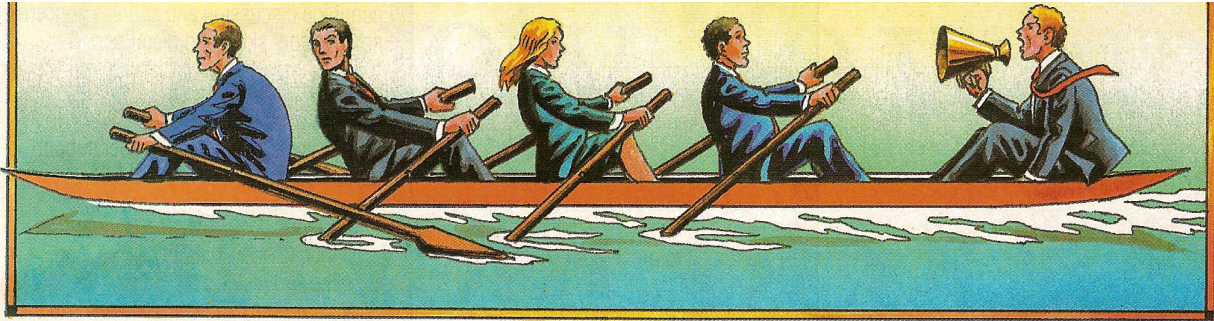


# DO TEAMS



## ... BUT DO THEM RIGHT

Work teams have delivered too much success to be labeled a managerial fad.

But while team-building may appear to be a natural act, it's anything *but* natural.

To succeed, teams need care, patience, and a charter.

By MARK A. FROHMAN

**T**HE NEED TO IMPROVE TEAMWORK TO COMPETE MORE EFFECTIVELY is no longer a subject for debate, because the evidence of what teams contribute is overwhelming. "Teams," affirms a *Fortune* 50 senior executive, "have improved both quality and customer satisfaction around here. We need to do more of it." Even the most skeptical manager has to acknowledge that the routine challenges now confronting our organizations often require a team approach for these reasons:

- Intensifying competition, shrinking profits, obvious-and rapidly rising-needs to support and serve global customers, and faster product development force continual reviews of practices, procedures, and management systems.
- Vertical command-and-control structures that emphasize specialization by function have all but decayed.
- In the final analysis, downsizing, rightsizing, consolidation *et al.* have not yielded anticipated results-but they have shaped the realization that employees must be utilized more effectively, not just eliminated.
- Increased complexity in almost everything organizations do demands greater coordination and communication among persons in different functions and/or geographic areas.
- While employees at all levels still seek opportunities to contribute and grow, traditional promotions "up the corporate ladder" are dwindling; cross-functional teams provide ideal alternatives to nurture these desires and reap their benefits.
- Teams are even stretching beyond corporate boundaries as alliances-as strategic partnerships, vendor-supplier teams, and other customer-involvement activities all reflect.

For good reason, then, the formation of teams-which have distinctly U.S. origins-has firmly taken root.

# TEAM STAGES

Stage	Description	Leader Focus
1. Start-up	High expectations. Unclear goals and roles.	Task focus. Provide goals, structure. Supervise start-up and define accountability.
2. Reality strikes	Recognition of time and effort required. Roadblocks. Frustration.	Task and process emphasis. Clarify expectations and roles. Encourage discussion and address concerns. Ensure proper skills and resources.
3. Realigning expectations	Goals and roles reset. Cooperation and trust begin to produce progress.	Process focus. Promote participation and team decision-making. Encourage peer support. Provide feedback.
4. Performance	Involvement, openness, and teamwork. Commitment to process and task achievement.	Monitoring and feedback focus. Let team take responsibility for solving problems and making decisions. Monitor progress and supply feedback.

*These stages reflect why effective teams take time to form. Teams need structure to start. As they gel and assume responsibility for results, attention to the team processes and procedures becomes important.*

Indeed, strip the veneer and buzzwords from today's management *fads-process reengineering, empowerment, TQM* and one finds teamwork and project work teams at their core. Unlike these fads, however, teams continue to exhibit staying power.

The bottom line is unmistakable: One of the major unrelenting challenges facing management is to create effective teams that deliver superior short-term and long term performances. Meeting that challenge best begins by first exposing the fallacies and traps that produce not teams-but turkeys.

~ *Teams are not easy to start.* They require careful planning and giving team members time to get to know each other.

~ *Teams are not panaceas.* A team is not the best solution for any problem at any time. Doing teams right means ensuring that the problem cannot be better addressed by other means and that conditions-availability of people and time support their creation.

~ *Teams are not compatible with existing expectations, systems, and procedures.* In fact, they're apt to be incompatible with standard job descriptions; performance appraisal, reward, and promotion practices; or with traditional measurement and control systems.

~ *Teams are not self-directing.* There is nothing inherent in a team that teaches its members about their strategic context or important targets, or magically monitors their performance against them. Without direction, monitoring, and feedback from management, teams are aimless, abandoned, and ineffective-and a waste of time and effort.

