

## Developing SMART Teams

Developing effective teams takes sound leadership, the commitment of team members and an appropriate degree of organizational support. The move from a BASIC team to a SMART team is an important step in the development of highly effective teams.

### SMART Teams

Some of the key characteristics of SMART teams are presented under the following acronym:

#### **SMART Team Characteristics**

**S**trategic use of group-team processes  
**M**onitoring progress  
**A**ddressing communication and conflict issues  
**R**outinely share leadership  
**T**rust clearly evident

#### **Strategic Use of Group-Team Processes:**

SMART teams use a variety of strategies to ensure that they are working in a collaborative, creative and productive manner. For example, they often develop a set of team guidelines about how they will plan, manage, and participate in meetings. They also take the time to discuss how they will make decisions; that is, they openly determine the type of decision-making methods they will use, especially before making an important group decision. Moreover, when needed, they consult external experts to consider relevant group processes that can help them work more effectively as a team.

#### **Monitoring progress**

Another important strategy that effective teams employ is monitoring the progress they are making. By establishing common goals and objectives and developing ways to measure progress towards them, SMART teams encourage and facilitate both individual and team accountability.

In fact, many SMART teams, develop their own unique ways of measuring their performance. For example, over a period of time, they might set a series of financial or work goals and then evaluate the degree to which they achieve them. No matter what method is used, effective teams are committed to monitoring the progress that they are making. Taking the time to discuss the progress a team is making towards its goals as well as how it is working as a team has proven to be a productive way to facilitate accountability and enhance team effectiveness.

## **Developing SMART Teams**

### **Addressing communication and conflict issues**

SMART Teams understand the value of free and open communication and, as noted above, they often establish guidelines to facilitate doing so. In addition, when communication problems do arise they are able to openly discuss how these difficulties might be resolved. When conflict emerges, SMART teams are more likely to deal with it in a calm and collaborative manner. In fact, teams that have members who can listen well and encourage other members to do so are usually more productive because they are able to collaboratively solve task-related or process-related issues. Moreover, when the majority of team members can manage their emotions, focus on the tasks at hand and support each other, they are much more likely to become SMART teams. Being able to address communication and conflict issues as they arise is a key factor in the development of highly effective teams.

### **Routinely share leadership**

SMART teams also recognize the importance of sharing team leadership. Rather than one person taking responsibility for leading the team, SMART teams allow different people to lead depending on the issues and type of work the team is facing at a given time. The appointed or formal leader of the team may well continue to play a significant leadership role; however, effective formal leaders encourage and enable others to share leadership responsibilities. In doing so, they often gain increased respect from their colleagues, while building leadership capacity within the team. Sharing team leadership increases feelings of team ownership and contributes to the building of collegial trust within the team.

### **Trust clearly evident**

By being willing to monitor their contribution and assuming mutual responsibility for the progress that is made, members of SMART teams often learn how to work together and reach their shared goals in an effective and efficient manner. Most importantly, as they do so, they develop a sense of collegial trust that enhances and facilitates the work of the team. Moreover, by reaching their common goals and addressing ways to work more effectively as a team, the members feel a deep sense of satisfaction and pride in their own contributions and in the overall work of the team.

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