Rapid Skill-Builder®
Team Building

Success in any organisation today rests heavily upon how well its teams perform. A champion team will usually beat a team of champions – but how do you create a champion team? Effective teams do not simply "happen". They have to be built.

For the purposes of this Skill Builder, a team is defined as a group of between three and twenty people. Usually the team exists around a common purpose or goal in the way that it works or performs. The team also has to see itself as (and behave like) a team by meeting and sharing experiences regularly.

Team-building can be applied to an old or new team, a temporary or a permanent team, or even a team formed specifically to achieve one simple goal in a very short time-frame. In every case, the team needs to be built step-by-step to ensure that it performs to its highest potential through each of stages of team development.

▼ Direction

No group will succeed as a team unless it understands why it has been formed. In this forming stage, every individual on the team needs to participate in the discussion about the purpose and mission of the team.

Developing a Mission Statement

A mission should concentrate on tangible objectives, not vague aspirations and ideas. Of course, a good mission statement will also express the purpose of the team. It should help involve every individual and not be too narrow – or in some cases, too broad.

A team mission statement works best when the input of the whole team has been considered. The group then makes sure that the basic purpose is expressed, is workable, and is understandable to everyone.

For example, a hospital ward of doctors, nurses, porters and cleaners all need to arrive at a mission statement that reflects their purpose as a team – not as individuals within it. Perhaps its mission is this:

"To provide high quality care and service
to patients in order to ensure that the hospital ward
experience is the most pleasant possible."

This mission statement allows each individual to achieve the expected outcomes in his/her own particular way, but also to do so together.

It is important to make sure that the mission of the team remains sufficiently broad so that every member of the group is involved. A school might develop this simple mission:

"To teach children effectively."

However, a better and more encompassing mission for all school employees (and even the children and parents) would be:

"To create the best learning environment possible
for children to reach their ultimate potential according
to their individual needs and aspirations."

In the final analysis, a mission statement must be a real, living statement of what the team practices and does. If it is imposed upon the team from senior people with little team involvement, is communicated in poor or vague language, or is not shared with others, it will prove useless and will not result in clarity and common purpose.

Developing a Vision Statement

As the team members work on reaching consensus on their mission, the team should have a good grasp of why it exists at all, i.e. its main enduring purpose or overall objective. However, understanding their vision is also important. A vision is very different from a mission, which reflects the ongoing business in which the team should engage. Vision specifies the direction in which the team is heading, i.e., its long-term aim.

As with the mission process, the development of the vision should involve all team members. Imposed visions that set future direction have low levels of ownership. If individuals in the team have little understanding of the vision or consider they have little chance of achieving it, they are unlikely to make a real commitment.

A successful **vision** or strategy is developed by asking all team members to describe a set of broad future goals and targets for the group. A target should be challenging but also realistic. Group members can engage in a brainstorming exercise to shape their particular vision, or use a number of other creative approaches.

For example, each team member could write a "newspaper article" from the perspective of three, five or ten years in the future, describing what the team has successfully achieved over the previous twelve months. By sharing these articles, the team can build upon each other's ideas to shape an innovative strategy for the future.

A well-developed strategy should be a meaningful statement that inspires the team to act. If the team has a high level of ownership of the vision, it will be a "living" document, capable of providing clear and focused direction. However, a vision should only be seen as a guiding light: to engender team action, specific goals and objectives need to be developed to make the vision a reality.

Ultimately, the team vision should act as a map when setting any goal or objective. In this way, goals can be formulated that contribute toward achieving the vision. In simple terms, this means that every goal should be reviewed after it has been drafted to check that it is likely to make a tangible contribution to the overall vision of the team, and that it will consistently help to pull the team in the same general direction.

▼ Values

Team values – those beliefs that people hold about work, relationships, likes, dislikes, etc. – are rarely discussed.

In the earlier stages of team development, group members are usually less willing to share their individual values for fear that others won't agree. However, every individual also knows that a high-performing team needs to have a number of common values if it is to succeed. Once the initial forming stage has passed, it is usually safe to test how much common ground exists.

There is no formula for agreeing on which values are most important for the team to succeed. Values will vary according to individual teams and their respective goals and aspirations, but it is the actual discussion of what is important to the team that is of most value. Many teams avoid this discussion or think the debate will be too open-ended to be useful. Nothing could be further from the truth! A mature team will seek to draw out what is important to its members, discussing differences and how they might be reconciled.

