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Teamwork – Building and Leading Effective Teams

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By: Timothy D. Blackburn, PE, MBA, DBS

Introduction

Teams happen. These may be project-based or standing teams in which we work everyday. All are necessary. We simply cannot accomplish as much individually as collectively. Yet, working in and leading teams can be very difficult. In this course, we will consider proven strategies to build and lead successful teams. We will also discuss ways to identify and resolve common problems that teams face and prevent or minimize success.

While the principles can be applied in any environment, the course is written from an engineering perspective.

Keys to Team Success

Teams are necessary to solve problems collectively. Whether teams are short or long-term, project or standing, all are needed to resolve current or anticipated challenges. Simply stated, we can accomplish more together than apart – if we apply effective team strategies.

Effective team strategies include a variety of seemingly intuitive practices, yet are often missing from our teams. There are many characteristics typical of a successful team. We will address many of these in this course.

First, we need to have clear team goals. Unless we know where we need to go, teamwork will be chaotic at best. Then, we need a clear plan for improvement. Even with on-going teams, continuous improvement is a journey. Communication is also essential for a team to function effectively. Without it, there will be inefficiency and frustration of the team members. Positive team behaviors are also essential for a team to be successful. Decisions should be made using a defined approach. All team members should participate, and follow well-established ground rules. Finally, effective teams use the scientific approach.

In addition to effective strategies, other things are important for a team to be effective. First, teams must have the correct people. These people must have the skills and knowledge needed for their assigned tasks. They must also have the interpersonal skills and motivation necessary to perform on the team. Finally, teams must have the proper resources to complete their tasks. Often, teams are under-budgeted and not provided with adequate time to complete tasks at hand. While it is often effective to *stretch* teams (which drives innovation), we must ensure that expectations are attainable.

Types of Teams

Teams can be project-based or standing – all include people working together to accomplish common goals. Standing teams are also referred to as *natural work teams*. But there are several things *all* teams have in common. First, all share a common work product – there is something that they must accomplish together that individually none could accomplish. Teams share responsibility for outcomes. They must have a commitment to a shared approach of working together. Finally, team members manage relationships across organizational boundaries.

As engineers or architects, we often think of teams as being related to a specific project. There might be several project teams associated with a single project. The owner will likely have a team, the consultants will have internal project design teams, and there should also be a combined core team consisting of the owner and key consultants.

But teams can also include standing or functional work teams. These are permanent or long-standing teams. There are several types of on-going teams as follows:

- **Natural Work Team:** This type of team includes individuals who share responsibility for completing a whole piece of work. For example, I once worked in the Structural department for a consulting engineering firm. We had 30 employees, and all of us focused on completing the structural portion of a project. Owners also have similar teams, who are responsible for manufacturing a specific product.
- **Self-directed Work Team:** This is also a natural work team, but this team shares management responsibilities (versus only specific tasks.) These responsibilities can include scheduling work, performance evaluation, budgeting, and personnel decisions.
- **Process Management Team:** This team monitors and controls a work process. For example, you might assemble a team to initiate a new market. Again from my experience, I joined such a team at a consulting firm when we launched the Pharmaceutical Engineering task-force (from which I also formed a new career focus as it turns out). I will use this as an example throughout the course (reworded to avoid specific references to my previous employer.) Owners often assemble these teams to develop new products or service offerings.
- **Management Team:** This team represents interdependent functions that coordinate for success. At the time of writing this course, I work for a pharmaceutical manufacturer. I direct a department, and also serve on the Plant Leadership Team. Working together,

we (the leadership team) collectively coordinate our efforts for plant success.

Engineering consultants should also use this model, with department heads or leads working together to ensure customer and company success.

- **Virtual Teams:** In the digital age in which we live, virtual teams have become a reality. It is now possible (and necessary) for people to work across boundaries (countries, locations, offices, etc.) but still serve on a common team. Technologies continue to be developed that enable this. A word of caution: it is important to meet face-to-face periodically, especially early in the team formation. People need the relational touch to drive performance and encourage working together.

Pause to reflect:

What type of teams are you involved with?

	Natural Work
	Self-directed
	Process Management
	Management
	Virtual

Establishing Teams

Similar to strategies to ensure team success, we need to employ strategies to establish and build teams. It starts with education and reeducation of the team members. They need to know what to expect, and need to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to complete their tasks. When we started the pharmaceutical engineering market task-force, we began with workshops to educate the various disciplines on the team as to the particulars of the industry.

Teams also need to have adequate time to implement their assignments. If the pharmaceutical task force was asked to immediately start a project without some preparation, we would at best have had one-time clients. Our lack of knowledge of the subject would have been immediately apparent. Once a team is established, they need continued support; otherwise, they will not progress. And finally, teams need carefully selected projects or improvement projects (for standing teams). These projects must be within their ability to complete.

To get off to a good start, begin with a team charter. Actually, having a team charter is a characteristic of most effective teams (whether project-based or on-going.)

