introducing changes. Typically the most effective member of the team, responsible for its actions. Strong points: resistance to stress, efficiency. Thrives in a team. Shaper's weakness is impatience.

- Teamworker

Teamworker's main tasks is keeping a good atmosphere in the group and preventing interpersonal issues. Avoids conflicts, is able to include the team to limit their occurrence and good at mitigating those that have already arisen. A sensitive person. Perfect at sensing and improving moods in the team. Teamworker's strong points are enthusiasm, being articulate, trusting and able to compromise. His/her weakness include submissiveness and often excessive faith in people.

- Resource Investigator

Highly valuable in developing and implementing ideas from outside the team. Good at acquiring and maintaining external contacts and at negotiating. Has an ability to obtain information and analyse data. A very crucial role at the beginning of team formation and throughout its existence. Enjoys a good opinion in the team. Resource Investigator strengths include resourcefulness, ability to search for information, being articulate and enthusiastic. His/her weaknesses are changing moods and sometimes being overoptimistic.

- Specialist

The Specialist is a very important team member. Without his/her skills, the team would not be able to carry out its tasks. Able to implement tasks efficiently, but usually not very creative. Able to calmly analyse group's ideas. His/her strong points are an analytical mind, practical skills, impartiality and prudence. The weaknesses include the lack of creativity, weaker interpersonal contacts and an excessively critical approach.

According to Belbin, well-functioning teams include members with highly diversified roles. When building a team, attention should be paid to selecting people with the essential qualifications (with proper education, knowledge, skills and experience). However, it is also crucial to select the right people for the respective roles in a team.

Belbin's research also shows that in order to create an effective team it is important to compose it in such a way to fill all the roles and, when necessary, for other team members to be able to replace a given person.

During team building classes, the author carried out Belbin's test on a group of 80 students. The studied group comprised full-time students, with a majority having no previous job experience. Part of the group was active on the labour market, but these were usually temporary jobs not related to their field of studies. Thus, it can be assumed that these people did not have experience in the profession which they intended to practise in the future. [9]

Having analysed the obtained results, it can be concluded that in the group of students of a technical higher education institution most people saw themselves in creative roles or those which required perfectionism. A smaller group showed predispositions for being teamworkers or specialists. However, the studied group was not highly diversified. It is recommended to carry out research on a less homogeneous group.

To recapitulate the discussion of team roles, it can be stated that when building a team it is important to choose people with diverse team characteristics.

Team development

Staff teams require continuous improvement and development; otherwise they may experience situations of crisis and decline in performance. Currently there are many methods available to motivate employees and enhance team development. These are particularly popular in corporations, especially in the trade and IT sector. Team formation and development, however, are also crucial in production enterprises, such as those operating in the mining industry. [8]

Team building may involve the following initial situations:

- Building a team out of people who are just getting to know each other
- Streamlining the work of the existing team
- Integrating the team formed out of two (or more) teams
- Maintaining the team's energy in moments of changes or crisis
- Building formal relations between departments
- Building informal cooperation between departments

Regardless of the team's phase and status, its evolution should be supported. [4]

HR departments should manage team development on an ongoing basis. This is often achieved through such methods as cooperation between teams, company events or the creation of active leisure zones. Outdoor training sessions are an interesting option for employees and become increasingly popular among them.

They have a unique character, differing completely from those organised at the workplace.

The main objective of these measures, in addition to the content-related aspects, is building atmosphere in the team, which usually translates into an improved quality of its future work.

As the name suggests, outdoor training sessions are organised outside the workplace, often outside of the workers' place of residence. The main reason for choosing such location is to completely isolate training participants from the outside world, their families, friends, professional and personal problems. The basic task of the organiser in their choice of the location is to meet the following assumptions: [7]

- a place distant from civilisation
- lack of Internet access
- minimal contact of the participants with family or friends
- maximum integration of the participants
- extensive space to use for field games
- comfortable lodging contributing to participants' integration

The fulfilment of the above assumptions should be based on a prior inspection of the potential training location. A place distant from civilisation, preferably without Internet access, is difficult but possible to achieve. In order to ensure complete independence of external factors, it can be suggested to put mobile phones in a deposit (at least for a while), which, of course, requires the participants' consent. This way they would be able to completely focus on the activities and would not be distracted by the nearby attractions or virtual reality.

