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International Exposition on Team Excellence (IETEX)

Team Excellence in an Organisation

The formation of teams in an organisation is a natural way to involve employees in working cooperatively and collaboratively. Teams such as problem solving committees, quality improvement groups, task forces, and product launch teams are among the “key elements of strategies” that recognise that every employee in an organisation has the expertise that can contribute to the success of the enterprise.

The essence of teaming is a shared vision and agenda. Teaming streamlines the work of the organisation, and coordinates the efforts of staff both within and across teams. Teams can also make a huge difference to the efficiency, productivity and quality of life of all kinds of organisations.

Benefits of Teaming

Teaming fosters greater collaboration and aims to increase productivity and higher-quality work. Teaming also promotes higher level of commitment and provides equal opportunities for learning and success.

Among the benefits of forming teams are;

- promotes effective communication among team members
- gives team members the opportunity to share experiences
- team members are able to achieve greater depth of learning, further develop current skills and acquire new knowledge or skills
- promotes creativity and risk-taking, apart from helping members to express valuable ideas they might otherwise keep to themselves
- teaming can unlock the creative potential of individuals
- a team implies a point of identity and reference for the members.

Seven Key Components of Team Excellence

- 1. Clear sense of direction**

Teams need to establish clear goals, targets and objectives they need to achieve. It is also critical that the purpose of each team is clearly stated and communicated to each team member.
- 2. Talented members**

The team must possess members with full complement of competencies, knowledge and skills that are needed to accomplish the set goals. Members' talent should be utilised and they should also continuously develop their knowledge and skills.
- 3. Clear and enticing responsibilities**

Each team member should know his or her role and responsibilities in the team. The expectations of leadership and all other roles should be well established, with each player understand how their roles fit into the overall team's objective.
- 4. Reasonable and efficient operating procedures**

It is important that task content and process systems are established and put in place to plan, conduct meetings, identify and solve problems, make decisions, give and receive information, evaluate progress, and perform tasks.
- 5. Constructive interpersonal relationships**

Team members must demonstrate "genuine respect" to one another and celebrate diversity due to the different backgrounds, and various skills and capabilities. Team members should understand the differing personalities and see the strengths in those differences, in particular when handling conflicts.
- 6. Active reinforcement systems**

The efforts and contributions of team members should be appreciated and acknowledged. Hence, organisations must look into their evaluation and reward systems

7. Constructive external relationships

It is also necessary for teams to build good diplomatic relations with other key players and teams that are external to their own membership. Developing constructive external relationships will be an advantage for them to pursue opportunities and assist in addressing threats.

Characteristics of a Best Performing Team

A team should possess a rich mix of skills and talents. It should have a passionate belief in its mission with clearly defined goals. Team members need to identify the common purpose and pursue the collective common goals to reflect a coordinated team effort. Contribution of individual expertise and sharing of insights are deemed critical for the effective learning through teaming.

A best performing team should display the following characteristics;

- team goals are considered to be as important as individual goals
- team is able to focus on both task completion and process maintenance
- team understands the goals and is committed to achieving them; members should also be willing to shift responsibilities to meet demands
- members are accountable to the team and individual members, and feedback on performance is welcome
- team climate is comfortable and informal; members should feel empowered
- communication is spontaneous and shared among all members; diversity of opinions and ideas is encouraged
- respect, open-mindedness and collaboration are high; members seek win-win solutions and build on each other's ideas
- trust replaces fear, and members feel comfortable taking risks

- conflicts and differences of opinion are considered opportunities to explore new ideas; the emphasis is on finding common ground
- team continually works on improving itself by examining its charter, protocols, procedures and practices, and experimenting with change
- leadership is rotated, and no one member dominates
- cross-training occurs on all key responsibilities owned by the team
- decisions are made by consensus and are accepted and supported by the team's members
- authority increases as the team demonstrates competence and maturity
- members are bound closely together by a shared set of values that in turn reinforce personal commitment and a collective accountability for the results

Benchmark of Team Excellence

To achieve team excellence, teams need to possess the six indicators of excellence. Teams should examine their scores against these indicators to allow team members to identify the areas of strength and weaknesses, discover overall patterns of agreement, and surface differences in perceptions about how the team is functioning.

The six indicators of excellence are;

1. Alignment

Team members must share and possess a deep sense of common goal, vision or purpose and work towards achieving it.

2. Team Effectiveness

Teams should have strong internal processes that allow coordinated efforts such as shared values, trust, open communication, flexibility and decision making.

3. Empowerment

Team members must feel empowered to do what is necessary to accomplish their tasks, and their efforts should be supported.