Team Charter

A team charter provides a firm starting point for all teams. Establishing a charter is also a great way to involve the team members and acquire their buy-in early. The following are minimum contents of a charter (you may wish to add more):

1. Vision and Mission statements
2. Goals
3. Assignment/Roles
4. Ground Rules (how team members will interact, expectations, etc.)
5. Schedules (this can include deadlines or milestones depending on the team type)

The following are specific recommendations for vision/mission statements and goals:

Vision Statement: The vision statement expresses what the team hopes to accomplish. The statement must be easily understood by all stakeholders, and should be briefly stated but comprehensive. The statement should be challenging, but attainable. Provide definitions of terms in the statement as needed (this will help keep the statement short while the team clearly understands it). The following is an example that we could have developed for pharmaceutical task-force example:

“Become a respected provider of facility and process design for pharmaceutical manufacturers with repeat customers while meeting our financial goals. “

Mission Statement: The mission statement generally states how the vision will be accomplished. The statement should be brief, but comprehensive. One paragraph is a guideline. In the statement, describe *who*, *what*, and *where*. Use wording that is simple, easily understood, and descriptive. Provide definitions of terms in the statement as needed. The following could have been a mission statement for the pharmaceutical task-force example:

“Establish an interdisciplinary team and develop members in pharmaceutical fundamentals. Acquire and complete projects with team members serving as departmental coordinators with progressing project complexity. Team members will be active in pharmaceutical professional organizations and activities.”

In either of the above, you may choose to also include timing, or the *when*. Generally, however, I find this better included in the *Schedule or Milestones* portion of a charter.

Team or project goals: Goals should translate the mission/vision statements in measurable terms. These terms should include measurable metrics that can be monitored. Goals should be specific enough to be measured, yet stated broadly enough to avoid frequent rewrites. Each goal should focus on a specific outcome. For example, the goals for the pharmaceutical task-force could have been as follows:

- Acquire and complete two engineering projects for a pharmaceutical manufacturer within one year
- Team members join ISPE (International Society of Pharmaceutical Engineers) and attend at least one sponsored event within one year
- Publish one technical article in a technical journal or speak at a conference related to the pharmaceutical industry within two years

While goals are important, we don't want them to become the primary ends of a mean. If not careful, we can completely miss what is important and actually diminish team effectiveness.

Team Roles and Responsibilities

Team roles and responsibilities should be clearly understood and generally described in the charter. First, let's review the Sponsor:

Sponsor: A sponsor is typically a manager who is assigned the overall responsibility, authority, and accountability for the team success. He or she selects or defines the project, begins the charter, and selects or recommends the team members. The sponsor reviews progress of the team, runs interference, and ensures other stakeholders have the proper involvement. The sponsor also tracks results and applies lessons-learned to future projects. Next, let's consider the team leader.

Team Leader: All teams should have an identified team lead. Team leaders must possess a few key attributes. First, they should have well developed people skills. They should be able to get along and work with diverse people. They should be participative in their leadership style and not dictatorial, nor should they be pushovers (neglecting.) Second, they should possess the technical skills needed to lead the team. That doesn't mean they need to be experts in every area, but they should have sufficient

knowledge to lead various other disciplines and roles. Last, they need to possess the ability to teach, or develop skills and knowledge in other team members.

Before we look at specific responsibilities of a team leader, let's examine some of the common leadership styles:

1. Autocratic – This style is directive or dictatorial, and the leader makes most of the decisions.
2. Democratic – In this style, the leader only makes a decision after getting the team's input. Such style often insists on having consensus before taking any action.
3. Goal-oriented – This style is purely results based. It asks the team to focus solely on goals and grades success on accomplishment of goals only. This type of leader in essence says, "I see you at performance review time."
4. Situational – This style varies based on the situation. This can be very confusing to team members. It is similar to a parent who disciplines a child differently without any connection to the action.
5. Participative: The participative leadership style helps the team establish goals and assists in removing barriers, but doesn't dictate every detail or micromanage. It considers the input of the team, but can make a decision when needed. It focuses on goals, but not at the expense of other key team deliverables. This is the style most effective for teams and management in general.

Team Leader: Obviously, a team leader is essential for team success. There are specific responsibilities for a team leader. In addition to leading the team, the leader is the primary point of contact with the Sponsor and the organization. He or she updates the sponsor periodically. The leader maintains records of progress. The leader should participate selectively to facilitate open discussions, but not dominate. The leader should complete and ensure others complete assignments on-time. The leader oversees or implements responsibilities within the bound of authority. Finally, the leader helps the team solve problems – the leader should focus on data to solve problems and not feelings.

A powerful driver in embedding accountability in team members is for the leader to demonstrate the same. The leader must be a positive example of expected behaviors. The leader must be willing to reiterate expectations (especially ground rules). The leader should be willing to discuss openly and frequently about peer accountability, and reinforce it.

