



Team Effectiveness – 5 Factors to Manage

To improve a team's effectiveness, it is first necessary to understand the factors that impact its' performance. Once you understand these factors you can determine when and what team development is needed.

In order for teams to function effectively they must manage how they work together and how they interact with the rest of the organization. As a result of his studies, Richard Beckhard ("Optimising Team Building Efforts", Journal of Contemporary Business, Summer 1972) states that for teams to be effective they must manage four areas internal to the team: goals, roles, processes and relationships. Further research has identified a fifth factor impacting performance: how the team manages its interaction with the organisational environment. Within these factors is a hierarchy with some factors affecting all of the others. These five factors become the focus of attention for the manager who wants to raise team performance, because teams that effectively manage these areas function more effectively than teams that do not.

Environmental Influences – the impact of the organisation and the outside world on team performance.

The organisation creates the context within which the team functions. The policies, procedures and systems within an organisation can either support or hinder a team's effectiveness. An excellent example is the impact an organisation's reward system has on teamwork. Organisations typically reward only individual contribution. Few organizations have found ways to reward teams.

Signs to look for: The team is physically distant, not given enough resources to do the job, individuals are not recognized for team effort.

Goals – what the team is to accomplish

A team exists when members have responsibility for accomplishing a common goal. An effective team is aware of and manages:

1. The extent to which goals are clear, understood and communicated to all members
2. The amount of ownership of team goals
3. The extent to which goals are defined, quantified and deliverable
4. The extent to which goals are shared or congruent
5. The extent of goal conflict or divergence

Signs to look for: The goals are unclear or not communicated, everyone is doing their own thing and not participating in goal setting.



Roles – who does what on the team

Do all members understand what they and others are to do to accomplish the task? Do they know their individual responsibilities and limits of authority? In new teams time should be spent discussing and defining roles and responsibilities. As the team develops it is typical for

individuals to build expectations and assumptions of others which are seldom recorded anywhere. These should be discussed and agreed upon.

Conflict may occur as a result of differing expectations among team members. Overlapping roles can create conflict, especially when two or more team members see themselves as responsible for the same task.

Signs to look for: Responsibilities are poorly defined, there is a power vacuum, members act independently and avoid responsibility.

Work Processes – how members work together

Once team members know what they are to do and who is to do it, they must determine how they will work together. Typical considerations are:

Decision making – how will each of the team members participate in decision making.

Communication – what should be communicated within the team, to whom, by what method, when and how frequently?

Meetings – what is the team trying to accomplish, what subjects are to be covered, who is responsible for the subject, how will the meeting be conducted, who should attend?

Leadership style – the leader and the team need to agree the best style to meet the situation and the leader should be open to receiving feedback on their style.

Signs to look for: Meetings are unproductive or poorly attended, decision making is dominated by one or two people, actions taken without planning or communication is one way.

Relationships – the quality of interaction among team members

As team members work together, relationships often become strained. Members need ways to resolve problems and to assure that a good working relationship continues. Sometimes relationship problems occur because of a difference in values or a personality or management style clash. Managers may need to take an active role in soothing relationships during times of conflict. The more energy that is siphoned off because of bad feelings, attitudes or strong emotions, the less energy is available for the team's task.

Signs to look for: Personality conflicts, or members are defensive or competitive.

Team development is a process aimed at improving team performance in any one or all of the five factors in the team hierarchy. After examining your team's performance in these areas, your role as a manager is to identify where your focus for team development needs to be.

Pam Kennett

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