It is a good idea to start the event by asking the participants to reach the location individually as a form of a car orienteering exercise – the participants would receive instructions on how to reach the lodging place with a description of the successive sections of the road, number of kilometres, direction, road number, etc.

When planning the training trip, its main goal should be clearly specified. Usually the priorities are participant integration and soft skills development. This means that the content-related aspects of the training are important, but they are not the ultimate goal. Therefore, in planning this type of training emphasis is placed on group work, frequent interactions

between participants, multidimensional tasks which require creative solutions to complex and interdisciplinary problems.

People in charge of the specific modules/panels should be to a greater extent moderators than trainers. Independently solving a problem by the participants is much more valuable and conducive to development than receiving a ready-made solution by the trainer.

The key aspects related to designing and executing training trips that are worth considering include: [7]

- Determining the details of risks
- Building the atmosphere of the training
- The manner of conducting the respective modules
- Feedback
- Subcontracting costs
- Analysis of training needs and participants' limitations
- Constructing the content of the training
- Selecting and testing the activities
- A list of questions – a starting point for discussion
- Finding subcontractors
- Organisational and insurance arrangements
- Carrying out the training
- Assessing the effects – conclusions for the future
- Positive energy

In the training execution process, the so-called “ice breakers” are very crucial, i.e. people who take care of the atmosphere of the training, solve any possible interpersonal problems and initiate group's actions if its members do not know how to start. These persons' task is also to make the participants aware of their role in the team and to coordinate activities, especially those which are interdisciplinary in nature.

Another important role during training is that of a Facilitator. Their tasks are as follows:

- not being an expert, but a moderator
- not providing ready-made solutions, but leading participants towards their own solutions
- must have training skills, be able to ask questions and transform information into concrete outcomes for the company.

Training trips have a huge potential. When well-planned and executed, they provide extensive opportunities for team integration and leadership development. After such training employees often find it much easier to cooperate with each other. The time spent together, on both team work and recreation and integration in the positive sense), usually has a great impact on the group's future endeavours. Despite the fact that arranging training trips is time-consuming and usually expensive, companies should consider this form of training. In many enterprises training trips have become a tradition, and are organised regularly, often more than once a year.

Team malfunctions and how to eliminate them

In the work of each team there may be failures resulting from the team's malfunctioning. The typical stages associated with team's malfunctioning are:

- The group makes an error during task implementation
- Error – goal not achieved – FAILURE
- Analysis of the causes of failure – discussion

- Redoing the task (IMPROVEMENT)
- Analysis results – identification of SUCCESS factors
- Discussion and conclusions for the future

The most frequent team malfunctions:

- Analysis of the company's situation from the perspective of one's own interest and not of the company as a whole
- Following an initially established strategy even when the internal or external situation suggests that change is needed
- Considering the current productivity, work organisation or cost indicators, etc. optimal, with no room for improvement
- A failure to adjust operations to strategic goals, especially after changing the company's strategy
- Poor information flow between teams
- Unintentionally generating gossip through gaps in communication and its being unadjusted to the co-workers
- Overlong, poorly organised meetings, arrangements only on paper
- A failure to utilise well-known and simple methods supporting manager's work (e.g. SWOT, Gantt chart, brainstorming)

The knowledge of the above sources of errors facilitates the early detection and prevention of at least some of them.

