

TEAM BUILDING – A REVIEW

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Abstract

Work environment tends to focus on individuals and personal goals, with rewards and recognitions singling out the achievements of individual employees. There is the increasing need for team building in which there are shared goals to which every team member is committed. Establishing shared goals and engendering commitment requires a particular set of skills that are more often associated with a transformational, rather than transactional, style of leadership. This paper reviews the concepts of team building. It looks at group dynamics and exercises that facilitate the understanding of the concepts and their practical applications. It also examines the types of team building exercises.

Introduction

Work environment tends to focus on individuals and personal goals, with rewards and recognitions singling out the achievements of individual employees. There is the increasing need for team building in which there are shared goals to which every team member is committed. Establishing shared goals and engendering commitment requires a particular set of skills that are more often associated with a transformational, rather than transactional style of leadership (Klein, DiazGranados, Salas, Le, Burke, Lyons & Goodwin, 2009).

The most challenging task in any endeavour is to select and bring together the right team. It does not matter if it is a formal organization or just a free association of people - the right mix needs to be put in place. And, once it is in place, it needs to be kept going by

interesting people long enough to cause them to stick with the organization (Kirkman, Jones & Shapiro, 2000).

This paper reviews the concepts of team building. It looks at group dynamics and exercises that facilitate the understanding of the concepts and their practical applications. It also examines the types of team building exercises. After this brief introduction, the rest of the paper is structured as follows: definitions, types of team, concepts of team building, team building practices, and conclusion.

Definitions

Team building refers to a wide range of activities, usually in a business context, for improving team performance. A team of people is a living, dynamic system. It has a unique personality, temperament, moods and vision. Over time, it creates its own culture with both spoken and unspoken rules and values. The system itself exerts tremendous influence on what gets done and how it gets done. The most successful teams are characterized by (Williams, Graham and Baker, 2003):

- High levels of trust, respect, empowerment, and team spirit
- Productivity measured with plans, goals, and accountability.

Types of team

Today, we find all kinds of teams in society, and they generally fall into one of two of the primary groups: *permanent teams* and *temporary teams*. Here are some of the common types (Leonard & Freedman, 2000):

1. *Task force*: a temporary team assembled to investigate a specific issue or problem.
2. *Problem solving team*: a temporary team assembled to solve a specific problem.
3. *Product design team*: a temporary team assembled to design a new product or service.

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4. *Committee*: a temporary or permanent group of people assembled to act on some matter.
5. *Work group*: a permanent group of workers who receive direction from a designated leader.
6. *Work team or self-directed work team or self-managed work team*: an on-going group of workers who share a common mission and collectively manage their own affairs within predetermined boundaries.
7. *Quality circle* (or other various names): a group of workers from the same functional area who meet regularly to uncover and solve work-related problems and seek work improvement opportunities.

The name of the group or team type is less important than the purpose for which it exists. These names simply give us a common language to help us define team types.

Concepts of team building

The three great foundational concepts of teamwork in business are:

- *Principle determine actions*
- *Expect only the best*
- *Show you care*

These team building concepts are not new. In fact, they are as old as human's ability to organize and work toward a common purpose. Each foundational concept plays off the other. If the first concept, *principles determine actions*, is accounted for, the next will flow naturally, like water from a spring. Core principles are the wellspring of the rest of your team building activities – building the team on a foundation of bedrock rather than sand (Humphrey, Morgeson and Mannor, 2009).

A model of team development notes that the difference between the first stage (Forming) and others (Storming, Norming, and Performing) is that each member of a Forming team is focused on his

or her own objectives, perhaps guided by the manager, whereas in the later stages, there is some commitment to the shared goals. For example, to go through the Storming stage can be an uncomfortable process, so for team members to persist with it, they have to be convinced that it is worth engaging with other team members in a *storming dialogue*. That is, there have to be shared goals that everyone thinks are more important than their own individual goals (or, for a management group, more important than the goals of their section) (Salas, Nichols & Driskell, 2007).

Once the foundation of commitment to shared goals has been established, there are many approaches that can be taken to improving teamwork. Underpinning all these approaches is always the shared goal and a general methodology that is similar to a force field analysis (Miller, 2007):

- Establishing *ownership* of shared goals.
- *Removing inhibitors/blockages* to achievement of those goals.
- *Introducing enablers* (awareness, resources, information, processes, etc.) to help achieve those goals.
- Using health checks, performance management, 360 feedback, etc., in the correct sequence, to gradually raise performance, akin to climbing a ladder one rung at a time.

