

White Paper: Team Building



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*“Coming together is a beginning.
Keeping together is progress.
Working together is success.”*
— Henry Ford

The purpose of this white paper is to provide organizational leaders with an explanation of why we believe team building is an important organizational activity and why we think it should be a continuous process rather than just an occasional event.

Definition

Team Building is any activity designed to move a team from any of the first three stages of team development to the final stage, PERFORMING.

The Four Stages of Team Development

Bruce Tuckman (1965) developed a model for explaining the stages of development that every team goes through.

- 1. FORMING.** In this first stage, the members of the team get to know one another. Team leaders tend to be directive. Serious issues and feelings are avoided, while members are gathering information and impressions about each other.
- 2. STORMING.** In this second stage, as members become more comfortable with each other and their team roles, members open up to each other and confront each other’s ideas and perspectives.

Team leaders tend to be directive as they help team members resolve their differences.

- 3. NORMING.** In this third stage, the team reaches consensus about its shared goals and team roles and responsibilities. Compromise is often needed as members may have to give up their own ideas to facilitate effective team functioning.
- 4. PERFORMING.** In this fourth and final stage, the team begins to function as a self-managed entity. Team leaders are participative rather than directive. Members are motivated to exceed team goals. Conflict is depersonalized and constructive and serves to fuel innovation and creativity.

Note that changes to team composition or objectives will more than likely require the team to go through the same development process from the beginning.

Effective Team Building Strategies

We have studied teams and conducted team building activities in a variety of organizations over the past 30 years and have discovered that effective, high-performing team share these characteristics:

- **Transformational leadership.** Team leaders are inspiring and challenging team members to take ownership of their work.

“None of us is as smart as all of us.”
— Ken Blanchard

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- **Formalized decision-making methods.** The team makes decisions based on what the tasks require. Decisions are quick when needed or more deliberate as appropriate. Consensus is valued and sought.
- **Clear communication.** Information flows freely up, down, across and around the team. There are no information silos or hoarding.
- **Embraced diversity.** The team values differences in perspective, experience, expertise and other areas.
- **Trust.** Team members trust each other, their leaders and their mutually developed team processes.
- **Formalized conflict management.** When conflicts arise, team members have a respectful process for resolving it that preserves dignity and fosters creativity.
- **Clear and challenging goals.** Team goals are Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant and Timely (SMART).
- **Defined roles and responsibilities.** Team members know what they are responsible for and how their roles interact and interest with those of their team members.
- **Positive atmosphere.** Team members enjoy working with each other. They work hard and have fun without losing focus on the team's goals and objectives.

A Continuous Process

One of the most important lessons we have learned over the years is that effective team building is a continuous process. Think of it this way, teams are composed of people who are growing and changing all of the time. Add to that the fact that most teams undergo a change to their membership compositions at least once every six to nine months. Add to that the notion that most organizations are experiencing rapid

external changes. Taken together, this means that a team that is performing today may be forming or norming next week.

Intelligent organizations are recognizing this by increasing the frequency of their formal and informal team building activities. Informally they are encouraging their team members to spend more time getting to know each other in personal settings like offsite meals, outings and recreational events. Formally they are investing in team building workshops, leadership and member coaching and skills training to help their teams sharpen and maintain their performance edge.

Conclusion

Remember, every team goes through the four development stages. How quickly they progress through them is often the difference between organizational success or failure. Let us help your organization develop high-performing teams that exceed your organizational goals.

“The greatest danger a team faces isn’t that it won’t become successful, but that it will, and then cease to improve.”

— Mark Sanborn