

# Collective Staff Performance Management: Inputs and Mediators

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## Abstract

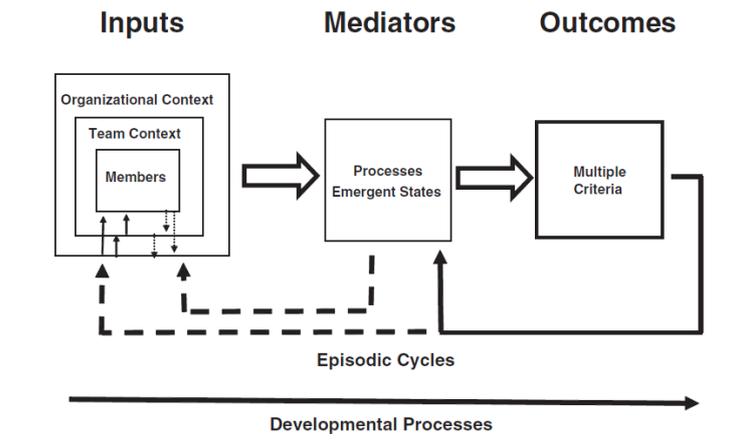
How do collective incentives contribute to team effectiveness? With a field study (71 interviews) and the IMO (Inputs-Mediators-Outcomes) model, we found that major inputs of team effectiveness are: the staff performance management process (SMART objectives, reliable performance appraisals, hybrid incentives), manager's abilities to ensure equity, task interdependence, and a few team members' characteristics (job level, performance level, culture). Major positive and negative mediators are: Free-riding, team spirit, mutual aid, work commitment and mutual motivation. Our findings indicate that collective incentives are one of the several major inputs of team effectiveness. They also reveal that team spirit is perhaps an important component of team cohesion or a new higher-level construct which should be further investigated.

## Introduction

Collective staff performance management is composed of team objectives, team appraisals and team rewards. The management process aims at improving performance or effectiveness in particular via team better communication (Johnson et al., 2006), cooperation (Northen & Kurland, 2013), mutual learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1989), mutual support (LePine, Hollenbeck, Ilgen, & Hedlund, 1997), and more efforts from individuals due to group pressure, altruism, shared responsibility and need for social identify (Charness, Karni, & Levin, 2007; Sutter & Strassmair, 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Wagner, 1995). The collective process fosters trust, collaboration, cohesion and mutual aid (Beersma, Homan, Van Kleef, & De Dreu, 2013; De Dreu, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 1989). It is designed to make individuals' interests converging and to foster cooperation instead of competition (Deutsch, 1949).

The IMO model exposes the determinants of team performance or effectiveness (Figure 1). Expanding from previous research (e.g. Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson, & Jundt, 2005; McGrath, 1964), the model shows that team outcomes are based on inputs which are composed of individual characteristics (competencies, personality, values, socio-demographic characteristics, etc.), team characteristics (team composition, task, leader, training for instance) and organizational ones (culture, HR and management practices for instance). From these inputs, team performance or effectiveness is achieved through team processes and emergent states. Team processes refer to team coordination, communication and other collective actions while team emergent states refer to team cognitive, affective and emotional states (Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001). Emergent states are notably team beliefs or emotions which develop after a certain time. Both team processes and emergent states mediate the team input-outcome relation.

**Figure 1: The IMO model of team effectiveness / performance**



(Source: Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008)

The IMO model captures the determinants of team performance or efficiency at individual, team and organizational levels. The model also describes the dynamics of team performance/efficiency. Team outcomes influence team processes and emergent states which in turn influence team outcomes, and - even if it is less obvious- team outcomes, processes and emergent states influence individuals, the team and possibly the organization which in turn influence team processes and emergent states.

Collective staff performance management uses team objectives and rewards with the view to develop positive team processes and emergent states and ultimately team performance or effectiveness. Reviewing literature on team incentives, DeMatteo and colleagues (DeMatteo, Eby, & Sundstrom, 1998) use the same structure (individual, team, organizational levels) to explain team rewards' efficiency. In the IMO model, collective objectives and their related incentives are team inputs (type of task).

