

On the Team Building Process

One of the most important ways that we can enhance the effectiveness of any organization is through the use of teams. Unfortunately, teams are often not as effective or efficient as they might be; hence, it might be worthwhile to consider the nature of teams and what factors contribute to building them.

The acronym **TEAMS** will allow us to highlight several of the key elements that underlie the operation of successful teams.

Time: If a group of people are going to develop into an effective team, then sufficient time must be set aside for them to get to know each other and to develop a clear understanding of why they have come together. Thus, the first step in the team building process involves developing an initial understanding of the team's purpose. Unless people feel that the purpose of the team is a relevant one, it will be very difficult for them to actually begin to function as a team.

During this initial team building phase, it is very important for team members to discuss what they are trying to achieve and why they are trying to achieve it. Without a clear, meaningful purpose, there is little likelihood that an effective team can be formed. In other words, because a group is called a team it does not automatically mean that they actually are a team, to become a team the members of the group must develop a commitment to a common purpose and begin to move towards reaching the goals and objectives that they wish to reach. Hence, time is needed to actually shape a group into an effective team (Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Hackman, 1990; Katzenbach & Smith, 1999; Tuckman, 1965).

Engagement: To become a true team, members of a group need to become engaged in planning, implementing and evaluating actions that help the group reach its goals and objectives. As group members begin to work together and see that their work is actually moving them towards their common goals, they begin to rely on each other and set clearer expectations for the team and for its members. As they demonstrate their commitment to a common purpose and reach the milestones that they have set, they begin to act and feel like a team.

Effective teams are characterized by the development of an increasing amount of trust and we know that team trust emerges when people make a commitment to do something and they do it in a competent and timely manner. Over time, as actions lead to successful outcomes, members of the group begin to behave as a team and the results of their work leads to increased team confidence and competence. Hence, engagement in meaningful activities is an important aspect of the team building process (Hackman, 2002; Hartley, 1997; Katzenbach & Smith, 1999; Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner, 1994).

On the Team Building Process

Action: As noted above, a team needs to feel that it is making progress towards its objectives. If the team has a clear and relevant purpose and sets out a sensible progression to reach its objectives and actually begins to reach them, then team members can readily note that their efforts are having a positive effect. However, if only a few people are doing the work, then the group is not really a team.

In fact, one of the key characteristics of effective teams is that the people on it have complementary skills. Thus, some members may be particularly skilled in planning while others can take on the role of spokespeople for the team, while some people may contribute to the team by handling computer or technical tasks while others happily facilitate the social side of a team's functions. In sum, a team becomes particularly successful when it is able to use the expertise and skills of all or at least most of its members and they are collectively engaged in reaching their goals (Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Hackman, 1990; Hackman, 2002; Tuckman, 1965).

Maintenance: One of the most common challenges that a group of people face as they develop into a team is trying to ensure that there is a balance between the degree of emphasis that is placed on completing the tasks that they have set and the maintenance of the group as a team. Experience has shown that a group will have difficulty developing into a team unless it has members who provide encouragement and support for the other people on the team.

When team members encourage other people to contribute ideas, build on the ideas that other people have proposed, acknowledge the work that other people do, and routinely ask other people for their opinions, they are contributing in a positive way to the development and maintenance of the team. Not every member of a team has to exhibit such group maintenance behaviours, but a group that does not have sufficient members who contribute to the group in this way will certainly have difficulties becoming a real team (Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Hartley, 1997; Katzenbach & Smith, 1999; Tuckman, 1965).

Support: In order for a group of people to become an effective and efficient team, they must have sufficient internal and external support to meet the physical, fiscal and human resource needs that emerge. One of the characteristics of truly effective teams is that they are able to plan ahead to ensure that sufficient resources are available to carry out the actions that they have planned.

A basic minimum amount of support is needed if a group of people are going to be able to reach their goals in a collaborative and sensible manner. Quite simply, several people on the team will need to have the skills to access such resources so that the team can fulfill its common purpose.

On the Team Building Process

Unfortunately, if a group does not have the support it needs, then it will have difficulty completing the tasks that it has planned and the result of failing to do so is a diminished sense of purpose and team confidence. In contrast, when resources are available to support a team so that people can complete the tasks that they have committed to do, then a feeling of competence and confidence emerges that enhances team trust and effectiveness (Katzenbach, & Smith, 1999; Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner, 1994; Stoll & Temperley, 2009).

References

- Druskat, V. U. and Wolff, S. B. (2001). Building the emotional intelligence of groups. *Harvard Business Review*, March, 81-90.
- Hackman, J. R. (Ed.). (1990). *Groups that work (and those that don't)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hackman, J. R. *Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances*. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 2002.
- Hartley, P. (1997). *Group Communication*. London: Routledge
- Katzenbach, J. R. & Smith, D.K. (1999). *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization*. New York: Harper
- Senge, P., Roberts, C., Ross, R. B., Smith, B J. & Kleiner, A. (1994). *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization*. Toronto: Doubleday.
- Stoll, L., & Temperley, J. (2009). Creative leadership teams: Capacity building and succession planning, *Management in Education*, 23, 1,12-18.
- Tuckman, B. W. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin*, 63, 384-399.