Productivity Link

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Contents

Developing High Impact Teams

Teamwork: The Essence of a Successful Business

Teamwork is a critical aspect of business strategy. Well working teams is a key component that contributes to a successful business. The competence of a single employee is no longer sufficient for today's complex labour market. Employees need to work together and help each other.

Well-designed and well-developed business teams will help businesses to;

- minimise and reduce costs and number of employees
- increase profits and reduce the hierarchical structure of the business
- improve customer relationships and maintain a client focus
- increase employee motivation and commitment
- improve processes for the recognition of team and individual contribution

Some of the tangible benefits of teamwork for businesses include;

- new products get to market faster
- customers get better service
- employees gain satisfaction
- enhances the quality of products and services
- reduces the cost of production
- creativity and innovation are enhanced

Traits of a Successful Team

High performing teams should have a clear performance objective.

Here are the 12 characteristics of an effective team and the role of team players;

- Clear purpose
- Informality
- Participation
- Listening
- Civilised disagreement
- Consensus decision
- Open communication and trust
- Clear roles and work assignments
- Shared leadership
- External relations
- Style diversity
- Self-assessment

Clear Purpose

It is crucial for a team to know and define its mission, goal or objective, and why it exists and their deliverables within the stipulated time frame. Teams need to establish a clear direction, and an action plan needs to be drawn up which may include the following;

- overarching goal or purpose
- statement of need or problem that needs to be addressed
- specific objectives or outcomes
- timetable of key events or milestones
- deliverables
- resource needs
- budget or cost estimate

The success of most effective teams is dependent on their ability to focus on the task at hand, where teams keep next deadline or deliverable as their main priority.

Informality

Team players need to enjoy being around their team mates, and the atmosphere of an effective team tends to be informal, comfortable and relaxed. Players should feel comfortable to interact with each other regardless of position, age, or race. A relaxed and informal environment promotes enthusiasm and enhances contributions.

Participation

An effective team needs the active participation of all its team players. Though the type of participation may vary, all team players should be encouraged to participate and should be provided with an opportunity to participate. It is known that some team players tend to dominate the action and limit the participation of others. Hence, it is the role of team leaders to manage and control the situation. Quiet members should be encouraged to join in the discussion and talkative members should be dissuaded from dominating the conversation. Meeting facilitation may require inviting members to speak and give their comments, views or opinions, rather than waiting for them to offer their comments. Team members should also be encouraged to participate regardless of their discipline and formal training. It is also important that participation should be kept relevant to the goal or objectives of the team. Team leaders or meeting facilitators should ensure that the meeting stays "on track" and intervene when discussions are not relevant and suggest that the team re-focus and return to the agenda or objective.

Participation can be enhanced by team players who

- limit their participation to the main agenda or objective
- intervene when the participation goes "off track"
- encourage silent members to participate
- speak out even when their views are contrary to the majority

Listening

The ability of team members to listen to each other is the single most crucial factor that establishes an effective team. Listening skills requires the "ability to sit back, be attentive, and take in what is said while reserving judgement". The ability to listen and

reserve judgement is critical and is especially important for team during problem solving and decision-making. Team members should use effective listening techniques such as questioning, paraphrasing, and summarising to get out ideas.

Civilised Disagreement

Disagreements or conflicts often arise while working in teams due to cultural differences, conflicting views or opinions, etc. Though conflicts about the work of the team should be encouraged and accepted as a natural consequence of a dynamic and active team, problems often arise from the manner in which the opinion is conveyed.

There are various methods of resolving conflicts, such as problem solving. Though it is the most difficult, problem solving is potentially the most satisfying method. Also known as collaborative conflict resolution, problem solving requires acknowledgement by the team players that "some differences exist, agree to deal with the issues and not smooth them over, forgo power as a quick and easy alternative and avoid simple compromises when the problems are complex and important".

Here are the steps to an effective problem solving;

1. Discussion
   Problem solving should be initiated with a discussion, which leads to an agreement on a problem.

2. Problem analysis
   Problem analysis involves the participation of team players that have data and opinions.

3. Generating alternative solutions
   Often, teams tend to jump to the first available option without considering other possibilities. All possible alternative solutions should be laid out, and the ultimate solution selection should involve as many team players as possible. This will help to ensure the "team's support for implementation of the solution".

The table below indicates how conflicts can be either destructive or constructive.