In a previous analysis (Weidmann, Gonin, & Konishi, 2014a), we identified the benefits, drawbacks and conditions of collective staff performance management in a communication company in Switzerland where this process had been implemented. We also analyzed the impact of individual and team characteristics on performance (Weidmann, Gonin, & Konishi, 2015). The aim of this paper is to put these results together and to structure them according to the IMO theoretical model. It is also to compare them with other data collected in another organization. Hence, the research questions we will address in this paper are the following:

*What are the major inputs and mediators of team effectiveness or performance?*

*Which ones are universal / to be found in different organizational contexts and which ones are contingent, i.e. specific to some organizations?*

## **Methodology**

We interviewed 71 persons in 2 companies (Weidmann, Gonin, & Konishi, 2014b). The first one, AA, is a communication organization active in several countries, with a rather

young and dynamic workforce. AA offers a quarterly team perk which depends on team results. It is equally distributed and can amount up to half a monthly salary. The second company, BB, is a large international hotel group where the annual bonus is entirely based on team objectives. The bonus varies from 5 to 45% of the annual salary according to the job level. With AA, we interviewed call center agents who work in large open spaces, and sales staff who work in small shops. With BB, we interviewed reception, restaurant and management teams, all of them being composed of 4-5 persons. Interviews were all individual and semi-structured. Questions covered the benefits, drawbacks and conditions of success of collective incentives. Respondants also had to describe the impact of collective incentives on their own performance. We also asked about individual and team characteristics. Each interview lasted around 45 minutes. AA sales teams included 5-6 persons while call centers included 12-15. BB teams were composed of 4-5 persons. We interviewed all team members except in call centers where we saw around 4-5 persons per team only.

Interviews transcriptions were coded using an inductive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, one of the two researchers read the transcriptions in order to familiarize himself with the data and search for meanings and patterns. Second, interview excerpts related to benefits, drawbacks and conditions for efficient collective incentives were coded in as many categories as possible. This exercise was rather straightforward as direct questions about these three aspects were asked during the interviews. In addition, the coder took also into account statements and replies arising from other questions and which indirectly expressed views about benefits, drawbacks and conditions for the collective process to work properly. Third, these small and numerous categories were collated into broader categories representing recurrent and overarching themes. Fourth, both researchers reviewed the composition of these broad categories together, splitting too heterogeneous ones, merging semantically similar ones, re-coding some data, until obtaining coherent patterns in each category. Finally, additional coding was performed according to these final categories to ensure that we didn't miss any relevant information (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 86-93).

## **Results and discussion**

### **“Universal” versus contingent benefits, drawbacks and conditions**

Five benefits are listed in both AA and BB, in similar proportions and in the same order of importance (Table 1). The collective management process leads to **team spirit, mutual aid, sharing competencies, task commitment and mutual motivation** in both organizations. These elements therefore seem to have a universal nature, or at least, they are to be found in two rather different organizations with different activities. This is aligned with past research, in particular on team cohesion (Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003), cooperation (Northen & Kurland, 2013), mutual learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1989) and mutual support (LePine et al., 1997).

However, some differences appear between AA and BB. As far as benefits are concerned, group pressure, less top-down pressure and fairness are listed by AA but not BB. This may be due to AA's organizational culture. AA staff works in offices where performance statistics constantly appear on screens while it is not the case in BB. This may create more stress on AA's staff than in BB's and explain why individuals refer to pressure. Another difference is justice which does not appear in BB, perhaps as decisions and management is more structured and fair in BB, an older and more stable company than AA (over 20 years in business compared to 14 years punctuated with several take-overs).

**Table 1:** Benefits of the collective staff performance management process

	<b>AA (n=46)</b>	<b>BB (n=25)</b>	<b>Total (n=71)</b>
1. Team spirit	20	12	32
2. Mutual aid	19	13	32
3. Sharing competencies	15	9	24
4. Work commitment	12	8	20
5. Mutual motivation	12	6	18
6. Group pressure	13	1	14
7. Less top-down pressure	12	1	13
8. Fairness, justice	9	1	10*

\* Categories of less than 10 references do not appear in this table and in the following ones.

Two common main drawbacks appear in the same order across AA and BB: **free-riding**, a well-known phenomenon (Olson, 1965), and demotivating **un-SMART objectives**, which has been less addressed in team effectiveness literature (Table 2). Free-riding and un-SMART objectives seem to have a universal nature.

Some drawbacks are listed in AA only. They refer to high and low performers, the formers being penalized and the latter reducing team performance. If comparison between high and low performers matters in AA but not in BB, one may conclude that underperformance does not take place with BB (indeed, few managers referred to low performers). It is probable that BB excludes individuals as soon as they under-perform while AA does not, or at least not so quickly. Team members therefore suffer from them more in AA than in BB. The organizational culture may also explain this. AA's is rather Swiss (consensual) while BB's is almost entirely French (and perhaps more directive).