4. Passion

Each team member should possess a high and sustained levels of enthusiasm, energy, excitement, excellence and confidence to the team.

5. Commitment

Each team member should also possess deep commitment to achieving the purpose of the team.

6. Results

The team should purposefully raise the level of performance above and beyond what is necessary and accomplish outstanding results based on high standards.

Innovation Through Teams

Great inventions stem from teams, where a group of people from diversified backgrounds and skills come together to figure out how to leverage existing products and concepts in new ways. Hence, innovation takes teamwork and is a process undertaken to present a new fresh idea to improve business operations and processes, increase productivity and enhance customer experience.

Innovation brings the following benefits;

- faster development of new products and services
- better optimisation of R&D investment
- closer alignment with market needs
- more successful product introductions
- better anticipation of customer needs
- competitor differentiation

Ten Principles to Unleash Innovation in Teams

1. Establish the reasons and objectives of forming a team. Create a concise and well-understood team vision and mission statement.
2. Recruit the best team players. Team members should work towards achieving the team objectives, vision and mission.
3. Establish clear, participatory, effective and elevating team goals and plans. Ensure that team's plans and future direction are clear and supported. Team members should always be kept informed of the ongoing progress, quality standards and effectiveness set. They should also give full commitment towards achieving the objectives.
4. Articulate and communicate team task functions and relationship functions. There should be a high degree of trust and confidence among team members. They should also participate fully and communicate openly, encouraging different viewpoints and foster diversity in thought and members, and build camaraderie, and closeness within the team.
5. Develop healthy and productive group and meeting norms. Team cohesiveness should be grown by building collaboration. Decisions should be made after seeking the opinions and views from each team member. This will assist the team in making good decisions, resolve problems and find solutions through mutual effort and open communications.
6. Proactively manage team behaviours and conflicts. Conflicts are a "healthy sign" of a team cooperating and communicating ideas frequently. Conflicts should be addressed in a timely manner and remain rooted in problems and issues and not about members.
7. Cultivate and unleash group creativity and innovation.

8. Analyse, update and manoeuvre team communication. Leaders should review the team's members communication once every few months, to gain insight on how the team communicates, and also provide individual members feedback. Leaders should also undertake appropriate steps to enhance communication flow when the need arises.

9. Create a team assessment inventory. A team assessment inventory on the team's general productivity and climate, team goals, processes and procedures and member relationships should be carried out once every three months. This allows the team performance to be analysed and calibrated, and is critical when working together on projects for the long term.

10. Create an environment where team members enjoy their work, and team moral remains high.

Four Levels of Innovation

Levels of innovation are defined by the combination of capabilities and customer/user segments.

Capabilities	New	III. Expanding market opportunities by connecting new capabilities to existing needs	IV. Creating new markets by developing new capabilities to meet new needs
	Existing	I. Exploiting market opportunities through better ways to connect existing capabilities with existing needs	II. Expanding market opportunities by connecting existing capabilities to new needs
		Existing	New
		Customer Needs	

Level I : Exploiting market opportunities through better ways to connect existing capabilities with existing needs.

Level II : Expanding market opportunities by connecting existing capabilities to new needs.

Level III : Expanding market opportunities by connecting new capabilities to existing needs.

Level IV : Creating new markets by developing new capabilities to meet new needs.

Top 20 of the Most Innovative Companies 2009

Rank	Company
1	Apple
2	Google
3	Toyota Motor
4	Microsoft
5	Nintendo
6	IBM
7	Hewlett-Packard
8	Research in Motion
9	Nokia
10	Wal-Mart Stores
11	Amazon.com
12	Procter & Gamble
13	Tata
14	Sony
15	Reliance Industries
16	Samsung Electronics
17	General Electric
18	Volkswagen
19	McDonald's
20	BMW

Source: The 50 most innovative companies. (2009). *Business Week*. Retrieved May 4, 2009, from http://bwnt.businessweek.com/interactive_reports/innovative_50_2009/?chan=magazine+channel_in%3A+inside+innovation

Evaluating Teaming Performance

Teams should reflect and evaluate their performance periodically. Teams can be evaluated in five main areas; goals, results and productivity, team structure, team operation and team skills. The core of the evaluation process is defining their goals and assessing if their goals have been achieved. Various methods can be employed to undertake the evaluation process.