Destructive	Constructive
Diverts energy from more important activities and issues.	Opens up issues of importance, resulting in their clarification.
Destroys the morale of people or reinforces poor self-concept.	Leads to the solution of problems.
Polarises groups to they increase internal cohesiveness and reduce inter-group cooperation.	Increases the involvement of individuals in issues of importance to them.
Deepens differences in values.	Causes authentic communication to occur.
Produces irresponsible and regrettable behaviour such as name-calling and fighting.	Serves as a release for pent-up emotion, anxiety, and stress.
	Helps build cohesion among people sharing the conflict, celebrating in its settlement, and learning more about each other.
	Helps individuals grow personally and apply what they learn to future situations.

Source: Parker, G. M. (2008). *Team players and teamwork*: New strategies for developing successful collaboration. United States: Jossey-Bass.

Team players can establish a climate for civilised disagreement by;

- maintaining an objective, analytical approach to the differences
- being flexible and open to all points of view
- backing off when their views are not being accepted by the rest of the team

Consensus Decision

An effective team uses consensus as the method for making key decisions. Consensus requires "unity, but no unanimity, concurrence, but not consistency". Often the consensus method is used to reach an agreement on a problem statement and the recommended solution. A consensus involves as many team members as possible and is reached when everyone agrees to support the outcome.

The consensus approach is usually used when;

- there is no clear answer
- there is no single expert in the team
- commitment to the decision is essential
- sufficient time is available

Open Communication and Trust

A low level of trust among team members may result in the reluctance to discuss key issues openly. Trust is the avenue to open communication and gives members the confidence in revealing aspects of them. Open communication and trust usually develop over time and experience in working with the team.

Team members can encourage open communication and trust by;

- being dependable, trustworthy, and someone who can be relied on
- pitching in and helping other team members who need assistance
- candidly sharing views and encouraging others to do the same

The role of team leaders is crucial in building trust and opening communication. Team leaders need to encourage and promote discussion of problems and key issues. They should also be trusting and trustworthy, providing accurate and complete information to the team, honour commitments to the team and willing to take responsibility for errors in judgement. The team leaders should also "be an expert in cultural values that may have an impact on trust and open communication in order to advise on how to use these differences to build a more effective team".

Clear Roles and Work Assignments

It is important for team members to know what is expected of them. Awareness of the importance of roles is essential for the success of the team. Team members also need to know what others expect of them. They should take responsibility for work assignments that are critical to the achievements of the team's mission, goals and objectives. Tasks should be accomplished and delivered on time. An effective team will comprise team members who are committed and willing to work collaboratively with others to accomplish work assignments.

Shared leadership

Though all teams would have an appointed leader, leadership of a team must be shared among team members. It is necessary for all team members to take responsibility for meeting the goal and process needs of the team. In a successful team, leadership duties are usually shared. The leadership roles usually shift from time to time among team members. Successful and effective teamwork in businesses requires coordinated effort of all team members.

Some leadership responsibilities are found in the following table.

Task	Process
Initiating: proposing tasks, goals, or actions, defining group problems; suggesting a procedure	Harmonising: attempting to reconcile disagreements; reducing tension; getting people to explore differences
Offering facts: providing data and other information; giving an opinion	Gatekeeping: helping others to participate; keeping communication channels open; facilitating the participation of others
Seeking information: asking for data, opinions, facts and feelings	Consensus testing: asking if a group is nearing a decision; proposing a possible solution or decision that seems to be emerging from the group
Clarifying: interpreting or elaborating ideas; asking questions in a effort to understand or promote understanding	Encouraging: being friendly, warm, and responsive to others; indicating an interest in others' contributions
Coordinating/summarising: pulling together related ideas; restating suggestions; offering a decision or conclusion for the group to consider	Compromising: when one's own idea or status is involved in a conflict, offering a compromise that yields status; modifying in the interest of group cohesion or growth
Reality testing: making a critical analysis of an idea; testing an idea against some data; trying to see if the idea would work	

Source: Parker, G. M. (2008). *Team players and teamwork*: New strategies for developing successful collaboration. United States: Jossey-Bass.

External relations

The customers, vendors and sponsors are among the external relations, which "make demands on the team, provide access to needed resources, and a source of valuable feedback on team performance". The impact of these external stakeholders on the team's success may be great. For example, resources of customers and clients are important indicators of success for the team.

