

Effective Teams

The nature of the team one is in strongly influences their happiness and effectiveness. Team settings often involve making important decisions that impact people throughout the organization. Developing skills in building effective teams and understanding what makes a team effective is beneficial for everyone.

One common misconception is that teams are a cure-all for organizational problems. There is a belief that simply gathering a group of individuals to address an issue or find a solution is sufficient to achieve organizational goals.

Team building requires careful consideration of various factors such as the selection of team members, the representation of different skill sets, the clarity of objectives, and the commitment of team members to the group's goals. These factors significantly influence the success or failure of a group effort.

In this session, participants will learn about the key elements of team formation and development, and their impact on the final outcome. They will also have the chance to evaluate two team scenarios and discuss the successes and failures in each. Throughout the lesson, participants will gain knowledge on the following topics:

- Team development
- An important factor in constructing high performing teams
- Why team composition is crucial for success

The team building strategies and guidelines presented will assist in evaluating team performance and gaining insight into the dynamics of successful team building.

TEAM DEVELOPMENT

To effectively build, lead, or join a team, it is important to understand the stages of team development. Having knowledge of the stages that successful teams go through will better prepare you for similar experiences. If you are a team leader, this understanding will also help you guide your team through challenging times, ensuring it emerges stronger and capable of achieving its goals.

One of the well-known studies on team development was conducted by Bruce Tuckman in 1965, where he identified four stages: forming, storming, norming, and performing.

In order for teams to reach their highest level of effectiveness, they must progress through a series of stages. Each stage presents unique challenges and issues that must be addressed. By successfully navigating these hurdles, the team gains valuable experience and develops the skills necessary to overcome future challenges as they work towards achieving their main objective.

The Four Team Stages:

Forming – bringing structure and clarity.

When team members first come together, they are individuals in a common setting. They wonder who the other people are and why they are included. There is uncertainty, ambiguity, and no unity. Trust is lacking, and there are doubts about the leader's trustworthiness.

It is important to focus on team acceptance and trust at this stage. Trying to dive into productive work will cause the team to miss out on crucial trust-building activities. Some teams never move past this stage, making it increasingly difficult for the leader to accomplish anything. Eventually, these teams dissolve without achieving anything.

During this stage, it is beneficial for the leader to facilitate open discussion and encourage team members to get to know each other. It is also important to establish clear goals, expectations, and guidelines for the team's work, including training, rewards, tactical plans, performance measures, and autonomy.

Storming – focus on commitment and dedication

When people collaborate and establish their positions in a team, conflict and tension often arise due to their different roles and perspectives. This can lead to questioning the legitimacy of the direction, the leader's ability to lead, and the abilities of other team members.

Team members are experiencing increased comfort in their roles, expressing their true feelings more freely, and feeling more secure in taking risks with their ideas. However, if team members prioritize maintaining harmony over problem-solving, the overall objective may be compromised.

During this stage, the team acquires skills in handling adversity and conflict, which are crucial for any team. The purpose of bringing diverse individuals together is to foster new perspectives and innovative solutions, rather than simply repeating the same ideas.

Given the current conflict, it is crucial for effective management to prevent the potential destruction of the team. It is important for the leader to recognize that team members may not necessarily dislike one another, but rather may be expressing their opinions and asserting their individuality by taking sides on certain issues.

The leader's current priority is to facilitate effective conflict management. This involves emphasizing win-win solutions and actively avoiding "groupthink," where preserving the team and avoiding conflict is seen as more important than solving the problem. During the storming stage, the leader should reinforce the vision, recognize the team's achievements, and act as an effective mediator.

Norming – create unity, define responsibilities, and communicate a shared vision

After resolving the challenges of storming, teams proceed to address the pressure members face to adhere to developing norms. Within groups, individuals tend to behave in alignment with their peers. The longer they collaborate, the more their behaviors align, which can either have positive or negative consequences. When slacking becomes the standard, there is an issue.

Team members are now trying to establish their roles and levels of support in the team. They are also exploring their individual commitment and loyalty. Expressing commitment through cooperation, ignoring disagreements, obeying instructions, and conforming to standards is common among team members.