You might be asking yourself, “How can I become a good team leader?” First, you might need some training. Not everyone is born a leader, but it can be learned. Second, practice it. You can use this course as a starting point or to go to the next level. List areas you need to improve on a note, and put it where you can regularly see it. Third, have determination. Intend to improve as a leader. Last, put in the effort. Becoming an effective leader simply takes hard work. Pause for a moment and rate yourself on the next page where you are as a leader:

Exercise 1: For the following questions below, answer how you rank as a team leader. *Completion of exercises is based on the honor system, and the quiz will ask if you completed them.* Consider how others see you. Never is a 1, Sometimes or Usually is a 2, and a 3 is Always. Then, add up your score across the rows and total at the bottom:

Your Team Leader Scorecard:

Behavior	Never (1)	Sometimes or Usually (2)	Always (3)	Score
I apply the participative style of leadership				
I use the data approach to solving problems				
I direct the development of a Charter				
I maintains team records				
I facilitate effective discussions but don't dominate				
I implements in bounds of authority				
I work effectively with diverse people				
I communicate effectively and listens to all stakeholders				
I possess adequate technical skills in areas of team responsibility				
I effectively teach others				
I effectively complete individual assignments on-time, and delegates other assignments to team members uniformly				
My teams consistently meet goals and deadlines				
Total Score	n/a	n/a	n/a	

Add up your total score. If you scored “Never” in any category, this is a goal for you to work on immediately. If your overall score is between 30 and 36, you have pretty much arrived – you are accomplished – keep up the good work! If your score is 22 to 29, you are a solid performer but you need some improvement. Scores below 22 – you get the idea. You’ve got a lot of work to do. But as mentioned before, these are skills that can be learned and practiced to reach the accomplished goal.

I hope the exercise helped you gauge where you are as a leader. Next, let's look at the coach role, which is also helpful on many teams.

Coaches: These individual(s) are necessary to help teams with their assigned tasks. Sometimes, the team leader might also serve in this capacity. In the pharmaceutical example, an individual from industry was hired and in part focused on developing team members in industry particulars. Coaches need to be experienced in subject matter plus understand team dynamics. They attend meetings as needed, and often focus on a team's process versus the end product. They are helpful to the team leader in breaking down tasks and planning. They explain how to collect and interpret data in a way it is clear to others. They watch for warning signs and advise the leader and others ahead of time. They are also helpful in preparing and practicing presentations to management.

Last but not least, let's consider the important team member role:

Team Members: Teams will not reach goals unless team members fulfill their responsibilities (or at least the journey won't be pleasant.) First, team members must contribute fully. We've all been in meetings where some team members never say a word or offer anything except their presence. And, team members must listen to others. They must assist the leader (don't just be an attendee and throw out ideas, but take ownership of things outside the meetings as well.) They need to complete assignments, and complete them on-time. They need to effectively communicate, and be sensitive to the impact of change on others and assist in managing it accordingly.

EXERCISE 2: The following page has a charter template you can print off. For this exercise, pick a real project you have worked on or are planning, and draft a brief charter.

Team Charter

Team Name	
Date	
Team Vision (the what)	
Team Mission (the how)	
Team Goals	
Team Leader	
Team Sponsor	
Team Members (list with functional responsibilities)	
Schedule or milestones	
Ground Rules	

Exercise 2 – Continued

Now, grade yourself as follows. Did your vision describe what you want to accomplish? Did your mission describe how you will accomplish it? Are your goals specific and measurable? Did you use terms that are generally understood?

As you can see, the document is simple and effective, although it takes a lot of thought to develop. Often, you can draft a charter on a single or a few pages. Try it on your teams – you will be impressed with how well it engages members and encourages them to work together more effectively. At a minimum, every team should complete a Vision/Mission exercise.

Remember: A characteristic of successful teams is that they have a charter

Meetings

Let's move away from key principles for a moment and look at the important subject of running effective meetings. Have you ever attended a meeting and felt like it was a waste of your time? Most of us have. Have you left not knowing what (if anything) was accomplished, and what was expected next? It doesn't have to be that way.

Preparation, as in most things, is key to successful meetings. The Team leader should prepare for the meeting before-hand. Have agendas ready (see below). And start on-time. Nothing is more effective at ensuring people arrive on time than starting on time. (And if you want to have short meetings, don't have chairs – just kidding!) Fill key meeting roles ahead of time. Ensure key individuals will be there if possible. Continually improve the meeting process. After the meeting, consider what went well and what needs to be improved.

Meetings should have an agenda. The following are typical contents of a meeting agenda:

1. Purpose of the meeting
2. Introductions (if needed) and agenda overview
3. Topics to be discussed. Consider listing discussion lead and time limit if needed.
4. Desired outcome of the meeting
5. Next-steps
6. Time for general discussion if needed

At the meetings, the team leader or meeting facilitator should open and coordinate the meeting. Ensure someone is taking notes. Keep the meeting focused and on time. Appoint a time keeper if needed. Effectively engage discussions (see below). Then, close the meeting with clear take-aways.