An effective team "builds key relationships with people outside the team". External relations could also be point of contacts that can assist the team.

Style diversity

Composition of the team as a determinant of success or to the concept of team player also plays an important role in teamwork. There tend to be a diversity of styles in a team. Style differences can reinforce the role of conflicts and at the same time, strengthen the team. Each member's style is dependent on their personality and the degree of culture influences. A finding showed that many successful teams comprise members "who are concerned about high-quality task accomplishment, push the team to set goals and objectives, work hard to ensure a positive team process, and raise questions about the team's operations". Although style diversity is a critical factor in successful teams, it is the ability of team members to appreciate and use this diversity that is crucial in creating and sustaining a high impact team.

Self-assessment

Periodically, teams should undertake a formal or informal examination on their performances and evaluate the problems or issues that are affecting their effectiveness. Team should then work together and address these issues to improve their performances and work towards achieving an effective and high impact team.

Top Ten High Impact Team Practices

1. **Shared purpose and vision**
   The team's purpose and vision should be well communicated to all team members, and the team should work towards achieving them.

2. **Shared leadership**
   All team members should take responsibility in ensuring the team being successful. Leadership is propagated throughout

the team, and all team members must operate with the same purpose and vision as their leader.

3. **Measurable performance targets and definable goals**
Team must agree to specific, measurable, achievable and time bond goals that include both business and team development objectives. Team should establish and track measurable performance targets that move them towards their goals and regularly evaluate their performances on how they are working together as a high impact team.

4. **Clear roles and responsibilities**
The role and responsibilities of each team member should be clearly defined and communicated. Each team member should be aware of all the activities that they are individually accountable for, and those that they are collectively responsible to produce. Team should respect members' role and openly discuss their expectations for the responsibilities of each role.

5. **Active sponsorship**
Sponsors are involved and committed to the team's success. They are the proponents of the team's work and delegate appropriate authority.

6. **Effective team process**
Teams should establish working agreements for their approach to their work, which should also be revised when necessary. Teams should also put in place practices for effective meetings, integrating new team members, decision-making and problem solving.

7. **Enhanced team competency**
The team should acknowledge conflict and deals with it when it arises. The team should also be flexible to integrate and adapt to changes.

8. **Synergistic collaboration and innovation**
Trust, accountability, and integrity are crucial in the teams, where communication and dialogues fosters action. Team collaborate to innovate new products or services, and solve problems when they arise.

9. **Meaningful recognition and reward**
    All team members should be committed to each other's and their team's success. Individual and team achievements and personal development are acknowledged and recognises values-based performance in a meaningful way.

10. **Quality relationships with stakeholders and other teams**
    Teams should develop good working relationships with their stakeholders – their sponsors, vendors, customers or clients, and other teams. It is also important that the team's work integrate with the company's overall business goals.
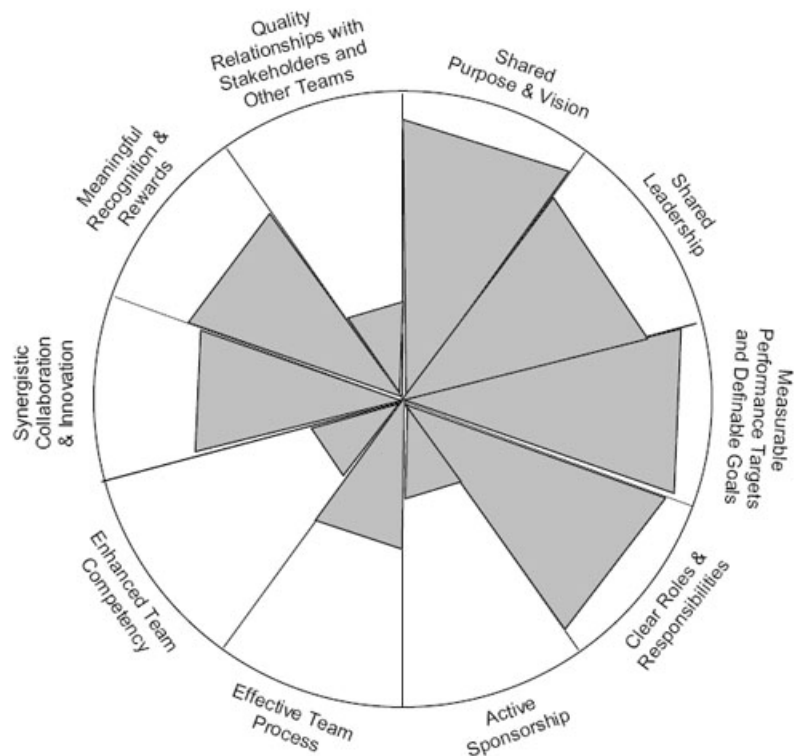

