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CC352 Revised 1990 Developing a productive Team : Team Building

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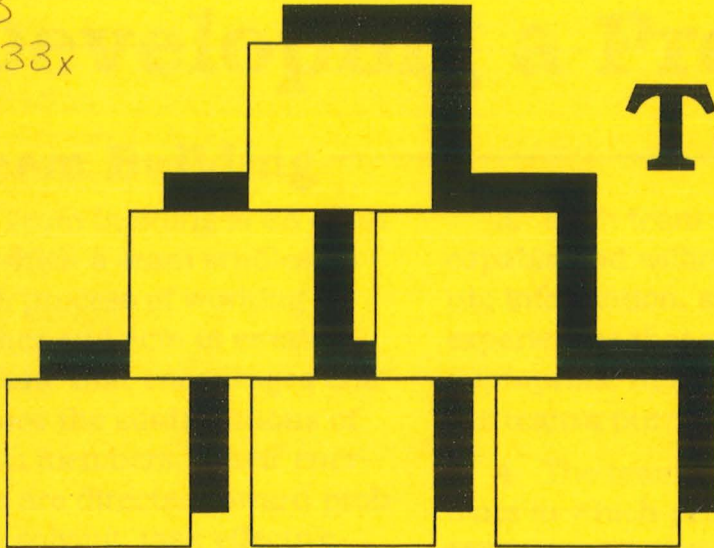
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Team Building

Developing a Productive Team

Team Goals:

Participation

Leadership

Problem Solving

Risk Taking and Creativity

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Developing a Productive Team

Team Building

Team building is an effort in which a team studies its own process of working together and acts to create a climate that encourages and values the contributions of team members. Their energies are directed toward problem solving, task effectiveness, and maximizing the use of all members' resources to achieve the team's purpose. Sound team building recognizes that it is not possible to fully separate one's performance from those of others.

Team building works best when the following conditions are met, (Francis and Young, 1979).

1. There is a high level of interdependence among team members. The team is working on important tasks in which each team member has a commitment and teamwork is critical for achieving the desired results.

2. The team leader has good people skills, is committed to developing a team approach, and allocates time to team-building activities. Team management is seen as a shared function, and team members are given the opportunity to exercise leadership when their experiences and skills are appropriate to the needs of the team.

3. Each team member is capable and willing to contribute information, skills, and experiences that provide an appropriate mix for achieving the team's purpose.

4. The team develops a climate in which people feel

Characteristics Of Good Team Building

— High level of interdependence among team members

— Team leader has good people skills and is committed to team approach

— Each team member is willing to contribute

— Team develops a relaxed climate for communication

— Team members develop a mutual trust

— Team and individuals are prepared to take risks

— Team is clear about goals and establishes targets

— Team member roles are defined

— Team members know how to examine team and individual errors without personal attacks

— Team has capacity to create new ideas

— Each team member knows he can influence the team agenda

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relaxed, and are able to be direct and open in their communications.

5. Team members develop a mutual trust for each other and believe that other team members have skills and capabilities to contribute to the team.

6. Both the team and individual members are prepared to take risks and are allowed to develop their abilities and skills.

7. The team is clear about its important goals and establishes performance targets that cause stretching but are achievable.

8. Team member roles are defined, and effective ways to solve problems and communicate are developed and supported by all team members.

9. Team members know how to examine team and individual errors and weaknesses without making personal attacks, which enables the group to learn from its experiences.

10. Team efforts are devoted to the achievement of results, and team performance is frequently evaluated to see where improvements can be made.

11. The team has the capacity to create new ideas through group interaction and the influence of outside people. Good ideas are followed up, and people are rewarded for innovative risk taking.

12. Each member of the team knows that he or she can influence the team agenda. There is a feeling of trust and equal influence among team members that facilitates open and honest communication.

Team building will occur more easily when all team members work jointly on a task of mutual importance. This allows each member to provide their technical knowledge and skills in helping to solve the problem, complete the project, and develop new programs. During this process, team building can be facilitated as members evaluate their working relationship as a team and then develop and articulate guidelines that will lead to increased productivity and team member cooperation.

As part of this process, team members need to learn how and be willing to manage conflict, evaluate performance of the group, and provide feedback and support that will encourage each member to meet their commitment to the team and the organization.

Team performance can best be evaluated if the team develops a model of excellence against which to measure its performance.

Team Effectiveness

When evaluating how well team members are working together, the following statements can be used as a guide:

Team goals are developed through a group process of team interaction and agreement in which each team member is willing to work toward achieving these goals.

Participation is actively shown by all team members and roles are shared to facilitate the accomplishment of tasks and feelings of group togetherness.

Feedback is asked for by members and freely given as a way of evaluating the team's performance and clarifying both feelings and interests of the team members. When feedback is given it is done with a desire to help the other person.

Team decision making involves a process that encourages active participation by all members.

Leadership is distributed and shared among team members and individuals willingly contribute their resources as needed.

Problem solving, discussing team issues, and critiquing team effectiveness are encouraged by all team members.

Conflict is not suppressed. Team members are allowed to express negative feelings and confrontation within the team which is managed and dealt with by team members. Dealing with and managing conflict is seen as a way to improve team performance.

