



Developing a High Performing Team

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

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What is a Team?

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We like Glenn Parker's definition of a team: "A group of people with a high degree of interdependence geared toward the achievement of a goal or the completion of a task." (From "Team Players and Teamwork" by Glenn Parker)

What Does That Mean?

This means that members of a team agree on a goal and agree that the only way to achieve that goal is to work together. Some groups have a common goal but they don't work together to achieve it. For example, many teams are really groups because they work independently to achieve their goal. Some groups work together but they don't have a common goal.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Teams

While there are a lot of advantages to teams, there are also some drawbacks that we should take into consideration.

Test Your Knowledge

Identify some advantages and disadvantages to teams.

Advantages	Disadvantages

The Advantages of Teams

The way decisions are made is a major factor in the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with work. Individuals are much less likely to be dissatisfied with decisions that they were involved in making.

The "strange ideas" that others bring into decision-making discussions are one of the very reasons you would want input from others. If everyone thought the same way as the team leader, there would be no point in discussing the matter.

Although discussions can bring misunderstandings, they provide an opportunity for the team leader to provide clarification and avoid potential problems when it comes time to implement decisions.

The biases that team members bring can also be helpful. Biases are based on previous experience, on what has worked or not worked in the past, or on assumptions. It is useful to understand the resistance against a course of action in case something has been overlooked. Besides, if someone is resisting an action, it is better to hear them out and deal with their resistance than have them sabotage your later efforts to implement the decision.

Self-interests are often based on the desire to have decisions result in what is best for them. If this is consistent with what is also best for the organization, these can be valuable viewpoints to hear.

How Can Teams Help Employees Grow?

Team decision-making provides learning and personal growth experiences. Decision making challenges you to think; to try to understand facts, alternatives, and how different jobs affect one another; to see the bigger picture. Participation in decision making makes people better decision makers.

Teams increase employee autonomy. Employees require less management time when they accept responsibility for their own work and for making their own decisions.

Teams also increase receptivity and trust of management decisions. When teams get involved in decision making, they develop an appreciation for the fact that solutions are not as simple as they might appear and that it is not so easy to choose among options. As a result, they become more accepting of decisions

made by others. Also, being listened to and having your opinion considered increases your willingness to respect the opinion and judgment of others.

Teams make better quality decisions. Team decision-making brings out the knowledge and experience of all members and allows the sum to become greater than the parts.

Team decision-making also improves teamwork. Most decisions will need the cooperation of more than one person to implement. The longer you wait to involve others affected by the decision, the harder it will be to gain their teamwork in the implementation of the decision.

Developing a High-Performing Team

The Five Stages of Team Development

There has been a great deal of study on teams and on group dynamics. Bruce Tuckman is responsible for this straightforward model, which emphasizes that all teams and groups go through five stages of development, although they do not necessarily go through those stages together or at the same time.

Forming

This is sometimes referred to as a team's childhood. This is the first stage of development. At this stage, team members may have no clear idea of what to expect or what they will accomplish. The team leader will be influential and will likely make many of the decisions. Your leadership style here is usually that of telling.

As team leader, you will make sure your team members know one another and know about one another so they can begin feeling comfortable together. You help them decide on their team goals and objective, and you share your expectations with them. You are the role model so you must demonstrate that you value each member of the team, and have high expectations that they will perform well.

Storming

This stage is often referred to as team adolescence. As members of the group work together, they become more comfortable voicing their own opinion and they may not agree with either the team leader or the other members of the team. There is often disagreement and conflict, with little cliques forming and alternate goals being suggested. Members of the team notice how different other members are and a pecking order may be established. In this stage of team development you will usually find the selling style most useful.

This can be a difficult time, particularly if turf wars develop. You are an even more important role model now, communicating with all team members, reminding them of how valuable each of their roles is, and helping them settle their disagreements in a civilized fashion: not ignoring them, but dealing with them openly and honestly. All the while, you are helping them get to know one another better and coaching them so they become more skilled at their job. Any group training at this point is often on team building.

Norming

This stage is often referred to as young adulthood for a team. Eventually, if you continue to encourage, support and communicate with your team they will work out their differences and begin to see that they are quite a bit alike after all. Now they begin to enjoy being together and they start having more fun—so much fun that occasionally they may forget about the work they are to get done. You will find that the participating style serves you well when a group is in this stage of development.