Team Interviews

Team interviews can be conducted to see what, if any, assistance that can be provided in order for the team to become a model of excellence. Such assistance should be tailored to fit the qualities of the team. Interviews can be conducted on an individual, small sub-group, or total team basis, and can include both team members and key parties outside the team who are familiar with the accomplishments of the team and how it operates. Anything said by a given individual should be utilised in the design of the developmental sessions, though the source should remain confidential. The purpose of conducting the interviews is to capture the themes that arose. A summary of the results should be put in writing and disseminated to all those who participated. An example of questions to ask during the interview is presented below.

Team Assessment Interview

1. What do you think are the keys for great success in the use of a team approach to work and problem solving?
2. How effective and satisfying is this team? What are this team's greatest strengths?
3. What would you like to see this team do better or differently?
4. What would you like your teammates and/or the resource people serving your team to learn or relearn at development sessions?
5. What forces, obstacles, barriers and sources of resistance will need to be overcome in order for your team to become great?
6. What forces exist that may push for greater success with your team?

Team Questionnaires

Questionnaires can also provide valuable data that can be used to plan team development interventions. An example of questions to be asked is presented below.

1. Results and Productivity

- 1.1 Does the team have clearly identified actionable steps to achieve its goals?
- 1.2 Does the team monitor its progress by concrete milestones?
- 1.3 Does the team regularly and frequently assess how well they are working together?
- 1.4 Are the team's successes, big and small, acknowledged?

2. Team Structure

- 2.1 Is the team the right size, with the right mix of players for your purpose?
- 2.2 Does the team have the flexibility to bring in people and change membership to suit the current project?
- 2.3 Does the team have the right resources; money, time and people?
- 2.4 Does the team meet regularly?

3. Team Operation

- 3.1 Does the team have effective leadership?
- 3.2 Do team members understand their roles and are able to carry them out effectively?
- 3.3 Does the team have good networks, internally, externally and with the management?
- 3.4 Does the team have useful meeting with clear identification of tasks?
- 3.5 Does the team have effective ways of managing conflict?
- 3.6 Does the team allow expressions of ideas freely and sharing of opinions?
- 3.7 Does the team stay motivated?

4. Team Skills

- 4.1 Managing meetings: setting agendas, managing time, etc.
- 4.2 Documenting progress: keeping minutes, records, etc.
- 4.3 Data and information gathering
- 4.4 Facilitation: dealing with conflict, managing constructive debates, etc.
- 4.5 Innovation: introducing creative ideas
- 4.6 Presentation: summarising findings to relevant audiences
- 4.7 Networking: bring comment, feedback, etc. to team
- 4.8 Motivation: reminding team of success
- 4.9 Task performing: reliably doing relevant tasks

Team Observation

Another method of evaluation is to observe it in action. Team observation provides an advantage of gathering unbiased data on how the team actually operates. It would provide insights on how team conducts their meetings, keep its members involved, methods of problem solving undertaken and dealing with conflicts. The table below provides an example of the approach to take in reporting back a group observation to a team.

Analysing Team Processes

1. Participation levels

Who participated the most and the least?
How were the silent members treated?
Were there any shifts in participation levels?
Who talked to whom?

2. Leadership

Who had the most influence, and over which issues?
How did various members gain influence?
Who was the task leader?
Who was the social (relationship oriented) leader?

3. Group roles

Who played which of the following task-oriented roles:
Idea initiator?
Information/opinion giver?
Coordinator?
Topic gatekeeper?
Consensus tester?
Clarifier/summariser?
Task accomplishment evaluator?

Who played which of the following social roles:
Harmoniser?
Person gatekeeper?
Encourager/support giver?
Team spirit captain?
Team member relations evaluator?

Who played which of the following dysfunctional roles:
Avoider?
Dominator?
Attention seeker?
Dependent member?
Blocker
Attacker?
Topic jumper?

4. Decision-making procedures

What styles of team decision making were used:
Self-authorized?
Handclasp?
Majority rule?
Compromise?
Consensus?

Did the group openly decide how it would make its decisions?

5. Group norms and sanctions

Were ground rules stated?
What norms were established regarding standards of performance?
Group cohesion?
Risk taking?

6. Group heterogeneity

How did the team celebrate/capitalise on the differences that existed between its members?
To what extent did the team make full use of its human resources?

7. Group procedures

Did the group clarify the purpose and agenda for the meeting?
Did it follow the agenda?
Did the group follow a systematic approach to problem solving?
Did the group assign responsibilities to particular individuals to ensure that actions would be taken on decisions made by the group?
How was this handled?
Did the group manage its time well?

8. Group effectiveness

How well did this group do on its task?
Overall, what are the strengths and weaknesses of this group?

Case Studies

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 aspect 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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