This is an example of a graphic representation of how a team has rated itself in the Top 10 High Performing Practices. The centre of the circle represents zero, and the outer ring ten. If this graphic were a wheel on the team's car (metaphorically), it would be nearly impossible to operate at a fast speed, and would be at a competitive disadvantage. The graph quickly communicates the team's strengths and areas to be improved.

Source: Niemela, C., & Lewis, R. (2001). *Leading high impact teams: The coach approach to peak performance*. California: High Impact Publishing.

Facilitating an Effective Team

TIER Framework
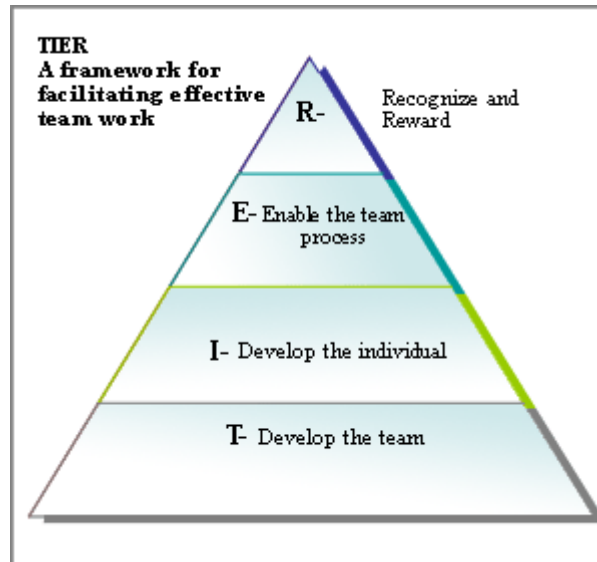
Source: Facilitating effectiveness in teams. (2008). Retrieved December 17, 2008, from http://www.teambuildingportal.com/articles/effective-teams/facilitate-effectiveness.php

Layer 1: Develop the team
Invest in developing the team on a continuos basis.

Layer 2: Develop the individual
Businesses will need to pay attention to individual progress and facilitate ongoing job training. Employees should be sent for training to upgrade their skills regularly and offer scope for personal growth. Developing the individual will "simultaneously strengthen the team". The aim is to effectively develop the individual to ensure than the team's performance is sustained in the long run.

Layer 3: Enable the team process
It is crucial to steer the team in the right direction by setting the framework for the team process. Poor role clarity and understanding of organisational objectives are the two key factors that contribute to ineffective teams. Thus, businesses will need to steer the team in

the right direction by clarifying roles and specifying business objectives. An essential aspect of enabling good teamwork is by encouraging frank and open discussions to ensure that the output from the team is truly based on the collective thinking and experience of all the team members.

Layer 4: Recognise and reward
Good teamwork deserves a pat on the back and so does outstanding individual contribution. Businesses should monitor the progress and develop methods to recognise and reward both the team and individual in order to motivate, inspire and enthuse them to greater performance heights. Rewards are motivators for team members to "strive harder and aim for excellence", and recognition boosts team morale. It also work wonders for team spirit and enthusiasm. Thus, recognition and reward systems should be put in place to "enhance motivation levels and provide a stimulus for a better team performance".

Sustaining an Effective and Efficient Team in a Competitive Corporate World

Source: Facilitating effectiveness in teams. (2008). Retrieved December 17, 2008, from http://www.teambuildingportal.com/articles/effective-teams/facilitate-effectiveness.php

The team is the unit that evaluates problems, develop strategies, and takes decisions on various aspect pertaining to the business. Thus, a team's effectiveness or ineffectiveness will have a direct impact on the performance of a business. Ineffective teams posed a potential damage to the reputation of the business, and often, results in clients or customers shifting their business dealings to a rival company. The TIER framework is a continual process that fosters consistently high performance in teams. It helps businesses augment and enhance the capabilities of their teams in a systematic manner and on an ongoing basis. Thus, the TIER framework sets the stage for sustaining effectiveness in work teams.