A team needs a leader to function properly. The major characteristics of a good leader include:[6]

- Charisma
- Being able to provide solutions
- Being a recognised authority
- Listening, giving advice, motivating
- Effective division of tasks
- Introducing enhancements
- Being trustworthy
- Being empathic
- Effective conflict solving
- Taking care of staff development
- Developing a superior strategy
- Facing challenges
- Integrating a group
- Negotiating effectively

In addition, a leader should have the following personality traits:

- Self-esteem
- Being proactive
- Independence
- Positive thinking
- Interdependence
- Internal cohesion
- Sense of abundance
- Ability to create a vision
- Ability and willingness to continuously learn
- Intuition

Conflicts in a team and methods of solving them

Conflict is a natural phenomenon even in healthy, well-functioning organisations. It usually occurs where two

or more parties strive for opposite or different goals. However, actual problems are not necessary for a conflict to arise. It is enough for the involved parties to be convinced of the opposite side's hostility.[5]

The causes of conflicts can also be sought in human emotions. This issue is an area of interest for work and business psychologists. Leaders should be aware that often people under the influence of strong emotions can behave completely irrationally. The nature of emotions and their impact on human activity was the subject of publication [3]

In terms of the subject of the conflict, the following can be specified:

- subject-matter conflicts – are non-personal in nature and refer to specific matters, specifically to the difference in opinions as to their solution. The subject of the conflict is quite easy to define, and the solution lies in the appropriate adjustments in the division of assets or changes introduced in an organisation;
- emotional conflicts – refer to states of frustration and the related emotional tension caused by a negative attitude (i.e. hostility) in human interactions. The actual subject of the conflict is often difficult to capture, and the best solution is to prevent this type of conflicts.

In terms of their range, the following conflicts are identified:

- between groups of employees – resulting from different interests of particular groups, different temporal and spatial horizons, goals and ways of solving problems;
- between individuals – often ascribed to personality differences, but generally caused by disrupted relations between individuals resulting from differing roles or the personalisation of antagonisms between groups;
- interpersonal – occur when an individual does not have clearly defined workplace duties, some tasks are mutually exclusive or expectations exceed the level of perception of an individual's own capabilities

A list of the types of conflict and their basic causes is presented below.

- Conflict of interest:
 - procedures
 - subject-matter issues
 - psychological needs
- Structural conflict:
 - varying range of power
 - poor spatial organisation
 - time constraints
 - unclear division of tasks, authorisations and responsibilities
- Conflict of values
 - central values
 - peripheral values
- Conflict of relations
 - strong emotions
 - stereotypes and prejudice
 - poor communication
 - negative experiences

- Data conflict
 - lack of information
 - misunderstanding
 - varying interpretations of the same information
 - different data collection and analysis procedures

If a conflict arises in a team, it should be solved so as not to lead to a complete disbanding of the team. Solving a conflict requires an accurate diagnosis and remedial measures.

Stages of conflict solving:

- the diagnosis stage
 - recognising the type of the conflict
 - determining causes
 - dispelling negative emotions
- the solution stage
 - choosing the conflict solving style
 - removing actual causes of the conflict
 - reducing emotional tensions.

The most frequent conflict solving styles are as follows:

- avoiding – ignoring or omitting the issue
- adjusting – restructuring one's position not because of accepting the other party's views but for the sake of cooperation
 - competing – adopting the winner/loser attitude and striving for winning at all costs
 - compromising – finding a solution by giving up some of one's needs in return for adequate concessions on the partner's side
 - solving the problem – seeking mutual benefits of a common resolution of the conflict treated as a problem-solving task

Problem-solving strategy – basic stages

- defining the problem – the source of the problem and its essence should be specified, the causes should be named, without blaming others or the environment
- generating alternative solutions – a list of possible solutions should be developed. It is important not to assess the alternatives before the list is closed.
 - choosing the best solution – benefits and costs related to adopting a given solution. Through a thorough analysis of each of the possibilities, a mutual decision on choosing the best proposal should be made.
 - putting the solution into action and controlling the results – the time needed for the completion of a given solution should be specified and its progress should be monitored. When needed, if the selected option does not lead to the expected results, a different solution should be selected. It is important not to adhere to only one solution.