Meetings require the ability of team members to engage in effective discussions. Team leaders or meeting facilitators play an important role in this. Start with an open-ended question. An open ended question doesn't have a specific short answer, and encourages conversation. Listen to what is being said. If unclear, ask for clarification. Effectively manage participation. If a few team members are dominating, circle to give each person a chance to answer. Ask the quiet person specific questions or say, "John, what do you think about this?" Summarize discussions. Effectively manage time and reign in discussions. It is helpful to have a "parking lot" to write down ideas or topics that are preventing resolving the issue at hand. This allows all to be heard while moving the meeting forward. Then, close the discussion and move on to the next point.

Pause to reflect:

Which of the following items do you included in your agenda? Which should you add in the future?

Agenda Items	Currently	Will start to do
1. Purpose of the meeting		
2. Introductions (if needed) and agenda overview		
3. Topics to be discussed. Consider listing discussion lead and time limit if needed.		
4. Desired outcome of the meeting		
5. Next-steps		
6. Time for general discussion if needed		

Communication

Effective communication is the lubricant that enables team success and continuity. Everyone communicates, but not everyone communicates effectively. On teams, there are certain indicators that effective communication is occurring. First, all members speak with clarity and directness. Members are able to speak directly. They avoid anecdotes that can leave the listener unclear as to the message.

They don't interrupt one another, and remain polite. They speak clearly. There are no hidden agendas, but the team is working together for a common purpose. Team members don't bully one another.

All team members (especially team leaders) should be able to effectively listen. Strategies to effectively listen include removing distractions. Put the speaker at ease, and look directly at him or her. Concentrate on what is being said – people can tell if your mind is wandering. Avoid looking away or working on something else while they are speaking. Watch for what is *not* being said. Non-verbal cues can often express more than what is being said. Note the speaker's tone. Wait patiently, and ask clarifying questions. It is helpful to paraphrase and repeat. Most importantly, control your own emotions. I find if I deal with an emotion early (anger, fear, etc.) it won't progress into something that damages the conversation.

Also practice active listening techniques. These include giving the speaker full attention, and make every effort to understand him or her. Listen for meaning behind the words. Try to follow his or her thinking and follow-up by capturing central ideas. Demonstrate that you are listening. If necessary, check the speaker for accuracy. For example, someone might say something like, "We have the best record of _____ in the company." Do we really? Ask them to provide data if it is essential to the issue at hand. Finally, relate what the speaker is saying to ideas presented by others (try to align it with other topic or issue categories.)

When any of the above is not being practiced, the team leader should intervene. Later, we will review strategies to resolve conflict on teams and how to handle difficult team members. You will be sure to have them . . .

Pause to reflect

How effective is your communication? Which of the above ideas could you apply to improve?

Values

Ethics and values should be at the core of all that we do. Years after the team is gone, what we will most remember will be the relationships and the memories of working with others. I've found that many of my most enduring relationships have come from serving with others on teams. These have included natural work teams, project teams, teams at work and in private life, etc. In all things, practice the golden rule (do unto others as you would have them do unto you). But there are specific values we

should consider on teams, and team leaders play a key role in embedding these values in their teams' cultures. These values not only make the team experience more pleasant, but give us a sense of purpose and also fuel success of the team.

First, we should be customer focused. We owe it to our customers (internal or external) to meet their legitimate needs. The team should ask itself, "Who are my customers or stakeholders?" Then, align your work to meet their needs. Simply put yourself in your customer's shoes – what would you want or need in that situation? Seek to delight and not just meet the needs of your customer. Every action of the team should contribute to meeting the customer's needs.

Next, be dependable and expect peers to be dependable. Follow through on assignments and commitments. Be punctual to meetings and complete assignments on-time. Take ownership and responsibility for your role, and hold yourself and others accountable. Lastly, help others succeed. Be a teacher, coach, and friend.

Finally, be enthusiastic. Enthusiasm is contagious – others will begin to practice it when they observe you being enthusiastic. And you can do it! Enthusiasm is an attitude, not an emotion. Choose to be enthusiastic. Think positively. As much as possible, seek out other enthusiastic people.

Team members have the right to expect peers to be accountable to common values and other agreed-to expectations. One way to ensure accountability is to begin with the charter which will include ground rules of behavior. The team should evaluate itself against the charter and ground rules frequently.

Managing Change

Let's face it – change is hard, even good change. The goals of projects almost always include change. So, we must understand and manage change.

People usually don't resist change as much as they resist being changed. You must understand that things are the way they are because *people* made them that way or allowed the situation to persist. And without stating the obvious, things will likely remain the same unless *people* change things. Rarely does change occur without people resisting the change. Just accept it. Therefore, *people* versus the technical changes often make the change most difficult to manage.

There are actions you and your team can take to implement change. The first is to create a shared vision as covered earlier in this course. That vision must clearly state where you want to go, and the team should have a determination to get there. Then, understand all the affected stakeholders.

Develop a stakeholder analysis. In this analysis, you can identify the stakeholders who are key to success, and areas of resistance. From the stakeholder analysis, you can develop strategies to deal with them in the form of an action plan.