The first step in drawing out team values is to start with individual values. Each person can list their top three or five most important personal values and then rank them. The individual values of the entire group are then shared and discussed with a view to reaching a common understanding (bracketing values together where different words reflect similar meanings).

The discussion of individual values should lead to a list of fifteen to twenty statements. Some values of the team may be business-focused (such as valuing teamwork, customer service or quality). However, more importantly, the list of values should reflect the beliefs held by the team members about how they will focus their behaviour. There may be underpinning values such as honesty or integrity, and inter-relationship values such as open communication.

In a high technology environment, for example, the team might decide that innovation or continuous learning are important values for the team to emphasise. In a people or customer-focused environment, the important values are probably more about respect for people and teamwork. Whatever the outcome, there is no substitute for the team developing its own approach and then validating the final results and outcomes according to its needs.

Comparing the team's values with the organisation's values will also be beneficial.

▼ Roles

Teams are usually comprised of members that possess a wide range of skills and abilities. A key task for the team is to conduct a systematic appraisal or audit of those skills in order to perform at an optimal level, using each individual to help the team reach its potential.

A skill audit will naturally highlight the tasks to be done and those people with the ability to best perform these tasks. This process should be done openly and constructively. If done well, the team design will be a strong platform upon which to build and achieve future targets.

This can be carried out in a number of ways. One method is to invite individuals to list their abilities or areas of competence that they feel are relevant to the group for achieving the tasks ahead. This information is then shared with the whole group for discussion.

Another method is to list the skills and abilities the team will need to achieve its goals, independently from the actual skills of the individuals in the team. In either case, once the skill inventory or audit has been carried out, the group then performs a simple gap analysis, and develops a plan to fill the skill gaps identified (through training, recruitment or partnering with others in some way).

One effective method for allocating goal responsibilities is to get the whole team involved in developing a matrix. As the matrix below illustrates, this simple approach clarifies who is accountable for leading the activities and who else is involved.

Goals	People							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1. Develop a product brochure		O		X	O			O
2. Organise an advertising campaign			X			O	O	
3. Brief agents on the sales campaign		O			O		O	X
4. Submit proposals to major customers	O		O	X	O	O		
5. Design credit terms	X		O				O	O

X = Accountable **O** = Involved

As the matrix shows, some team members will work on several projects simultaneously. The successful team will, therefore, share its individual action plans in order to commit to and remain accountable for their roles and responsibilities. This ensures that there is a common understanding of what will be happening in the future, who will undertake it, and at what stage.

By sharing objectives, and individual action plans to achieve them, group members are given the opportunity to discuss how they might assist one another to create a better outcome.

If this is done in an open-meeting format that involves all team members, the most logical outcomes for work to be done (either individually or among several people) will naturally emerge. Be sure you do not over-extend one team member or underutilise another. If done collectively, a balance can be easily struck.

Once individuals have agreed that it will be necessary to team up with others for some goals, determine how the partnership will work. Some tasks are best performed over a short but intensive period, working together closely. Other work is best performed over an extended period, with team members coming together at pre-agreed checkpoints to ensure that progress is being made.

Simple agreements to regularly exchange data on a project or produce a summary update on individual progress are also helpful upfront. This is a useful way to perform self-checks and keeps the team on course.

A team without a good grasp of its individual and collective role as a group will inevitably be poorly aligned. Although role definition can be tedious and a little bureaucratic for some, it often helps reduce future disagreements or frustrations.

This is particularly important where the team faces difficult targets or is under pressure to perform. In these circumstances, be sure that everyone understands all the team roles and competencies – not just their own – to eliminate confusion or misunderstandings about who is doing what. This will reduce the potential for conflict.

▼ Ground Rules

By this stage, members of the team will have spent a reasonable amount of time endeavouring to understand each other and talking about what the group individually and collectively values (inside and outside of work). While this debate will uncover a few key shared values upon which the team will now focus to optimise its chances of success, the team should also develop a written document that details how that team will actually work together.

The purpose of developing a written team charter or determining a set of ground rules is to ensure that everyone operates under the same guidelines. If team members rely only upon memory or assumption, it will be easy to forget the terms of a behavioural contract.