**Table 2:** Drawbacks of the collective staff performance management process

	<b>AA (n=46)</b>	<b>BB (n=25)</b>	<b>Total (n=71)</b>
1. Free-rider	29	12	41
2. Non-SMART objectives	14	9	23
3. Higher performers are penalised	12	1	13

Conditions for the process to succeed are mainly the same and in the same order between AA and BB (Table 3). There must be a **unified team** with little conflict (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004; Labianca & Brass, 2006), a good manager (Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur, & Hardy, 2009; Sauer, 2011) who is able to ensure equitable contributions, and a **good performance management process** with SMART objectives (Messmer, 2004; Picq, 2005), - including individual ones (DeMatteo et al., 1998; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006) -, followed by reliable appraisals and follow-up. Good **communication** (Bernatchez, 2003; Bunderson & Sutcliffe, 2002; Evans & Carson, 2005) also matters. Details of the benefits, drawback and conditions are provided in previous papers (Weidmann et al., 2014a, 2014b).

Finally, some conditions differ between AA and BB. A motivated team is not listed as a condition with BB, perhaps as it is not seen as a pre-requisite but as a consequence of other conditions (communication, common vision, unified team). SMART objectives are an important condition in both AA and BB but it matters more for BB's staff. This may be due to

the fact that BB has more experience with collective incentives (over 15 years while AA implemented it 1 year before our study) and consequently, more references to bad examples.

**Table 3:** Conditions for the collective staff performance management process to succeed

	<b>AA (n=46)</b>	<b>BB (n=25)</b>	<b>Total (n=71)</b>
1. Unified team	25	10	35
2. Good manager	21	11	32
3. SMART objectives	14	15	29
4. Communication	13	5	18
5. Individual performance must also be valued	8	9	17
6. Reliable performance appraisal and follow-up	10	6	16
7. Common vision	7	6	13
8. Motivated team	9	1	10
9. Team homogeneity (same socio-cultural level, way of thinking, age)	6	4	10
10. Adhesion of all to the objectives	5	5	10

### **What are the important/major Inputs and Mediators of team performance of effectiveness?**

According to the IMO theoretical model, we have tried to transpose the benefits, drawbacks and conditions of the collective staff performance management in terms of inputs and mediators. Collective incentives are part of the performance management process and are inputs at the team level. Benefits and drawbacks are respectively positive and negative consequences of the collective process and thus can be viewed as mediators, be it processes or emergent states. Among the conditions listed by respondents, SMART objectives, reliable and fair performance appraisal, the type of task, performance incentives and team leader's management style are team inputs. Other conditions listed by respondents, such as a unified and motivated team, good communication, common vision, and unanimous adhesion to the objectives were not considered as team inputs because they result from (at least some) collective work. They cannot exist before having worked together.

Our outcome variable is the impact of work with collective/team incentives on individual performance, as perceived by the respondents. Table 4 lists the main inputs and mediators which were found in both AA and BB by decreasing order of importance. In addition, we completed Table 4 with findings from previous analyses on the impact of team characteristics (Weidmann et al., 2014b) and individual characteristics (Weidmann et al., 2015) on collective staff performance management.

Mediators can be positively (+) or negatively (-) related to performance. With good inputs, teams develop processes (MP) and emergent states (ME) for a better performance for 50% of the individuals. Results are yet mixed, negative mediators having a stronger impact on some individuals, leading 32% of them in BB to think that their performance reduces. The collective management process works but not with everybody.

Major inputs deal with the management process, the manager, the task and the team members. This confirms the IMO model except for the organizational culture which no one referred to, directly or indirectly, perhaps since it is not strong enough or perhaps since respondents did not see much of its real impact at work.

**Table 4:** Results structured according to the IMO model (found in both AA and BB and listed by decreasing order to importance, i.e. number of references)

<b>Inputs</b>	<b>Mediators</b> (MP= Process, ME= Emergent state)	<b>Outcomes</b>
<p><b>Organizational context:</b></p> <p><b>Performance management process</b> Hybrid incentives (collective and individual)</p>	<p><b>Free-riding (MP -)*</b></p> <p><b>Team spirit (ME +)</b></p> <p><b>Mutual aid (MP +)</b> Mutual aid Sharing competencies</p>	<p><b>Performance</b></p> <p>Increased for 50% of respondents in AA and 51% in BB.</p> <p>Decreased for 11% of respondents in AA and 32% in BB.</p> <p>Remains the same for the rest.</p>
<p><b>Team context:</b></p> <p><b>Performance management process</b> SMART objectives Reliable performance appraisals</p> <p><b>Team manager</b> Ability to ensure equity / to control free-riders / to follow up performances</p> <p><b>Task interdependence**</b></p>	<p><b>Work commitment (ME +)</b></p> <p><b>Mutual motivation (MP+)</b></p>	
<p><b>Members:</b></p> <p><b>Managers (+)**</b></p> <p><b>Higher performers (-)**</b></p> <p><b>National culture (-)**</b></p>		

\* negative effect (-); positive effect (+).