Related to change, teamwork must be embedded in the culture of your organization. One way you can begin to embed teamwork in the culture is to develop clear goals and objectives for your staff. Develop a clear strategic plan for your group or organization. Have clearly defined roles and job descriptions or responsibilities. Follow-up with measurable performance evaluations, and reward and recognize employees based on performance. Provide adequate compensation.

Doing the above will better ensure teams will be effective in doing what they were intended – solving problems.

Operational Excellence

Before we move to techniques for solving problems and making improvements, let's compare the operational excellence model briefly to a more traditional model. Traditionally, we have employed Management by Objectives (MBO) principles to drive the performance of our teams. With MBO, we give and focus on specific expectations and financial consequences, but this can actually get in the way of team success.

MBO can result in employees focusing on optimizing their specific team's work at expense of others. For example, you might have a structural department that is charged with completing their design in a certain timeframe and within a manhour limitation. They might meet both objectives, but design framing for equipment before it is selected, and provide inadequate details that result in changeorders. While meeting their goals, the overall project suffers. MBO can therefore result in internal conflict and unhealthy and nonproductive competition. In addition, we could be rewarding short-term thinking. It also encourages teams to find ways to mislead through creative accounting. And, we can completely miss customers' needs and what is important to them. We can conclude inappropriately that success comes from meeting our goals instead of meeting the needs of customers or stakeholders.

The Operational Excellence approach has proven to be more effective. It includes a strong customer focus, insistence on effective teamwork (described herein), and following the scientific approach. Think of it as a three-legged stool. If all legs are in place, you should expect to have process

or operational excellence. While the customer focus and effective teamwork elements are for the most part obvious, what is the scientific approach?

The scientific approach understands how work processes deliver customer needs through systems thinking combined with data analysis. The 85/15 rule asserts that 85% of our failures to meet customer needs come from management-controlled systems or process failures, while only 15% comes from human error. Isn't it interesting that we often manage our teams as if it were the reverse? The scientific approach leads us to fix systems or processes to improve quality and customer service. Team members should monitor variables inside and outside their teams to meet customer needs. This requires an ability to collect, analyze, and interpret data and use it to guide decisions and root cause analysis. The approach also monitors progress of an improved system or process. With any process or system, it is important to find ways to minimize variation in the process which will in turn improve quality and delight customers.

You as a leader can influence effective teamwork for operational excellence impact. You can begin by building an environment that supports trust, collaboration, and mutual respect. You can lead them to craft common vision, mission, and values that support a shared customer focus. You can encourage an environment where continual learning thrives. And you can continue to solve problems and make improvements as a team.

Pause to reflect

Does your team have any goals that are not compatible with overall organization success? If not, what do you commit to do about it?

Solving Problems or Making Improvements

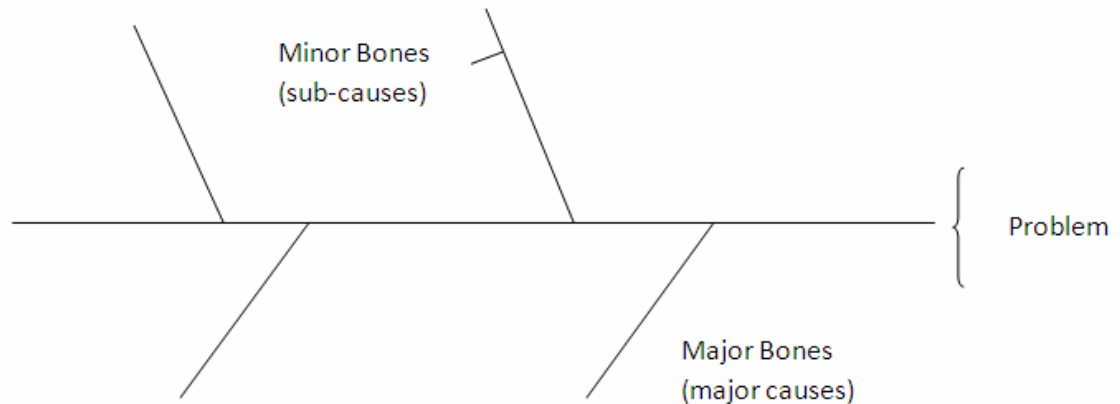
As noted previously, teams are established to solve problems or make improvements collectively. Whether teams are short or long-term, all are needed to resolve current or anticipated challenges. I remember an experience early in my engineering career when I complained about the problems and challenges I was facing to my boss, who responded, "If we didn't have problems, we wouldn't need you."

When solving problems or making improvements, teams need to follow proven practices to maximize results. Communication between team members and stakeholders is crucial at all stages of the improvement. Make sure the improvement initiative links to measurable business objectives or

customer objectives. Otherwise, the effort will be wasted. Avoid the tendency to *bite off more than you can chew*. Working on a few successful projects is better than many that will be unsuccessful. Fix obvious problems first. Consider how your initiatives will impact others before moving forward. Document problems and progress as you go along. And don't forget to publicize and celebrate successes. But to begin, follow a defined process.

