

Team Activity

A. Overview.

Teams, if properly motivated and channeled, will help people in organizations achieve enhanced individual performance, improved team productivity, increased work group innovation and increased organizational profitability (or effectiveness and efficiency). Below are described the three prime conditions under which these potential teams will do their best work: Significant Organizational Change, Organization Alignment, and Problem Solving at the Grass Roots Level.

1. Prime Conditions for Team Formation. Teams can naturally be formed for any purpose. Experience teaches us that a team formation ought to be designated with a sense of common or shared priority and urgency. Teams are challenged by apparent threats to their organization.

2. Real (Hard)Work. When this happens form a team to do battle with this treat and win! If you want the illusion of progress, form a committee - if you want real progress charter a team! Set it loose on a severe problem with full authority to solve it. Plan on using the team to follow through on its recommendations by implementing them.

B. Team Challenges.

Three apparent conditions under which a team approach ought to be considered:

1. Significant Organizational Change. If something is about to radically change the organization, or if the organization is about to undergo radical change, the team approach to assisting the organization whether the storm of change and survive it is essential. The list of potential applications runs fully from unprecedented growth to the upheaval of downsizing. Sandwiched in between are reorganizations, the radical shifts in top management that often comes with poor organizational performance or the acquisition by another organization under unfavorable conditions.

2. Organization Development Initiatives. When the elements of an organization do not advance its purpose through cooperative, consistent, and congruent activity such that common direction is confused or absent, strategies for achieving success are often competitive or counterproductive, and work processes are ineffective or inefficient -- the organization has become unaligned. Teams that escalate in active membership and embed a new and more advantageous culture to overcome these shortcomings are the best possible remedy.

3. Problem Solving at the Grass Roots Level. When people at the grass roots level in an organization are directly affected by decisions, they can expect to play a part in that decision making process. Charging an Ad Hoc Team with the responsibility for solving problems, making recommendations, and helping to implement those recommendations does not necessarily alter decision making authority in an organization. It does alter culture favorably and foster organizational learning if done well, however.

C. Team Descriptions.

In any organizational change project, it is desirable to involve a critical "slice" of the organization. People need and want to be appropriately involved in the decisions that will effect them either directly or through a reasonable representation approach. A cross-section of involved people helps the information flow in both directions, to and from decision-makers or those who will influence those decisions. This communications channel is a vital link in implementing well thought out plans for organizational change.

Described below are twelve potential teams that will enhance the effectiveness of any substantial change effort. Naturally, not all teams must be engaged, nor must these be permanent assignments. Under ideal conditions, people ought to be able to volunteer for a team on which they feel their best contribution can be made. In this regard, each team must first be responsible for determining "how" it will achieve the stated purpose.

D. Team Composition.

Teams **MUST** include people with the expertise to make competent decisions, and these people must be engaged in a process that will bring reliable deliberate results. It is additionally important that the team contain a representative segment of the organization. This includes one or more of the "cynics" that will provide the creative tension necessary to assure "tough" questions are answered by the team. We often suggest that membership on a popular team escalate from a smaller group to a larger one. Volunteers are normally higher performers than are those pressed into service. The group size ought to be determined by the magnitude of the task for which the team was established.

E. Authority.

Teams are established by competent authority for a specific function. Because members of "teams" share a common priority, the chartering authority must place the purpose for which the team has been chartered above all other routine duties of team members. This priority must be stated in the charter so that members understand their priorities. The Realignment Coordinator must become a focal point for Team chartering.

F. Team Charter.

Teams must be chartered in writing by competent authority. The charter must include Outcomes to be achieved, Methods to be used to attain those outcomes, and Resources available or required for the team to attain its stated outcomes. The charter may also include assignments for personnel and their specified role in team activity.

G. Common Tasks for All Realignment Teams.

Regardless of the reason for which a team has been formed (or chartered), members can expect to perform certain repetitive functions even though leadership and other roles on a team will change. Below are some of the more common functional activities and some guidance on how to complete each.

1. Share Information. Members of a team have an obligation to each other and to their project to share all relevant information that will improve the quality of their product. From time-to-time, this includes sharing information about what is going on in their lives so that other team members can better understand them and their contribution to the collective effort. Sharing information may even include letting each other know the "feeling" they are having about the nature of the project -- or about each other's contribution to it. Within appropriate bounds (discussed next) members are also obligated to share information with people outside their immediate team when it will advance the goals of the project.

Note. Chart transcriptions or other "products" generated during team meetings are ideal for memory-jogging as information is shared with others, or as information is recalled in future team deliberations. All team members must have access to this recorded history trail.

2. Respect Anonymity, and when Required, Confidentiality. When sharing information outside the team, members must respect each other's privacy and not attribute dialog to specific individuals. There is always the possibility that remarks will be taken out of context, or that listeners will selectively hear what they want to hear based on who said it. On occasion, but rarely, a team may decide to keep its deliberations confidential. Although this is not encouraged, it is recognized as a potential necessity from time to time. When this occurs, members must respect this confidentiality. In the event they cannot, they must ask to be relieved from the team.