An effective team ground rules charter will outline a number of very basic inter-relationship guidelines or standards.

For example, the team can agree to share all feedback (good and bad) on other team members openly, or decide to always respect an individual's opinions or feelings. The team can also agree that all decisions will be made by majority rule or consensus. Similarly, any "final say" or dispute resolution could be nominated to be the responsibility of one person – perhaps the team leader or even an outside entity. Whatever the case, this is the stage to determine these criterion in order to regulate and uphold the group's behaviour.

Monitoring this behaviour can be done in a number of ways. The team can decide that the whole group will regularly observe behaviour collectively, or decide that any behaviour considered contrary to the team charter should be dealt with by individuals at the time on a one-to-one basis. Whatever method is chosen, monitoring is best done openly. Closed or secret monitoring tends to foster team distrust and discomfort and should be avoided in most circumstances.

The monitoring process should also be transparent and people should agree to it. Ideally, it should be used to adjust individual behaviour on the spot, and be upheld by the team's formal behavioural contract review mechanism.

The review must not focus on individual behavioural shortcomings but rather on ensuring that the team is collectively living by its standards and values. Ideally, this review will be done openly and in the most constructive way possible, to allow the team to honestly correct its own behaviour.

Ground Rules Examples
• How will performance feedback be handled?
• How will decisions be made?
• Who will be responsible for conflict resolution?
• How will behaviour be monitored?

▼ Progress

In many teams, several individuals step up immediately to take on the tasks of identifying the goal and agreeing on specific roles. This might seem efficient and natural but more often than not it will adversely affect the overall team result, particularly if an enthusiastic volunteer then accuses other team members of being lazy or ineffective. To avoid such misunderstandings, each team member must be responsible for their involvement.

One way to support this, and to keep the group on track, is to hold regular meetings and make sure that progress toward the team goal is consistent and planned. After all, the process of group achievement of a particular goal is as much about building the team as it is about achieving the assigned objective.

From these meetings, it should become evident when adjustments are required.

The main adjustments that any team will need to make to keep its performance on target will usually be centred around reallocation of people or other resources. In a large task or project involving the team, this reallocation will typically occur for two reasons:

- The skill fit between people and task, or the task and the individual capacity to handle it in the expected time-frame, might have been misjudged

- Team members designated to work together might not achieve the targets. Whether this reflects differences of opinion or a shortfall in the collective skills or resources, reallocation will be needed if the team wants to progress and achieve its goal.

Team review meetings are of little value if team members are not prepared to be totally open about real performance and the failures and successes along the way. The main advantage of a pre-agreed performance system is to help build the team. Open communication and feedback is a key platform upon which team success is built. Having said this, any criticism should be constructive, and lead to collective support, not used as an excuse or forum for condemnation.

The team can choose to schedule these feedback meetings separately from the regular weekly review meetings, allowing the team to give feedback without other agenda items or time constraints getting in the way.

This discussion can also be structured to maximise the benefit to the group. For example, every individual can be asked to contribute a positive and a negative statement about team progress or performance. This keeps things from deteriorating into a purely negative or problem-oriented discussion at the expense of the team's success.

Nonetheless, the team should not try to stifle negative feedback. Failure to perform is an opportunity to improve, not a chance to chastise the individual. In general, all feedback needs to be discussed constructively.

Ideally, the whole team needs to agree on which aspects of team performance to examine, in what frequency, and involving which individuals. The minutes of team review meetings are an obvious place to start, along with several other aspects of the task or project that should also be documented.

Ideally, documentation would come from:

- **Progressive indicators (graphs and charts)**

- **Milestone review outcomes**

- **Plan adjustments and changes**

- **Lists of team strengths and weaknesses.**

Documentation can consist of little more than keeping all charts and graphs produced in a chronological file, or recording adjustments and changes on a basic spreadsheet or database. The goal of documentation, however, is simply to keep a clear record of decisions, facts and events during team projects, so that a post-project audit is as objective and as fair as possible. This information is also valuable for any future team endeavours.

Even a good documentation process will not cover every aspect of project performance. Each individual should therefore collate his or her own personally-gathered data, which needs to be subjective as well as objective. This should be added to the overall group performance data that has been collected daily, weekly or monthly.

On the basis of this performance tracking system, the team can discuss good and poor performance. This should lead to an agreement on the kinds of rewards and recognition that will be afforded to individuals and to the team as a whole.