Teams need to follow a defined and understood decision making/problem solving process. First, they need to agree on how to make decisions. Then, decisions need to be made in a participative way. Always test for agreement – don't assume because someone is quiet that they agree. Finally, ensure decisions are made based on data as much as possible. The decision making process need not be a series of complicated steps. It can be as simple as identifying the problem, collecting data, considering alternatives, choosing and implementing the best alternative, then monitoring success and implementing measures to ensure successes will continue. **Avoid the temptation to rush to corrective actions before identifying root causes.**

Identifying the problem and root causes can be challenging. Often, teams move too quickly to identify and implement corrective actions without vetting root causes. A simple and effective technique in identifying and resolving root causes is the fishbone diagram. At the head of the fish you list the problem. Then, on the bones, list the possible root cause categories and specifics within the categories on the *small bones*. Often, you can eliminate many of the potential root causes and quickly isolate possible root causes. Look for root causes that result in variation (which leads to poor quality).



Fishbone Diagram

Pause to reflect

Think of a recent problem your team needed to resolve. On a separate piece of paper draw a fishbone diagram. List the problem at the head, and possible sources on the bones. How does this compare to how your team identified legitimated root causes?

Before identifying root causes, map the process so the team won't miss essential variables. FMEA (Failure Mode Effect Analysis) is also a helpful tool (see the LSS course) to isolate worst problem areas based on risk. Also, collect any data needed to make an informed and scientific decision.

Once the potential root causes have been identified, brainstorming is a quick and effective technique to collectively come up with corrective actions or solutions. For brainstorming to work, let ideas flow before critiquing. Try to get everyone involved. You can try the random approach (let people speak when they choose.) If you are lacking full participation or a few are dominating, try the round-robin or "round the table" approach. Silent writing can also be effective. With this technique, people write their ideas before voicing them.

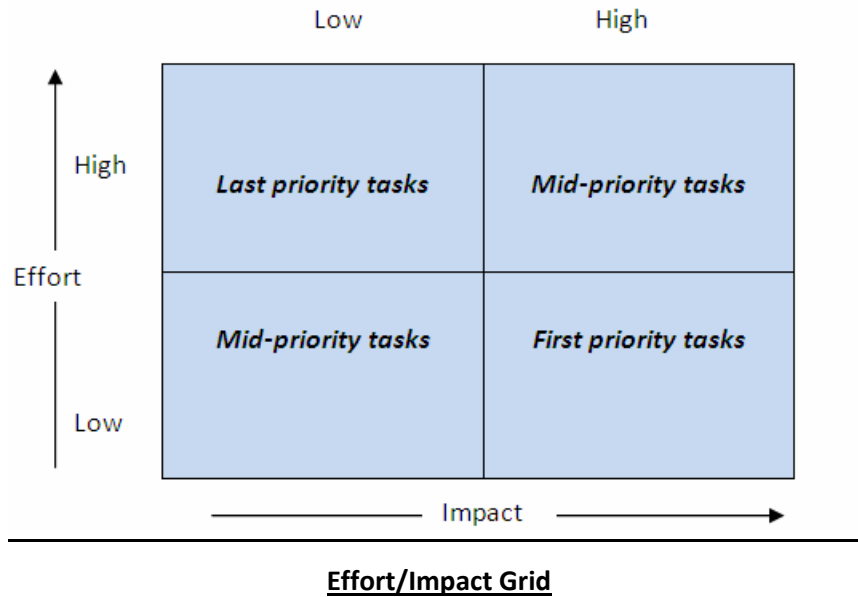
Develop some means for the team to vote on the ideas – this will minimize the chance of having a dominating personality drive bad ideas to implementation. One good approach is a technique called *Multivoting*. With this technique, allow people to vote on the most popular items on a list of ideas that result from brainstorming. First, develop lists, and agree with your team how many each member can

choose. For example, if there are 20 items, you might want each member to vote on their top 5 choices. After voting, low votes are discarded. You continue voting until the desired few are chosen.

Another popular brainstorming method is Nominal Group Technique (NGT). With NGT, you state the problem and the team silently records ideas. Then, each member reports their ideas publicly. The team leader or meeting facilitator clarifies ideas as needed, and the ideas are silently voted on. You can use the multivoting strategy if needed to narrow down the ideas.

There are also techniques to list ideas. It is helpful to organize ideas in common categories. One approach is the Affinity Diagram, which helps organize ideas or data. Group ideas or data together to find a common theme or *affinity*. Post-it notes are helpful for this – list categories on a marker board of flip charts, and let team members post their ideas under the appropriate headings. You'll find that ideas, although described differently, combine when using this approach. This also allows narrowing down ideas and making assignment to sub-teams.

Often, you will have more ideas than resources to implement. Rarely can we implement everything we agree would be helpful. A helpful tool for this is the *Effort-Impact Grid*. List the ideas by number, and then write the number in the correct grid based on the effort it will take to implement and the impact to the solution. Then, focus your efforts/resources on low effort/high impact first to get the easiest and quickest results.



The Pareto chart is also helpful, which follows the 80/20 rule (20 percent of the problem areas are causing 80 percent of the problems). Focus on the areas that are causing most problems first. Again, see the LSS course.