3. Obtain Information. In order for a team to do its best work, it must have access to the highest quality information. Team members must be ever vigilant to the availability of information sources and obtain information needed. This may involve asking others for information, or asking people outside the team to attend a meeting and provide needed

information. If there is an "expert" upon whom the team comes to rely for information on a regular basis, this person may be an ideal candidate for team membership. When possible, information obtained from any source ought to be included in the team recordings in its entirety or in summary form, (summarized information ought to contain a source reference when possible). If the Documentation Team is active, all team recordings should be channeled to that team for review and follow-through action when appropriate. In the absence of the Documentation Team, the Point of Contact (POC) for the project must fill this need.

Note. Either the Documentation Team or the POC may elect to structure a computer directory and file name discipline within which all information can be categorized and stored. A common-use system is ideal for this purpose. Documents not electronically recorded can be referenced in the file name structure.

4 Make Decisions and/or Recommendation. Teams make decisions or recommendations for others to make decisions based on the highest quality of information available. In some cases, it is appropriate to delay decisions until some specific time or event occurs. Typically, delays are not justified when further information is demanded if sufficient information is already available. When delays are encouraged by some and not by others, it is always a good idea to get clear what benefit added information will bring to the decision. Additionally, team decision making standards ought to follow a hierarchy depending upon the importance of the decision itself. The following four levels of decision making are encouraged with the least significant decision made at the first level:

a. Authoritarian Decision. That person with the authority to decide makes and announces the decision. Team members who disagree with the decision for any reason are obligated to voice their concern and ask that the decision be appropriately reconsidered.

b. Democratic Decision. A democratic decision is made by a majority of those present and voting. The only stipulation is that all options be voiced so that the fewest possible voting alternatives will exist. That larger the number of options, the fewer people will have to favor any one option for it to be favored by a majority.

c. Consensus Decision. Under the consensus, those voting must be able to live with the final decision, and may even be asked to support the efforts of those who will have to implement the decision. A consensus decision may be made with a passive vote, "Is there anyone who objects to..."

d. Concordant Decision. All members voting must be willing to champion the implications of the vote and take an active part in its implementation. The concordant vote is an active vote in that all members present and voting must be willing to register a positive affirmation "for" taking the action. Any "against" or silent vote must prompt further dialog until the ideal solution is attained.

5. Make Presentations. Participation on a team carries with it the responsibility for having to make informal presentations to the team and potentially to a larger number of people working on different parts of the project. Presentations are made to provide others with the necessary background information so they will have confidence in the decisions or recommendations made by the individual or the team/sub-team represented by the presenter. Presenters are assisted by members of their group when this is appropriate. The media used to present the material ought to be consistent with any presentations already made (if butcher paper presentations have been the norm, continue with this methodology in making team presentations -- this will improve the likelihood of presented material being incorporated into the recorded proceedings of the project).

6. Meet Off-line. Being a member of a team carries with it the responsibility to carry out specific task requirements. This often means having to meet with partial members or adjunct members between team meetings. Whenever this happens, a representative of the group ought to make a brief presentation to the larger group of which they are a member. Any documents ought also to be included in the documentation trail of the team.

7. Acquire New Members. Teams ought always to be on the lookout for new members who are interested in what they (members of the team) are doing. New members ought to bring with them a new burst of enthusiasm and fresh perspective. As teams cascade in size and complexity, newer members must always be ready to replace the older members on core activities. New members ought also to be brought on board by someone with a history and perspective of the chronology of what has happened. These essentials must be transferred in person, not via mail or through cold documentation.

8. Learn Constantly, and Seek Clarity. Team members ought to learn on at least three levels simultaneously:

a. The Content of the Project. If the content of the project is to "build a better mouse trap" then each member of the team must learn what he or she need to know about mouse trap building in a variety of contexts that include what the competition is doing about improving their mousetraps.

b. The Process. The process of that part of the project of concern to them. If, for example, marketing a better mouse traps is their part of the project, then they must learn everything there is to know about the sequence of events that make up the marketing process. These events will include cues that start and stop the pieces of work, activities in which one or more people engage during the marketing effort, and finally, the decision making patterns that move the events from one milestone to the next until the process is concluded.

c. The Culture. What are the rules of acceptable behavior within which work will be done. The culture applies to how the team will work on its tasks as well as the

required culture needed to implement any plans that will bring the project to a successful conclusion.

9. Model Behaviors. Team members are watched and listened to by those not on their team or on any team in the organization. Others will emulate the behaviors of team members believing that they (team members) are exemplifying the way things ought to be in the organization. For this reason, team members must be authentic in their pursuit of the organization values. When teams are used to change the culture of an organization (and teams always are used for this purpose to some measure) members must realize they are being watched and emulated.

10. Be Self-governing. Members of a team must govern themselves. This includes making rules and suspending them. Members must be able and willing to police each other to model the types of behaviors that others will ultimately emulate. It is recommended that leadership and other necessary positions be changed on a regular (quarterly) basis.