Sustaining team effectiveness can help in the following areas;

- it helps businesses build its credibility and reliability among it's customers or clients
- it helps build long-term relationships with customers or clients, and therefore retain client and sales revenues over a period of time
- it helps businesses to maintain continuity of work teams, thus the less need to train new members and incorporating them into an already established team
- quality in work output, services or products can be maintained and consistently meet the clients' needs and expectations
- it helps businesses to attempt new business development and new initiatives with total confidence that the team is able to deliver great work and good results
- it positively impacts business growth

Unique Characteristics of an Effective Team

Effective teams have some distinguished characteristics in the way they work together and interact. Some of the unique characteristics are listed below.

- **Effective teams talk to one another rather than behind each other's back**

  With high levels of mutual trust, it creates a bond among the team members, and leads to rapport and solidarity.

- **Effective teams have a healthy respect for each other's viewpoints**

  Team members actively listen, support and encourage one another. They also participate and contribute during team meetings or discussions.

- **Effective teams know how to deal with conflicts**

  Conflicts or disagreements pertaining to task-related discussions are treated as a normal occurrence. Team members do not harbour any animosity towards one another once the meeting or discussion ends.

- **Effective teams are true partners in all aspects related to teamwork**

  Team members are supportive to one another, and adopt an informal work ethic of sharing and fellowship. They are fully aware of their shared goals and shared responsibility and work towards jointly achieving their objectives.

- **Effective teams want team success.**

  Teams realise the need to focus on their goals and objectives. They understand and are committed to work towards achieving the business goals, carrying out their individual roles sincerely. There is also a good measure of team spirit within the team.

Building Blocks for Team Effectiveness

Source: http://www.upfrontconsultingmn.com/assets/newsletters/Team_building.pdf

1. Clarification of mission and vision, which should be defined and communicated to all the team members.

2. Assessment of strengths, capabilities and challenges.

3. Goal-setting to improve team effectiveness.

4. Communication of ideas, concerns, opportunities and successes.

5. Leadership strategies to strengthen the team experience and results.

Key Elements in Developing a High Impact Team

Developing a well functioning and high impact team is a learning process for every business. The key elements in developing a high impact team are;
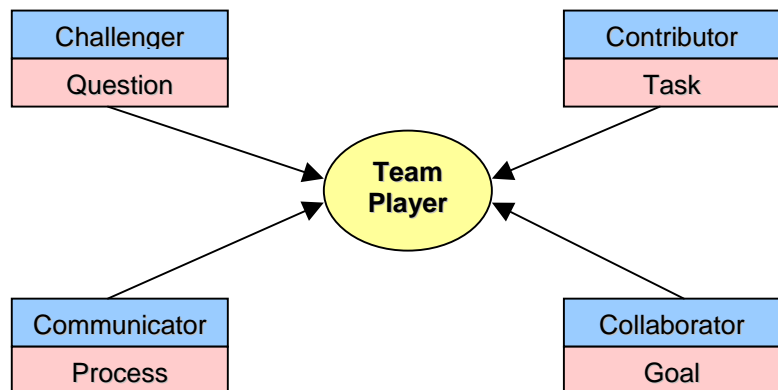
- team players
- team leaders

Team Players

Team players play an important role in determining a successful and high impact team. Team players should support the business and willing to go all out to achieve the corporate goals and objectives.

The team and team players should possess;

- clear goals and a plan to achieve them
- positive relationships with and support from other parts of the organisation
- excellent communication, openness, and trust among team members
- a blend of people, each contributing a special talent

Team Player Styles

There are four types or styles of team players, with each contributing in different ways to the success of the team.

Source: Parker, G. M. (2008). *Team players and teamwork*: New strategies for developing successful collaboration. United States: Jossey-Bass.

Contributor

- a task-oriented team member
- enjoys providing team with good technical information and data
- pushes the team to set high performance standards
- often dependable

Collaborator

- a goal-directed member
- sees the vision, mission or goal of the team as paramount
- flexible and open to new ideas
- willing to pitch in and work outside their defined roles
- a strategic, "big picture" person

Communicator

- a process-oriented member
- effective listener
- facilitator of involvement, conflict resolution, consensus building, feedback
- a positive people person

Challenger

- a member who questions the goals, methods and even the ethics of the team
- willing to disagree with the leader and others
- encourages team to take well-conceived risks

Team Leaders

Team leaders are the most critical to the success of a team. Leaders create an inspired vision for the organisation, communicate a sense of enthusiasm for the effort and are honest and authentic in their interactions with people. They need to be "effective managers" and able to adapt to "a variety of new challenges posed by".