When people work in teams, they often take different roles. Some focus more task-oriented behaviors, while others focus more relationship-building activities. Both types of roles are important for the team's success. However, some teams tend to lean towards one type of role over the other. A good team leader recognizes the natural strengths of team members in each role and helps them develop and utilize their skills effectively. Providing feedback, articulating a powerful vision, and fostering a sense of deeper meaning and purpose for the team's objective can help team members work well together and achieve their goals using their diverse range of skills.

Teams often go through stages of storming and norming before they find their groove. Some teams may experience the pressures of norming and conforming before going through the storming stage. It is important to understand and be prepared to handle the challenges of each stage simultaneously.

Performing – carrying out duties and improving performance

The reward for successfully navigating through the previous stages is reaching a point where the team is functioning as an effective unit. It has resolved conflicts and challenges, established trust, developed a clear vision, and is now prepared to achieve excellent results.

When teams reach this phase, it is believed that they can work independently and continue progressing. However, they will not become high-performing teams unless they consistently challenge themselves.

PERFORMING VERSUS HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS

To maintain the strength of a team that has already reached the performing stage, its members should consistently strive for improvement, encourage innovation, build on their skills, and maintain a high level of energy and dedication. They are no longer focused on managing their behavior, but rather on exceeding expectations.

Every member has a responsibility to improve. It is no longer solely the leader's responsibility. The team examines their core strengths and finds ways to utilize and enhance them. They strive to be innovative and bring significant value to their projects. Essentially, the team becomes self-managed and the leader's main role is to ensure that they do not regress to a previous stage. This involves monitoring conflicts, maintaining the vision, and assisting the team in broadening their focus.

What is the distinguishing factor?

Having a performing team is important for meeting objectives. However, achieving continuous improvement and surpassing objectives requires significant effort. The distinction between performing and high performing teams often lies in their mindset towards quality. Whether it's enhancing a product, a system, or completing a task, the team's measurement and focus on quality is pivotal.

Teams can focus on three levels of quality:

- **Error detection** – This is the starting point for most teams, where the emphasis is on meeting customer needs and preventing unwanted outcomes. It is a responsive approach that ensures the team meets expectations, but errors are only identified and addressed after the fact.
- **Error prevention** – At this level, the team focuses on preventing mistakes in the first place. They prioritize quality in everyone's role, not just the person responsible for inspection or detection. They analyze why mistakes occur and create systems to prevent errors instead of just fixing them. This team consistently exceeds expectations and satisfies everyone. Most teams stop at this level.
- **Innovation with continuous improvement** – Team performance reaches its peak when the focus shifts from just avoiding mistakes to meeting unexpressed needs. These teams set new standards and constantly strive to improve upon their achievements. They anticipate needs and proactively solve problems.

High functioning teams prioritize real improvement and innovation rather than solely focusing on error avoidance.

TEAM COMPOSITION

After analyzing the stages of team development, it is important to consider how team members are selected. Successfully guiding a team through all the stages of development can be challenging, so it is crucial to ensure that team members are capable of performing the work when the time comes.

The first step is to begin with the team leader, as they have a substantial influence on the team's growth and efficiency. Following that, it is important to consider the team's objective and ensure that individuals with the appropriate skills and experiences are present to aid in achieving the desired outcome.

Each person should be selected based on their knowledge and expertise. The leader needs to facilitate and coordinate activity, so these are essential skills that must be present. The leader should also have a comprehensive understanding of the issues and not be biased towards any particular perspective that could influence the team's outcome.

The composition of a team can vary depending on the project or objective. Sometimes, outside facilitators or advisors are brought in to complement the team's core skills. It is important to have both task-oriented and relationship-oriented individuals on the team. When selecting team members, consider their role in the team development process. Aim for a diverse range of skills, responsibility levels, and experience to gather different perspectives, especially during the norming stage. Groupthink is a risk that can be mitigated to some extent through the composition of the group.

After the team members have been selected, it is the responsibility of the leader to ensure that each person understands their role and responsibilities. This includes explaining how each role contributes to the overall objective and interacts with other roles within the team.

Diagnosing team development stages and leading the team to the next level is crucial in the workplace. Bringing the right people together and creating a supportive environment is important for smooth processes and high performance. Emphasizing continuous improvement can help a team achieve unexpected results. It may seem challenging, but it is possible to accomplish.