What, then, are the defining elements of successful teams?

Experience in organizations that have created hundreds of teams suggests that success depends on *six essential elements*:

## **1. Successful teams are management-directed and focused.**

They are born in the context of an organization's strategy and priorities, and challenged with specific high-performance goals linked to its strategic or operational plans. Teams can have vastly different missions. One, for instance, may form to solve a specific problem-such as rejects of an individual part. A cross-functional team, meanwhile, may be established to bring a new product to market and require R&D, sales and marketing, and manufacturing expertise. Other teams can be directed to find ways to improve product quality or safety. Regardless of mission, teams do not exist for their own sake. They are tools, a means to an organizational end. Moreover, management goals must be realistic.

Numerous organizations find that a formal charter can help a team understand its scope and assignment, and set expectations. Prepared by a team's organizers and its leader, the charter should include background information, purpose and scope, goals and measures, approach and constraints, members, schedule, and points to consider.

**2. Successful teams build their own identity with their own methods and ground rules.** They devise self-regulating procedures and insist on adherence, which, in turn, creates new expectations and roles for its members. Teams are not an extension of the traditional organization. That is why people are sometimes reluctant to get on board. Encourage teams to set up their own 3 Rs-roles, rules, and relationships. Then, members have something meaningful, and deliver a fourth R-results.

**3. Successful teams are accountable and utilize measurements for guidance and feedback.** Measurements give teams clear and practical systems of accountability—more accountability, in fact than can exist in a traditional organization. Team accountability has four distinct parts, three of which are non-traditional.

- Performance-based accountability is the traditional part. It arises from the tangible outcomes the team is to deliver. Development of a new product, a new or revised safety procedure, a schedule for over-time allocation, or reduced cycle time are typical outcomes.

- Process accountability shows how team members manage their relationships and work together. Typical process accountabilities can include activities such as goal setting, communication, problem-solving and decision-making, and participation during meetings. Process accountability requires a careful definition of key team processes and their measures by the team members themselves.

- Peer support accountability indicates how well team members support and rely on each other and perform assigned tasks. It becomes apparent as members discuss mutual expectations and identify "stakes in the ground."

- Personal accountability forms as individual team members set personal standards for taking initiatives to help the team succeed. Team members, seeing what is needed, accept shares of the responsibility for results and set their own expectations to act above and beyond their normal call of duty.

**4. Successful teams have corporate sponsors and leaders who understand the need for a non-traditional mindset and skill set and have a willingness to venture into uncharted territory.** If the traditional worked, teams would not be needed. Teams are effective because they primarily operate from side to side, not just up and down. You have to change your mindset for teams to succeed. Timid, low-performing teams come from traditional conservative management mentalities.

In turn, group-related process skills are required—team leadership, for instance, and conducting meetings, team dynamics, joint decision-making, and dealing with differences. These skills take time to develop and take hold, and as team members try to understand their assignment and establish these processes, they invariably experience uncertainty, ambiguity, and frustration. So, time is a mandatory investment for any team to succeed. Without a proper mindset, a team is like an airplane without a runway: It can't take off, and the investment it represents will be unrealized.

**5. If accountability supplies the tracks for the team, trust is the fuel.** When a cross-functional team forms, its members need to develop trust in one another. Yet a standard organization provides little experience or basis to do so. Layoffs, cost-cutting, and consolidations breed cynicism and suspicion, which obviously makes building trust difficult. Serious team programs, then, are even more dependent on mechanisms such as team charters, along with detailed company information about operations and competitors and candid conversations with customers.

**6. Successful teams need to fit into the organization.** They are never fully self-directed or completely independent. Progress must be monitored, and teams must be kept informed of relevant developments elsewhere in the enterprise. Otherwise, they may stray off course without knowing it. Logically, then, successful teams deserve recognition. It reinforces team members' contributions and tells the rest of the organization that teams fit in.

Because vivid team experiences are woven through the fabric of our personal histories, we're apt to regard teams in the workplace as almost second nature. Yet doing teams right is not second nature in most of our organizations. It requires considerable preparation and a different kind of management. And, it requires more management not less. ¶

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## ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES

### Performance measures:

- Focus on charter-directed goals.
- Are customer based.
- Encompass all functions represented on a team.
- Provide interim feedback mechanisms.

### Process measures:

- Focus on key procedures and standards that influence team performance.
- Gage open and timely communication and decision making.
- Help the team critique its teaming.
- Gage implementation of team process skills and practices.

### Peer-support measures:

- Focus on member expectations of each other.
- Look at hand-offs among team members.
- Put the issue of trust on the team agenda. Raise the issue of broadened understanding of other functions.

### Individual-initiative measures:

- Are determined by individual team members.
- Involve assuming responsibility to help the team perform.
- Are demonstrated by initiative and going beyond the call of duty.
- Focus on individuals' actions, which usually involve risk and persistence.