After you identify fixes, you might need to first test them before moving to full implementation. This is called "Design of Experiment" or DOE. With DOE, first define the objectives for the experiment. Then, choose responses to measure. You must ensure the corrective action achieve the desired result. Then design the experiment – how will it take place? Prepare for the experiment, carry it out, analyze the results, and then act on them.

Now, let's return to teamwork dynamics, specifically positive team behaviors.

Positive Team Behaviors

While teams must meet goals, how they meet them is also important. Also, how they try to meet them impacts success. Positive team behaviors are generally self evident – these include such things as members being helpful to one another, refusing to gossip, avoiding territorial behavior, loyalty, honesty, integrity, dependability, and enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm is the polar opposite of negativity, which must be dealt with on a team. Negativity can result from control disputes, authority and loyalty issues, and simply the need for attention or responsibility. Negativity can quickly drag down a team's performance, and make it a generally unpleasant experience. The best strategy to deal with negativity is effective communication. Also, it is helpful to have clear expectations. Provide a safe environment for venting when needed. Work to build trust between you and team members and peers. Involve and empower team members. Finally, choose to be enthusiastic (remember, it is an attitude, not an emotion).

Pause to reflect

Are you exhibiting proper team behaviors? On which can you improve, and what will you specifically do?

Resolving Conflict

Conflict is inevitable. Conflict comes whenever someone isn't getting their need(s) met or feels threatened. Conflict can come from limited resources, role ambiguity, goals that are not compatible, differing values, and poor communications. Conflict can also arise simply from different perceptions of why someone acts a certain way, what needs to be done to succeed, what is important, etc.

Not all conflict is bad or harmful. Actually, some conflict (different points of view for example) are necessary to maximize team success. But harmful conflict is detrimental to team success.

There are certain signs that there is unhealthy conflict or the team is in danger of failing. These can include the team taking a completely different direction, arguments about what the team should do or excessive questioning, or a sense that the goals are too big or not appropriate. Lack of progress against milestones is also a sign. Just simple floundering is a warning sign (the team is seemingly not able to move forward.)

There comes time when you will need to give personal feedback. The when and how of the feedback are equally important.

First, when should you give feedback? Give feedback when the behavior is harming the team or a relationship. But make sure you know first-hand about the circumstances. Give feedback when the person has the capacity to change. Avoid or limit feedback for people that have inherent low self-esteem. Don't give feedback when you or the other person are angry if possible, and never when you

are out to *get* a person (examine your own heart). Choose wisely the time, place, and circumstances of the feedback (maybe it is better to give it privately, for example.)

Finally, how should you give feedback? While there is no guarantee you can influence the person to change, there are specific strategies to make feedback more effective. First, care for the person. Make sure you are looking out for their interest as well. Then, select neutral territory if possible in an informal setting. Have the appropriate people there if needed. Sometimes, depending on the severity of the situation or fears of racial or gender discrimination claims, you might need another person present during the confrontation. But generally, one-on-one interactions are more effective. Have a clear agenda, even if it is unwritten. Manage the time together carefully – when it drags on weariness can dilute the effectiveness – its okay to come back another day in most situations. Finally, practice constructive feedback skills.

Effective constructive feedback skills require you to be descriptive and specific of the area of conflict. Avoid labels (such as immature, childish, etc.) and don't exaggerate. In conflict, people often use such terms as "always," and "never," and other terms that create more conflict. Don't be judgmental. Speak only for yourself as much as possible. Avoid "people are noticing you _____" and instead say "I am noticing you _____." Notice that I used "I" versus "You," which is more effective. Limit feedback to things you know for certain – don't base it on general hearsay. Be careful that it doesn't come across as manipulative, and give genuine compliments as appropriate. No one is all good or all bad.

When dealing with an angry person, you can take actions to minimize the anger and reduce the likelihood that it will escalate. First, control your breathing. Take deep breaths if needed. Then, look past the anger to see if there are hidden messages. Don't take the anger personally. While you are talking, watch your own body language and tone.

Before we move to the next section, let's admit it. We need constructive feedback sometimes as well. No one is perfect. How should we receive it? Similar to how we react to an angry person, breathe – take that deep breath if needed. Listen carefully before planning a response. Then ask questions for clarity. I've found myself getting angry when I actually didn't understand what the person was saying. Acknowledge the feedback – be gracious. Then take time and think about what was said. Even if it was said in an unkind way, you might be able to grow as a person or a team leader/member from some or part of it. Even if it is a perception, we need to manage it because perceptions impact our career, relationships, and success.

Pause to reflect

If any of the root causes of conflict are present on your teams, you will likely have conflict. On your current most significant team, which of the following conflict root causes are present? What are your plans to minimize or eliminate the source of conflict?

Potential sources of conflict	Present?	Strategies to remove or minimize source of conflict
Limited resources		
Role ambiguity		
Incompatible goals		
Differing values		
Poor communications		
Bringing in prior conflicts		
Different perceptions of what is needed to succeed		

As you consider ways to manage conflict, also be aware there are natural stages to team development. You can deal with the stages and prevent them from causing the team to miss goals by being patient and employing simple strategies.