\*\*results from Weidmann, et al., 2014b, 2015

Quality of the management process is a main input. The process has to be fair. Fairness is mainly achieved through SMART objectives and reliable performance appraisals. Organizations should therefore pay particular attention to this. Respondants also confirm the need for hybrid incentives (DeMatteo, et al., 1998; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). To succeed, collective performance management must include individual recognition, in particular for higher performers who otherwise feel unequally treated (McGee, Dickinson, Huitema, & Culig, 2006; Trevor, Reilly, & Gerhart, 2012). While hybrid incentives seem to be the best solution in order to capitalize on both competition and cooperation, recent work has showed that they may yet not be a panacea, since individuals are put in a social dilemma where they have to choose between individual and collective goals. When faced with the dilemma, individuals choose their own interest (social loafing). As a consequence, mixed incentives seem to lead to faster work but less quality (Barnes, Hollenbeck, Jundt, DeRue, & Harmon, 2011). While the need for hybrid incentives is clear, their ideal architecture or balance has not yet been found.

Another important input is manager's ability to ensure equity through a fair distribution of team workload. Manager's involvement and presence is found to be a major condition for the process to work. This is aligned with previous work on the impact of

managers' leadership style (Callow et al., 2009; Sauer, 2011) and managers' fit with the team (Hogg et al., 2005).

The task matters. Task interdependence is required for the collective process to work (Wageman, 1995). Our analysis of team dynamics (Weidmann et al., 2015) reveals that positive teams towards collective incentives are those who work with interdependent tasks (shop teams, hotel restaurants) while more negative teams are those whose team members do not need the others to do their work (call center agents, hotel reception employees). We also found that manager's implication and presence was positive for team effectiveness. In the same vein, we analyzed team members' characteristics and found that only 3 of them matter for team performance: Managers are more positive vis-à-vis collective incentives than staff members, higher performers prefer an individual system as they receive more bonus and recognition alone, persons with a foreign culture seem to be more open to work at collective level. Beside those individual differences, other demographic characteristics (age, nationality, job tenure, education for instance), role in team or other individual characteristics do not seem to matter. Team composition (mix of roles, performance levels, mix of individual characteristics) and dynamics (description of team processes or states by the respondents) was not significant either. Our findings indicate that with an able manager, collective performance can be achieved with any type of teams. This is rather encouraging for organizations which plan to implement a collective performance management process.

**Mediators:** Collective performance management leads to team spirit, the first benefit of the process, but also to social loafing. It develops mutual aid and work commitment, which is perhaps partly due to mutual motivation between team members. Team spirit is a large concept which encompasses or is equivalent to team cohesion, identification and pride, trust, climate, common language or memory. Given that it was often cited by respondents, team spirit should be further studied as a potential new higher level construct for team effectiveness. It may differ from team cohesion or be its major component. All mediators are positive except free-riding. Our results from team analysis indicate that collective performance management is fruitful provided that the task is interdependent and that free-riding is managed by an able and present team leader. When this condition is provided, positive team processes (mainly mutual aid and mutual motivation) and emergent states (mainly team spirit) develop for a better outcome, which in turn may influence the mediators in a positive way as well as the inputs (more able manager, smarter objectives, more positive team members).

## Conclusion

We wanted to identify the main inputs and mediators of team performance, using an empirical study on the impact of collective incentives. Our results indicate that collective performance management mainly depends on the management process (SMART objectives, hybrid incentives, reliable and fair performance appraisals), manager's abilities and task interdependence, but not much on individual or team characteristics. The collective process leads to team spirit, mutual aid and work commitment but also to free-riding. Positive and negative team processes and emergent states influence each other to different extent depending on a few individual characteristics (job level, high or low performer, culture). We did not find evidence that team composition or organizational culture had an influence. Our results show that team effectiveness can be improved through collective incentives, regardless of the teams or the organizations. However, team composition, organizational culture and practices certainly have an impact on the collective performance management success. It is

possible that these factors are more difficult to capture with one-time interviews. Besides, it is possible that individuals did not dare to talk about this. Our results show that collective performance seem to first depend on mutual aid and work commitment, leading what many individuals referred to as “team spirit”. Our study is a first attempt to list the main inputs and mediators from a field study. Further research will be needed to better understand relations between MPs and MEs, and in particular, to investigate which ones are on a more general level and encompasses the others, and what are the causal relationships between them. Team spirit was often cited by our respondents and should thus be further studied, in particular as a potential different construct than cohesion or as one of its main component. We hope that our work may be used as a first listing of important inputs and mediators of collective work with collective incentives.

Team effectiveness can only be well understood with longitudinal studies. Our study lacks comparison across different times. However, we asked individuals what they thought about their performance *evolution*. As such, we tried to capture the dynamic nature of team effectiveness. To improve, our next research will observe teams before, during and after the implementation of a collective staff performance management process.

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