Team member resources, talents, skills, knowledge, and experiences are fully identified, recognized, and used whenever appropriate.

Risk taking and creativity are encouraged. When mistakes are made, they are treated as a source of learning rather than reasons for punishment.

After evaluating team performance against the above guidelines, determine those areas in which the team members need to improve and develop a strategy for doing so.

A Focused Team

When the team resources are focused and members are all working to accomplish the same purpose, teamwork can be very rewarding and productive. This is best accomplished when team members use a proactive approach rather than a reactive approach to accomplish their purpose (Adams, 1987).

The proactive approach manifests such characteristics as:

1. The team members take a very positive approach in jointly determining the way they are going to work together as a team and what they want to have happen. When individuals and the entire team choose to operate this way and are willing to set petty differences aside, unbelievable results become possible.

When individuals adopt this attitude and commit to use their resources, knowledge, and skills to contribute to the goals of the team, alignment with the team's overall purpose comes about. This will not happen unless both the team leader and team members choose to do so.

2. Having a well-defined purpose or vision of what the team will accomplish is a very powerful force for the team leader and members. Goals are aligned with the team purpose, and team members are empowered to accomplish the goals. This process leads to a high level of team productivity.

3. Team members have a positive attitude toward change and are willing to accept and allow change to occur as needed in order to accomplish desired results.

4. Team members understand that patience is required, and that for some goals, a long-term commitment is needed to accomplish the desired results.

5. Interests of both the team leader and team members are focused on desired results rather than on short-term problem-solving activities.

If people learn to focus simultaneously on both the current situation and the desired results, problems that arise will be solved as part of the total process of achieving the desired results.

6. The sixth characteristic of a well functioning team is that the members have a strong feeling of control within the team. They are able to establish priorities and then commit time and resources for accomplishing these tasks.

7. The seventh characteristic of a well functioning team is team members verbally and publicly support each other. They recognize that negative comments about others tear the team down.

Team leaders and members that make a conscious, sustained effort to make these seven characteristics a part of their mind set will find that both creativity and accomplishment of desired results will be much higher than it would be otherwise.

Team Leader

There are several ways in which the team leader can contribute to creating a positive climate within the team. One of the most powerful forces is to put forward, in cooperation with team members, an exciting vision/purpose of what the team is to achieve. Once the vision is developed, it needs to be kept in front of the team members as a reminder of what they wish to accomplish.

The team leader where possible should help select or influence the composition of team members. Selection should be based upon the willingness of people to work in a team setting and the resources, both people skills and technical components, they are able to bring to the team.

The team leader can provide the leadership for helping the team develop an understood and accepted set of principles that will contribute to their success. Included in this set of principles should be norms for operating within the group, criteria for evaluating success, standards for determining quality of performance, and an identified reward system to recognize the team's successes.

The team leader should be the liaison between the team and upper management. The team leader needs to know and work with upper management to obtain a full commitment from them in support of the team's program.

However, when this happens, team members must realize that they have a major responsibility to make maximum use of the resources and support provided.

The team leader can encourage team member growth, and should be willing to take some risk by having members whose resources are relevant to the immediate task provide the leadership.

The team leader should be fair, supportive, and recognized by team members as one who can make final judgments, work with upper management, and give direction to the team as needed.

To assist the team leader in evaluating the level of team development, have each team member answer the twelve questions in Table 1. This should be followed by a discussion of the questions to determine where and how changes should be made to help facilitate the development of a strong team.

Evaluate Your Team Development

Rating Team Development

How do you feel about your team's progress? (Circle rating).

1.	Team's purpose						
	I'm uncertain	1	2	3	4	5	I'm clear
2.	Team membership						
	I'm out	1	2	3	4	5	I'm in
3.	Communications						
	Very guarded	1	2	3	4	5	Very open
4.	Team goals						
	Set from above	1	2	3	4	5	Emerged through team interaction
5.	Use of team member's skills						
	Poor use	1	2	3	4	5	Good use
6.	Support						
	Little help for individuals	1	2	3	4	5	High level of support for individuals
7.	Conflict						
	Difficult issues are avoided	1	2	3	4	5	Problems are discussed openly and directly
8.	Influence on decisions						
	By few members	1	2	3	4	5	By all members
9.	Risk taking						
	Not encouraged	1	2	3	4	5	Encouraged and supported
10.	Working on relationships with others						
	Little effort	1	2	3	4	5	High level of effort
11.	Distribution of leadership						
	Limited	1	2	3	4	5	Shared
12.	Useful feedback						
	Very little	1	2	3	4	5	Considerable

Table 1

As team members build commitment, trust, and support for one another, it will allow them to develop and accomplish desired results. This commitment, trust, and self-determination by each team member is critical in achieving a sustained high level of performance. Team members will learn to appreciate and enjoy one another for who they are and will help keep one another on track. The team will have developed its working methods so that they become an informal set of guidelines.

References

Adams, John D., "The Role of the Creative Outlook in Team Building." In Team Building, edited by W. Brendan Reddy with Kaleel Jamison, 98-106. Virginia: Institute for Applied Behavioral Science and San Diego, California: University Associates, Inc., 1988.

Francis, Dave and Don Young, Improving Work Groups: A Practical Manual for Team Building. University Associates, Inc., San Diego, California, 1979.