Eventually your hard work and your support will pay off and your team gradually begins to trust one another and become a more cohesive group. Now they start enjoying work and the company of other team members. They begin to notice what you have been telling them all along: they really do have a lot in common. They start to socialize together and may even get so involved in social activities that they forget about what they are trying to accomplish. This is a good time to move away from being quite so hands-on and begin to delegate tasks. Cross-training can be useful.

Performing

Now the team is beginning to mature. They have skills, know their own strengths and limitations, and have a good deal of problem-solving abilities. By now they have figured out—perhaps with your help—who does what to make the team effective and they work well together. The challenge for you now is to keep them from becoming bored. You will use your skills as a delegating style leader.

Finally they've arrived! You have a team who really are capable of working on their own. Hopefully you have been celebrating team successes ever since you started working together. However, don't stop now. They still need to feel appreciated. Encourage them to do some self-evaluation and some work evaluation to see if there are things they can do even better. Continuous suggestions for improvement should come from this group.

A word of warning: Group dynamics are never static, so don't ever be fooled into thinking your battle is won. If a new member joins the team, or their roles change, you may find your group right back in the storming stage again.

Adjourning

When the group has formally finished working together, or when things are winding down naturally, the group will disband. Celebrate successes and achievements, and then bring the team to a close. Alternatively, if this was not a successful team, the group should evaluate what went wrong, and use the lessons for later projects.

Even if the same group is to work on future projects, they will still need to go through all of the stages, although they will likely form and storm very quickly.

Test your knowledge

How Can I Help?

What can you do as a leader to move your team through each stage?

Forming

Team Problem Solving

Test Your Knowledge

Armed with the information you have about your role as a leader and your team and how they might develop, think about some of the issues that you are dealing with as you work with your team.

Write down one concern, difficult employee, or difficult situation, that you are comfortable sharing with your colleagues in this room.

Now, take five minutes to describe your situation and get some feedback from the other participants.

Team Leadership

A team leader may volunteer, be appointed, or be elected by team members. The team leader will:

- Stimulate enthusiasm.
- See that conflicts are resolved.
- Encourage communication and participation.
- Keep meetings in control.
- Ensure the team is making progress.

In order to develop openness and trust among team members and promote open communication, it should be understood that:

- There are no stupid questions.
- Team members must feel free to express all ideas.
- Team confidentiality is required.
- Team members' feelings are as important as the facts.
- It takes practice to develop tactful candor.

Characteristics of Team Players

Make every effort to be effective communicators.

Most conflicts start because people misunderstand one another. This is often followed by someone jumping to conclusions and making incorrect assumptions. The team has great strength when all members are on the same track.

Replace defensiveness with openness.

People get defensive when they feel threatened. Let others know you respect their opinions, even if you don't agree with them. Establish an environment where people are free to speak their mind and understand how to do so effectively. Every idea deserves to be given a fair hearing.

Team players understand the value of being assertive rather than aggressive.

Even if you are angry and ready to blow your top, you probably understand that approach is not going to get what you need. You can satisfy your own needs without dominating others if you use openness, honesty, and peaceful negotiation to help everyone win a little bit.

Avoid argument for the sake of argument.

Arguments and power struggles can take a lot of valuable time. If an argument is going nowhere, resolve it by applying a conflict resolution strategy, or table it. Don't dwell on it. Personal ego gratification should take a backseat to team goals.

Don't rain on someone else's parade.

We all are proud of our own achievements and possessions. Belittling someone else's achievements just creates tension and hurt feelings. Sincere compliments, recognition, and support help to create synergy within the team. Support your co-workers and they will support you.

Avoid contributing to doom and gloom.

If you are a pessimist by nature, try to look at things from other angles and register the amount of good work going on. Pessimism drags down energy, productivity, and morale.

Refuse to play games.

Some people thrive on chaos and discord, but it takes two to play that game. If you refuse to play, malicious behaviors can be halted before they start. As a leader, it's also your job to call it when you see it and deal with difficult situations and conflict.

Further Reading:

