

THE BASICS OF TEAMS



The primary reason to define “team” is to clarify what we mean because the word conveys different things to different people. Some people think any group working together is a team or any management grouping is a team, and some think primarily of two-person relationships as a team.

BACKGROUND

We also encounter many views on the benefits of a team. Some believe teams are a powerful force to achieve high performance. Others believe the main value of teams is to support and build team and individual self-confidence, promote involvement, empowerment, and cooperative teamwork. On the other hand, some believe teams waste time, squander resources, and get in the way of individual action and performance. Some individuals dislike team membership because it exposes them to unpleasant personal risk and loss of control.

Because of these differences, the definition of “team” lies in the fundamental premise that teams and performance are inextricably connected. The truly committed team is the most productive performance

unit management has at its disposal – provided there are specific results for which the team is collectively responsible, and provided the performance ethic of the company demands those results.

Too many teams and companies pay little attention to the company’s performance standards or the purpose and goals of individual teams. As a result, most teams fall short of their potential. Team effectiveness depends on each team member’s commitment to a common purpose and set of related performance goals to which the team holds itself accountable. Team members must believe in the team’s purpose is important to the success of the company, and collectively keep each other honest in assessing their results related to the purpose. Without this internal team discipline, the team’s performance and accomplishments will

not be realized.

Communicating the organization’s overall performance goals clearly and concisely is critical to team performance. Companies with meaningful, strong performance goals encourage and support teams by helping them to define their own goals and objectives.

DEFINITION

Our definition that distinguishes a team from a mere group of people with a common goal is:

“A team is a small number of people with complimentary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.”

TEAM SIZE

The size of a team can affect the outcome of a team. If the team is too large, they have trouble interacting as a team, agreeing on decisions, finding mutual time and space large enough to meet, or have difficulty confronting more difficult issues and constraints. Large groups have a tendency to settle on less clear statements of purpose and assign hierarchical leaders. Team members participate less, and have less opportunity to make contributions. Thus, large groups have difficulty becoming real teams, whereas, smaller teams of around 5-10 usually function at a higher level.

THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM

In 2002, Patrick Lencioni published “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team”. This book helped organization determine the points that cause team success and failure. The Five Dysfunctions are listed below:

Dysfunction #1: Absence of Trust

Dysfunction #2: Fear of Conflict

Dysfunction #3: Lack of Commitment

Dysfunction #4: Avoidance of Accountability

Dysfunction #5: Inattention to Results

Once a dysfunction is identified, the team can take action to address the dysfunction. The tactics to take depend on the dysfunction the team is addressing. These include:

Trust Discussion: During this discussion, your team will make practical progress towards building trust – the foundational element of team cohesiveness.

Conflict Exercise: Encourage the team to recognize and agree to a model for conflict resolution, which will lead to more effective decision-making.

Clarifying Team Direction: For a team to truly be cohesive, there must be a common understanding of the overall goals and objectives for the organization. Guide the team to clarify its direction and purpose within the organization.

Team Action Planning: The team will make commitments for improving the cohesiveness of the group and identify specific actions to drive those changes.

Follow-up: In 30 to 60 days, have the team complete the assessment again to determine improved performance.



COMPLIMENTARY SKILLS

Teams must develop the right mix of skills, that is, each of the complementary skills necessary to do the team’s job. These team skill requirements fall into three categories:

- Technical or functional expertise
- Problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Interpersonal skills such as effective communication, constructive conflict, comfort and approach to risk taking, helpful criticism, keeping your objectivity, active listening, giving the benefit of the doubt, support, clear and concise written and verbal communications, and recognizing the interests and achievements of others.

Team selection is critical to the success of a team. A team cannot get started without a minimum

complement of skills, especially technical and functional skills. No team can achieve its purpose without develop all the skill levels required. However, usually team members are selected primarily on the basis of personal compatibility or formal position in the organization.

Research indicates that skill mix is a prerequisite to selecting team members particularly for interpersonal skills. Most teams need some kind of skill development for personal learning and growth. With a focus on performance and results, teams will focus on identifying skill gaps and the development needs of team members.

The challenge for any potential team is to strike the right balance between selection and development as the means for building a full set of complimentary skills needed to fulfill the team’s purpose.