The Phases of a Team

It is common for teams, especially new teams, to go through four distinct phases of development. They are Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. If you are seeing characteristics of these categories, it might be more of an issue of normal team progression than serious conflict.

The first is Forming. As the term suggests, this is the early phase of a team working together. During this phase, you might see members exploring their boundaries. You might also see a wide range of emotions and team members posturing. They may still struggle with what the team is about, and move into irrelevant issues. Complaining is common. Strategies to move smoothly through this phase are for people to simply get to know each other. Icebreaking techniques are helpful. One technique that I've used is to ask each team member to write three things about themselves, two of which are true and one false. The team has to guess which is false. (This is helpful when team members don't know

each other well.) Also ensure the team has clear direction. Involve the team members – creating the charter together is helpful. Provide timely information, and answer their questions and concerns.

The second stage that can occur is Storming. This is the most difficult, and it is at this phase teams often fall apart. Here you might see frustration and resistance. Initial excitement during the Forming stage may diminish, people might question likelihood of success, become anxious, and even withdraw. A team leader must deal with these issues to prevent team failure. Strategies include resolving issues of authority/power, establishing agreements about decision making, give more autonomy to the team (allow them to make some independent decisions), reinforce ground rules of behavior, broaden team member participation, continue to answer their questions, and help new members enter the team.

The third phase becomes more pleasant – Norming. During this phase, you will see the team begin to come together with a common purpose. They become more mature, cohesive, get along better, and some become friends. But even in this phase the team leader plays a role in sustaining team performance and enabling it to move to the next level. During this phase, utilize everyone's skills, encourage respect, hard work, and collaboration, still refer to the ground rules, and answer questions.

And then we reach the desired fourth phase – Performing. Here, you will begin to see settled relationships and expectations. People will be more comfortable with one another, and work together as an effective unit. As a team leader, update team methods and procedures of working together if needed, help them understand how to manage change, and be an advocate for the team to others. Continue to monitor and acknowledge their work, and celebrate accomplishments.

And don't forget to reward and recognize them.

Rewards and Recognition

We need to give thanks to others when due. Often, we focus positive rewards on compensation. However, compensation has not been shown to be a primary and permanent motivator. Recognition is a much more powerful motivator.

There are actually four types of reward and compensation categories. These include individual compensation, individual recognition, team compensation, and team recognition. Reward and compensation systems should address all four. Team performance should impact individual rewards and recognition, but individual recognition is also important.

Think of ways you can recognize your team. The charter is a helpful document in identifying ways you can measure success.

Pause to reflect

How do you recognize and reward your team? Do you address all four areas? What will you do to improve if not? List on a separate piece of paper how you will address all four going forward – be specific.

Common Team Challenges

Event the best led, recognized, and rewarded teams will face challenges. The following are common problems you will face and some ideas how to deal with them.

- Sluggish Teams – difficulty starting or progressing. Review the project strategy and charter. Review work assignments and see what needs to be done next. Review what is holding up the team. Try new ways of thinking.
- Dominating Team Members – some members are overbearing. Reinforce that nothing is off limits from being discussed, talk off-line with the person and ask for patience/cooperation, and reinforce the scientific approach. Also structure discussion to involve everyone and use a time keeper.
- Non-participative Members – Structure discussion to encourage participation, make assignments, ask questions, check with them to see if they are pleased with their level of participation, and give out agendas before the meeting.
- Pushing too quickly for results – Follow the scientific approach, ensure you are not exerting too much pressure, confront those rushing using constructive feedback techniques.
- Discounting other team members – Members not giving credit to others' ideas. Train in active listening, support the impacted person; confront those discounting using constructive feedback techniques.
- Digression – getting off topic – Write ideas that are not directly relevant in the parking lot list, direct the conversation back, stick to a written agenda, ask, "Why we are digressing?"
- Interpersonal problems – continued disagreements that impact team success. Also, many people bring prior problems to the team. Contain the argument during the meeting, meet with them privately, and help them develop an agreement as to how to act on the team.

Final Pause to reflect

On a piece of paper, write three things you commit to doing in the next 30 days based on material presented in this course. Post the paper near your work area and refer to it daily. What you do for 30 days will become habit – the good kind!

Conclusion

Teams can produce successful results, but it requires careful application of principles in building and leading teams. Team members and especially the team leader play critical roles to this success. In conclusion, we truly can accomplish more together than apart. Enjoy the journey!

References

See the “The Team Handbook” by Scholtes, Joiner, and Streibel, Copyright 2003 by Oriel Incorporated. I used this text in a course entitled “Teamwork and Problem Solving” for John Tyler Community College. Also see MindLeader’s “Teams that Work” series. Other concepts I suppose I’ve heard and practiced over the years, but can’t remember the specific source. Finally, I have embedded my own experiences working in the engineering consulting environment and for the owner more years than I care to discuss.