Team building practices

Team building is pursued via a variety of practices, and can range from simple bonding exercises to complex simulations and multi-day team building retreats designed to develop a team (including group assessment and group-dynamic games). It generally sits within the theory and practice of organizational development, but can also be applied to sports team, school groups, and other contexts. Team building is an important factor in any environment, its focus is to specialize in bringing out the best in a team to ensure self development, positive communication, leadership skills and ability to work closely together as a team to solve problem. Team building is

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not to be confused with team recreation that consists of activities for teams that are strictly recreational (Svyantek, Goodman, Benz & Gard, 1999).

Teamwork workshops can help build and support effective and highly motivated teams. This is often made possible by having customized topics, putting more emphasis on the different issues faced by the team and how they can overcome it, and including interactive challenges that stimulate real-life situations. All these can help teams to develop the exact capabilities that they need to better handle the daily challenges that they face, based on what abilities they currently have (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 1997; Humphrey, Morgeson and Mannor, 2009).

In big organizations, the individuals have to be motivated with both monetary and non-monetary rewards. Team building is an ideal way through which the employees have fun, boost themselves as well as the other members in the team, build good employer-employee relations with the attendant high productivity (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 1997).

Most of the work in today's organization is done in teams. There are many team building products in the market. *Socio-mapping* represents a new generation of truly team-based tools. Its main advantage lies in its ability to reveal and efficiently present these relations so that they can be further utilized for team development. Therefore, team socio-mapping is one of the most demanded applications, since it facilitates work for numerous coaches, consultants, managers and human resources specialists (Newstrom and Scannell, 1998).

The simplest and most powerful way to involve and engage people in process improvement and implementing change is the *Square wheels*. Square wheels illustrations are a great vehicle for facilitating interactive discussions, developing creative problem solving skills and for improving communications among people at every level of the organization (Newstrom and Scannell, 1998).

The process of creating a new team is different from developing an existing one. Table 1 gives an understanding for the dimensions of the new task as a manager in the new team environment.

Table 1: Team building guide for new and old environments

Old environment	New environment
Person followed orders.	Person comes up with initiatives.
Group depended on manager.	Group has considerable authority to chart its own steps.
Group was a team because people conformed to direction set by manager. No one rocked the boat.	Group is a team because people learn to collaborate in the face of their emerging right to think for themselves. People rock the boat and work together.
People co-operated by suppressing their thoughts and feelings. They wanted to get along.	People co-operate by using their thoughts and feelings. They link up through direct talk.

Source: Newstrom and Scannell, 1998.

Ten steps for building a new project team are (Newstrom and Scannell, 1998):

1. Get upper-management support
2. Define the purpose of your team
3. Identify time frames
4. Select team members
5. Classify team-member openings
6. Share the overall purpose
7. Decide team name
8. Create the team mission statement and goals
9. Determine core team issues
10. Establish team norms

Reasons for team building include (Newstrom and Scannell, 1998):

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- i. Improving communication
- ii. Making the workplace more enjoyable
- iii. Motivating a team
- iv. Getting to know each other
- v. Getting everyone onto the same page, including goal setting
- vi. Teaching the team self-regulation strategies
- vii. Helping participants to learn more about themselves (strengths and weaknesses)
- viii. Identifying and utilizing the strengths of team members
- ix. Improving team productivity
- x. Practicing effective collaboration with team members

Team building exercises consist of a variety of tasks designed to develop group members and their ability to work together effectively. There are many types of team building activities that range from kids games that involve novel complex tasks and are designed for specific needs. There are also more complex team building exercises that are composed of multiple exercises, such as ropes courses, corporate drumming and exercises that last over several days. The purpose of team building exercises is to assist teams in becoming cohesive units of individuals that can effectively work together to complete tasks (Newstrom and Scannell, 1998).

Team building exercises are useful for all kinds of teams. Some exercises are designed for smaller groups, while some are for larger groups. Some are designed for new teams, while others are for old teams. Again, team building exercises are for different age groups (Newstrom and Scannell, 1998).

Conclusion

Team building has become the buzzword in the corporate scenario. No individual can work in isolation and the good ideas become excellent ideas by sharing them. Hence, it is quite essential that the

organizations make efforts to build strong teams so that the employees show excellent signs of improvement.

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