

7 Steps to Successful Teamwork

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Step 1: Let's talk about the work

Opening the teamwork conversation with a focus on work can ground people in the real goals they want to achieve together and energize the need for collaboration to get things done. Questions to address include:

- How are our customers affected by our current work structure and coordination?
- What are we doing well and where are areas for improvement?
- How are others in the organization positively or negatively affected by our work?
- This pre-team building phase often includes feedback from customers and coworkers for gleaning insights about team-building needs

Step 2: Clarify team structure and goals

In true “teams”, members are bound together by their interdependence on each other to ac-

complish shared goals. Early in the team development process, teams need to discover their areas of interdependence as well as areas where they might better work alone or in other team configurations. Different team structures can be developed to reflect clusters of goals or tasks. For example, a large team with loosely related goals or work might be re-configured into smaller sub teams whose work is more closely connected.

Step 3: Define the team purpose

Develop a “charter” describing the broad responsibilities of the team or teams. For example, a high level management team charter may include overall responsibilities for insuring that the organization achieves its mission and goals. This could include oversight of strategic planning, setting the direction for human resource management, and making resource allocation decisions. A charter for a project team, on the other hand, might include a statement of responsibility for coordinating and directing resources to accomplish a specific long term project. An ongoing work group would develop a charter defining who is served, the ongoing key roles and responsibilities of team members, and work goals and quality.

Step 4: Develop effective interaction skills and trusting work relationships

The foundations of teamwork are relationships and interactions. Ideas and information flow through workable relationships between people. Patterns of difficult interaction can erode morale and seriously impede work. Depending on the current skill and trust level of team members, developing effective interaction and relationships can take a variety of forms. For example, a communication or social intelligence assessment can help members identify and begin to build higher level interaction skills. Learning how to give and receive feedback may help reduce members' blind spots about how they are affecting one another, including how others perceive their strengths. Getting to know each other informally can also be very helpful for developing trust.

Step 5: Define your team decision making authority and process

A team without authority to make decisions is like a hungry alligator without teeth. Teams with a compelling purpose and a drive for positive change need the authority to make decisions that are not turned around by other groups or individuals in the organization. On the other hand, the team needs to know its limits of authority. For example, setting the overall budget of the organization would probably be an executive team (or board) decision, obviously not appropriate for a program, division or project team. Making decisions about improving a work process within a division would probably be an appropriate decision for a division team (assuming the decision was

coordinated and integrated appropriately with others who are affected). While not all such decisions can be projected in team-building, the team can get a sense of the kinds of decisions it should be making as well as who to consult, inform, and collaborate with on important decisions. Effective, sustainable decisions require a decision making process that generates input from team members and other important players, surfaces all the important information and data, and generates a full and robust discussion of scenarios.

Step 6: Create team agreements for how you want to work together

Certain norms and communication patterns will develop naturally in your team. Some patterns such as "everyone talks but nobody listens," will obviously work against your team effectiveness. The best way to ensure effective team norms is to consciously create them through a set of "team agreements." These agreements hold members to positive teamwork behaviors such as active listening, commitment to full participation, being direct, and sharing leadership for the success of the team.

Step 7: Become a "learning group"

Team building is not something that's done "once and for all." It's an ongoing process of learning, tuning up, and going the next level. Successful teams are constantly looking for ways to develop the competencies of their team members and the effectiveness of their teamwork to achieve high quality results and winning decisions for their organizations and customers.