A team reward system can involve considerably more than monetary recognition. At its most simple level, the basic recognition of success is often more than enough encouragement. It can take the form of a ceremony, or simply publishing the details of the achievement to the whole organisation. The point is to make every team aware that the organisation values exemplary teamwork and wishes to replicate this success as much as possible.

These team successes stem from a range of effective individual behaviours. It is equally important to share these successful behaviours, so that others can model their own actions accordingly.

▼ Outcomes

Boundary Management

Each organisational team is responsible for its own performance and progress. To this end, regular meetings should form an integral part of the team's activities. If an organisation is engaged in widespread team-building efforts, meetings between various teams must be encouraged. The critical skill then becomes "boundary management".

Boundary management is a vital step for teams to master in order to reach the "performing" stage. It involves looking beyond the team's daily or weekly work to the opportunities or threats presented to them. The term refers to the team's appreciation of how it fits into the wider organisational picture, and its actions to ensure that it continues to operate efficiently while ensuring events do not catch it by surprise. The key to managing the boundary is communication and how well the team co-ordinates member activities.

Effective teams are developed over time. The ultimate team to be constructed, over months and years of continuous team-building effort, is of course the organisation as a whole. This will cause the organisation to prosper and grow; a key factor in this is the communication system that is in place. Face-to-face communication, through both formal and informal meetings, is often the glue that holds all the teams together, provided that these meetings are constructive.

Goals and Objectives

Many organisations announce a new era of teamwork and then review the work of special project teams already in existence. This is not the goal. The real objective is to select the right projects in the first place and then ensure that a team works optimally to achieve the best possible outcome.

Project performance is often measured in time, cost and quality. These are entirely appropriate measures if they are well-designed and can be controlled by the team. However, the team will also need to look at such things as its co-ordination capability, cycle-times, problem-solving ability and innovation skills. Examining the performance indicators that have been agreed on will provide a more accurate gauge of the team's success.

Project performance also needs to be managed and measured in overall terms, or at a global level. The objectives of several teams are likely to overlap or even contribute to one another. By keeping a general eye on performance organisation-wide, any team-based performance measures can be continually adjusted to maintain consistency and relevance.

Learning from Experience

Once a team has gone through the team-building process and completed a project, its purpose for existence may have ceased. This does not mean it is no longer useful.

There may be another project the team can work on – either immediately or in the future. It is important to realise that next time the team is put to work, it will be easier to build team effectiveness because of the learning gained through the initial project. Higher goals can be set and subsequent activities should take into consideration the successes and failures the team has already been through.

The learning should also be applied to help every team in the organisation reach for new standards of performance excellence.

Building better teams is not an end in itself. The aim is to build teams that work more effectively together to achieve the organisation's goals. In the final analysis, remember that highly effective teams come together around a common cause or particular outcome or goal. If individuals are willing to work closely together to achieve this outcome, good teamwork is likely to result.

The Skill Building template on the following page provides a practical format that can be followed to help develop your team.
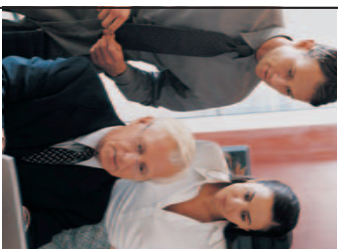
.

11

Team Skill Building Template

High Performing Teams Checklist

Outcomes
Goals
Learning
Boundary
management

HOW

Direction
Mission
Purpose
Vision

HOW

1	What is our vision as a team? (i.e., WHERE does this team want to go?)	
2	What is the team's mission? (i.e., WHY do we exist? What is our purpose?)	
3	What key values have been agreed on?	
4	What are the major roles that this team needs to perform to be successful?	
5	What team behaviours do we want to promote, and what do we want to prevent in the future?	
6	How will we measure or appraise the team's performance and give recognition for success when it is achieved?	
7	How will we capture the learning from our successes and mistakes?	
8	What goals, targets, results, or outcomes are most important for the team to achieve?	

Progress
Indicators
Milestones
Recognition

HOW

Values
Individual
Team
Organisational

HOW

Ground Rules
Behaviours
Responsibilities
Accountabilities

HOW

Roles
Style
Preferences
Capabilities

HOW