Among the responsibilities of a team leader are;

- able to articulate a vision, create a clear mission, and develop goals, objectives and action plans
- ensure the completion of immediate tasks and work assignments with high quality and delivered timely
- inspire a desire to produce quality product and services
- ensure that quality and excellent customer service is provided
- supportive of others who push for risk taking and innovation

Team leaders should possess the following qualities;

- able to build trust and inspire teamwork
- able to identify and communicate goals
- able to facilitate and support team decision
- able to expand team capabilities
- able to create a team identity
- able to foresee and influence change
- able to accept criticism and adapt to changes

How Can Businesses Develop High Impact Teams?

Team Development

Team development involves three primary tasks; purpose, partnership and process.

	DIMENSIONS		
	Organization	**Team**	**Individual member**
Purpose (why, what)	Mission	Charter and goals	Roles and responsibilities
Partnership (with whom)	Values & beliefs	Norms and communication channels	Interpersonal skills
Process (how)	Management systems and reviews	Methods and procedures	Problem solving & planning skills

Source: Castka, P., Bamber, C. J., Sharp, J. M., & Belohoubek, P. (2001). Factors affecting successful implementation of high performance teams. *Team Performance Management. 7*(7/8): 123-134. Retrieved December 17, 2008, from Emerald Insight database.

Businesses are recommended to examine and assess teamwork in accordance to the model based on factors affecting successful implementation of high performing teams, as illustrated in the diagram below. Therefore, the data obtained will provide insights on the barriers and the enablers for team development. The results can also be applied for the development of the organisation and individual employee.

Critical Factors for Successful Implementation of High Impact Teams
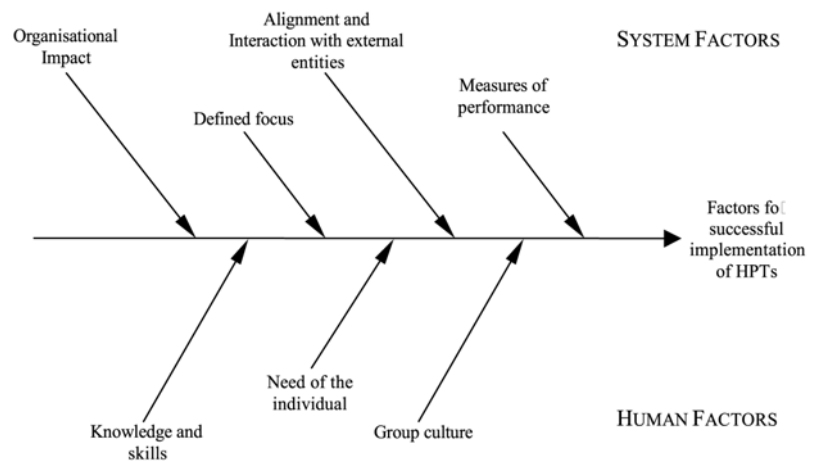
Source: Castka, P., Bamber, C. J., Sharp, J. M., & Belohoubek, P. (2001). Factors affecting successful implementation of high performance teams. *Team Performance Management. 7*(7/8): 123-134. Retrieved December 17, 2008, from Emerald Insight database.

Organisational Impact

The organisation or management needs to provide adequate support to all activities that involves any kind of "change". They should be accountable and responsible for;

- creating the organisational culture that supports and encourages team empowerment, experimentation, creativity and innovation
- team formation, its purpose and determining the group size, composition and team training
- providing a supportive environment
- monitoring team performance supported by measurement of key performance indicators that are mutually agreed on by both the team and management
- team reward and appraisal system

Defined Focus

A successful high impact team will have their defined mission, vision and goals clearly communicated and understood by all team members. Team members need to know the relative importance of the tasks and expectations from the management.

A good team focus comprise;

- a task
- a promised limit of what you are doing
- a promised level of performance
- a deadline
- the definition of the customer

Alignment and Interaction with External Entities

It is important for teams to understand the process from a customer's point of view. Thus, a high impact team should be able to "maintain alignment and interaction with other entities, such as other teams, managers, suppliers, customers, society and government".