Summary

Nowadays, managing a team requires the application of suitable methods for its creation and development as well as mitigating the effects of their malfunctioning. However, even the best team management does not guarantee the lack of conflicts or problems. Fast and effective response to the changing circumstances is key in such situations. A good leader is able to respond early enough, which may often safeguard the team from failure.

Teams operating within mining companies are governed by the same principles as other teams. Regardless of the specific characteristics of working underground, these teams may also face problems or conflicts. Mining supervision bodies should detect such threats early enough. What makes it even more important is that the nature of work performed by these teams requires their members to maintain good relations, as their life and health often depends on it.

In addition to the right selection of employees, it is a very important problem to look after the appropriate organizational culture in mining companies. The human factor in the production process, in particular in the mining process, is an extremely important link. This issue has been presented in publication [10].

Mid-level managers should also be guided by interpersonal criteria when selecting employees for a team. The information presented in the publication systematizes knowledge in the field of team building theory. It is particularly import-

ant to identify the role that a potential employee can play in a team.

The second important issue for the team leader in the mining industry is the ability to solve problems and conflicts. The publication presents the reasons for their formation and a set of methods for solving them. This is not an easy task, often requires personal experience of the leader or cooperation with professionals in this field.

In addition to professional skills, a modern manager should possess good teamwork skills, such as being able to choose the team members accurately, promote its development, and notice any potential problems to deal with them directly or with the assistance of experts. The ability to identify problems at an early stage is a crucial trait.

The paper presents results of research conducted in AGH University of Science and Technology no. 11.11.100.693

Literatura – References

1. Bator A., Fuksa D., Ślósarz M. (2012) Badanie oczekiwań motywacyjnych pracowników przemysłu wydobywczego, Przegląd Górniczy z. nr 9/2012, Katowice
2. Belbin M. (2002) Twoja rola w zespole, Wydawnictwo GWP, Gdańsk
3. Ekman P., Davidson R.: Natura emocji, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2002; Hartman T. (1999) Kod kolorów - typy osobowości zaszyfrowane w kolorach. Wyd. Amber, Warszawa
4. McKay M., Davis M., Fanning P.: Sztuka skutecznego porozumiewania się. Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 2004.
5. Rummel G. A., Brache A.P.: Podnoszenie efektywności organizacji. PWE, Warszawa 2000
6. Szczepanik R.: Budowanie zespołu. Organizacja szkoleń outdoor i wypraw incentive. One Press, Gliwice, 2005
7. Ślósarz M.: Wybrane zagadnienia budowy zespołów ludzkich — Selected issues of human team building . Marketing i Rynek ; ISSN 1231-7853. — 2017 nr 7
8. Ślósarz M.: Wybrane metody i narzędzia wspomagania zarządzania zespołami ludzkimi — Selected methods and tools to support the management of human teams. Marketing i Rynek, ISSN 1231-7853. — 2018 R. 25 nr 9
9. Sukiennik, M., Bak, P., Kapusta: Corporate culture and the human factor in the Polish mining companies [Kultura korporacyjna a czynnik ludzki w polskich przedsiębiorstwach wydobywczych] (2016) , M Inżynieria Mineralna, 17 (2), pp. 125-134

Wybrane zagadnienia budowy i rozwoju współczesnego zespołu wysokiej wydajności

W publikacji przedstawiono wybrane zagadnienia związane z budową, rozwojem oraz utrzymaniem zespołów pracowniczych. Omówiono etapy budowy zespołu, cechy współczesnych zespołów. Kolejnym poruszonym zagadnieniem była identyfikacja cech zespołowych według koncepcji Belbina i znaczenie tych cech przy doborze członków zespołu. Przedstawiono szkolenia typu outdoor jako jedną z form rozwoju zespołu. W publikacji przedstawiono również konflikty w zespole, przyczyny ich powstawania oraz metody rozwiązywania, a także cechy dobrego lidera.

Słowa kluczowe: zarządzanie, zespoły ludzkie, cechy osobowości, konflikt