

SMART Team Learning Process

SMART Team Learning Process: Applying the Four As to Mastery

This document is one of a series on team learning based on the BASIC, SMART, and GREAT Team Development Framework. It provides a path to resources on theleadershipwall.com website designed to facilitate the building of SMART Teams. Relevant resources in each phase of the four phases of professional learning can be accessed by holding Control and clicking on the link of interest.

As noted in other documents, [The Four A's to Mastery](#) on the [Leadership Theory](#) Page, describes the following stages in the professional learning process:

- **Awareness** of the need to develop a new skill
- **Attempting** to learn or improve the skill
- **Acquiring** the skill through deliberate practice
- **Adapting** skills by using them in increasingly more difficult environments
- **Mastering** skills so they become relatively automatic

Let us consider how an understanding of the above stages can be applied to the SMART Team learning process.

Awareness: As noted earlier, the first stage in the team learning process is becoming aware of the main characteristics of an effective team. The acronym SMART briefly describes the five key characteristics of a [SMART Team](#):

SMART Team Characteristics

Strategic use of group-team processes
Monitoring progress
Addressing communication and conflict issues
Routinely share leadership
Trust clearly evident

Team members can discuss the SMART Team acronym and consider some of the key features of teams that are operating at this level of development. Reading the document entitled [“Developing SMART Teams”](#) can provide more details on the main features of such teams. Team members can then discuss whether they have the potential of moving on to the next stage of trying to become a GREAT Team.

SMART Team Learning Process

Attempting: As with individual skill learning, teams to consider how they will go about acquiring or improving their skills. As noted in related documents, some of the possible approaches might include:

- ✓ Observing and discussing teams that are recognized as being very effective.
- ✓ Taking the time for team members to complete the [SMART Team Development Questionnaire](#) and then reflecting on the extent to which they are operating as a SMART Team.
- ✓ Reading some of the [Selected References on SMART Teams](#) provided in the document on Developing SMART Teams.
- ✓ Using the Internet to retrieve ideas on specific processes and strategies that might be enhance their effectiveness as a team.

The key point is for the leaders of the team and its members to set aside some time to assess where they are in the team building process and then plan how they are going to proceed. See the document: [Developing and Leading BASIC, SMART, and GREAT Teams.](#)

Acquiring: The acquisition of personal or team skills usually involves increased attentional focus and deliberate practice. Hence, receiving encouragement and supportive feedback during the learning process can be especially beneficial. In the case of moving towards SMART Team performance, where new or unfamiliar group processes or strategies will be employed, it is especially important for team leaders to remind the members of the team that they must be willing to take risks and appreciate that initially their performance may be negatively impacted as they acquire these new skills.

Team leaders may also find it useful to consider the strategies in the [Leading SMART Teams](#) document and try to employ them as they see fit. Team leaders should try to ensure that the professional learning environment is one that facilitates optimal team learning. In trying to ensure that the learning environment is actually an effective one, team leaders may find it useful to complete the [Professional Learning Environment Checklist](#). In addition, they may also find it useful to complete the [SMART Team Leadership Questionnaire](#) and identify their areas of strength and areas in which they may wish to improve.

Adapting: As the effectiveness and efficiency of the team improves, further progress can be made by discussing, learning and using other leadership skills that have been included on this website. For example, team leaders might wish to consider how to improve the way the team makes collaborative decisions. In doing so they may find it

SMART Team Learning Process

useful to review the document on [Collaborative Decision-making Methods](#) or the related one on [Consensus Decision-making](#).

Of course, identifying and learning new skills, especially advanced group or team process skills is the next step towards becoming a [GREAT Team](#).

Mastering: The final stage of mastery is reached when one can perform a skill relatively automatically. In the case of learning to be a SMART Team, this means acquiring a variety of relevant group processes or skills designed to effectively meet the shared goals of the team. Hence, the path to mastery at this stage of team learning may require a considerable length of time. Quite simply, SMART Teams are not formed overnight or by just talking about their characteristics; rather, team learning at this stage requires deliberate practice and reflection on the learning process. Finally, as noted above, team members should expect to experience some performance dips on the journey so that they are ready to deal with them in a positive and realistic manner.

Selected References

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