Group Culture

Developing a high impact team demands a strong group culture. A group culture is based on empowerment, shared vision, creativity, participation, learning ability, trust and shared consensus. It has been highlighted that "an environment of tolerance toward failures and mistakes and a certain amount of creative chaos can improve team performance".

Seven principles of effective teamwork are;

- members must respect and trust one another
- members must protect one another
- members engage in open dialogue and communication
- members share a strong common goal
- members have strong shared values and beliefs
- members subordinate their own objectives to those of the team
- members subscribe to "distributed leadership"

Knowledge and Skills

It is also essential for team members to undergo training and personal development in areas such as;

- interpersonal and joint skills
- analytical and statistical skills
- improvement techniques, creativity approach and systems thinking
- technical skills (if required by the work assignments)

Needs of the Individual

Team members must also be aligned with their team, which is necessary to empower the individual and in turn the whole team. "Teamwork represents an interdependent balance between the needs of the individual and the needs of the organisation". Individuals should be recognised and the "understanding of personal differences" will lead to the overall improvement and success of a team performance.

Measures of Performance

Measures of performance triggers improvement, and should be put in place. Team's performance can be measured via the productivity, and effective teamwork via the individual or team performance.

Here are four guiding principles that can be used to maximise the effectiveness of teams;

- the overarching purpose of a measurement system should be to help a team, rather than top managers, and to gauge its progress
- a truly empowered team must play the lead role in designing its own measurement system
- as teams are responsible for a value-delivery process that cuts across several functions, it must create measures to track the processes involved
- team should adopt only a handful of measures

Case Study

Creative Teams at Hewlett-Packard

Hewlett-Packard's success in delivering excellent and quality products and production methods is achieved through "integrating change, cross-functional teams and creativity".

Their creative-team process includes the following six stages;

1. Team formation

2. Defining the project mission

3. Imagining the future

4. Defining "breakthrough" objectives and critical success factors

5. Creative phase

6. Identifying core processes and gaining commitment

Team Formation

Hewlett-Packard dedicates a lot of "time and effort to forming teams and eliminating communication barriers between team members". Team members are required to attend short lectures, which include exercises on creativity, teamwork and approaches to problem solving. "The company also ensures that prospective team members know the purpose of the team and the potential contribution of each team member".

Mock exercises are also conducted for employees who have not worked in a Hewlett-Packard team before. Fictional problems are used for them to "transform the organisation of a small business, such as pizza-delivery firm operating in a highly competitive environment, by focussing on marketing, design and company operations". This exercise highlights problem-solving techniques and fosters communication and team spirit.

Defining the Project Mission

One critical expect in developing a successful team is to manage different perceptions and views, and "to develop a common view of the project goals", which is called a project mission. The team's project's mission "gives the team its identity and help to foster the commitment of team members", and must be communicated to the team and company members.

Imagining the Future

At Hewlett-Packard, team members are encouraged to "peer into the future", and emulate solutions which are non-existent to date. Members of the team will "predict what the world will be like in ten years time, what they themselves will be doing, what customers will expect and what technological developments will have occurred". Such visions that are gathered by the team are "related back to the competitive environment in which the team operates, to create a view of a shorter-term future about two or three years ahead".

This process allows team members to identify the strategic impact, which their project might have on Hewlett-Packard as a whole. At the same time, members will gain a better understanding of the business pressures driving the need for change, and helps to create a sense of urgency among team members.

Defining "Breakthrough" Objectives and Critical Success Factors

The Hewlett-Packard team members define breakthrough objectives. They also reflect upon the effects of such breakthroughs on the company as a whole, before identifying five to ten factors, which will make the breakthrough a reality. Through the breakthroughs and critical success factors correlations, the team can identify gaps and rank priorities.

Creative Phase

The creative phase is a thinking process that involves "reflecting on the role of factors such as technology in actually delivering the potential breakthroughs which have been identified". It is then translated into a few high-level business models to gain a

more complete picture of the impact of breakthrough on the company and its employees.

Identifying Core Processes and Gaining Commitment

Integration of activities is achieved at Hewlett-Packard through condensation, consolidation and clustering. Individual member's activities are collected and "condensed into processes, which are summarised in the consolidation phase". Processes that have been identified as a result of high-level business model are then clustered into related areas. Through clustering, team members are able to "identify their potential contribution to the project as a whole", which in turn "fosters team commitment".

Articles may be delivered to clients, upon request.

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