Principles of Team Building

Leadership Skills

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Preface

Successful team building in the workplace has more to do with making a success of the team you have been given, rather than building an ideal team from scratch. There are certain core principles of team building that will help you get the best out of any team that you find yourself managing.

You will learn how to apply these principles to:

- A project team where even though you are not an expert in all of the technical aspects of the project you are still expected to coordinate the team's efforts.
- A support team where there are problems with motivation and high staff turn-over.
- A high-level strategic team where you do not have any direct authority over the other participants.

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Introduction

You will probably have been a member of several teams during your life—for example, a sports team, theater group, church group, bridge club, etc. As a result, you should already have some understanding of how teams function and what motivates them to be successful.

As useful as this knowledge is, it is worth pointing out some of the differences between these types of non-work teams and those teams that you will need to manage as part of your job.

Firstly, teams that are outside of a working environment are usually made up of people who have a common set of beliefs and have actively chosen to join. Secondly, the team objective will be clear and universally agreed. Thirdly, anyone who does not fit in with the group will tend to leave of their own accord. Finally, in the case of a sports team, the captain can field the best players and leave the rest on the bench.

Things are very different with workplace teams.

As a manager you will often be presented with a team to manage which may or may not have a track record of success. Some of the team members may be enthusiastic, but some may not. People who don't fit in or who don't agree with the goals of the team may be reluctant to leave and it may be impossible to get rid of them. In addition, the people in your team are unlikely to have a common motivator as each one is influenced by their own personal career aspirations. Sometimes, the goals that the team has been set may be either impossible to achieve or inappropriate.

Despite all of these constraints, there are certain core principles of team building that will help you get the best out of any team that you find yourself managing.

This eBook explores three very different teams and describes how the principles of team building can be applied to each one. These example teams have been chosen because they represent the three most common types of team in the modern workplace.

The first example is typical of a multi-disciplinary project team that has been assembled to complete a particular piece of work. In this example, the team leader does not have total managerial control over all of the team members, which is normal with this type of team.

The second example is typical of a team that is performing an ongoing business process, in this case telephone support. In this example, the issues facing the team leader have more to do with maintaining team morale than with the work itself, which is reasonably straightforward.

The third example is typical of a team that is engaged in strategic planning. In this example, none of the team members report directly to the team leader and the goals of the team are changing all the time.

The issues facing the leader of each of these teams are discussed in detail. Even if your team does not match one of these scenarios exactly, there are still certain principles that will apply to your own team and it is up to you to interpret how best to apply them.

A Note About Team Leadership

The most important part of leading a team in the modern workplace is to be the person that others *choose* to follow. Even where compulsion is possible, it tends not to work very well. If you want to take a leadership role, then the most important questions you can ask are:

> *Which leadership style is the most appropriate to my team?*
>
> *How can I alter my behaviors to become this type of leader?*

The answers to these questions depend on your role, your team, and the task at hand. This aspect of team leadership is covered in the eBook 'Team Leadership Styles,' which you can download free from **www.free-management-ebooks.com**.

Principles of Team Building

There has been a lot of academic study of teams and team building over the years and much of it has found its way into team building books aimed at managers. As a result, there are certain aspects of team building that have gained the status of 'Golden Rules' that you should follow in order to build and manage a successful team.

A good example of this is team size. Academic studies have shown that the ideal team size is between five and nine, with six being the ideal number.

Team Size	• 5-9 people • *ideal is 6*
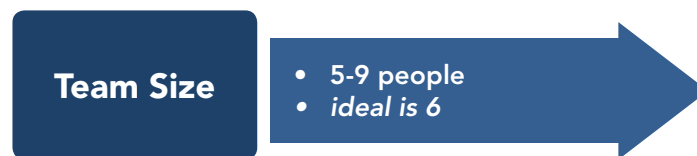
The effect of team size on productivity can be traced back to the work of Maximilian Ringelmann, a French agricultural engineer born in 1861. He discovered that the more people who pulled on a rope, the less effort each individual contributed, despite the total force generated by the group rising.

This effect became obvious after there were about five people on the rope. Ringelmann attributed this to what he called 'social loafing.' This happens because working as part of a group or team tends to obscure the lack of individual effort.

The impact of social loafing is more significant where each team member is performing exactly the same mundane task. With this type of task it is very difficult for anyone to tell how much effort any one individual is putting in and very difficult to reward an individual, or give that person a sense of achievement. Not surprisingly, this results in individuals putting in as little effort as they think they can get away with.

As well as Ringelmann's work, there have been innumerable studies involving team-building programs and a large number of companies that have designed games specifically to test the factors affecting team cohesion, trust, and cooperation as well as the quality of the work done by various teams. The ideal team size to achieve the objectives set by these exercises seems to be around five or six.

This evidence does appear to be slightly more compelling than the Ringelmann experiment, but you should remember that the tasks set in this type of exercise are often designed with a fairly small group in mind. This leads to the circular logic that:

> *'Tasks designed to be completed by small groups are most efficiently completed by small groups.'*

No doubt many of these academic studies have been performed rigorously and the results and findings are both valid and enlightening. Unfortunately, they are of little use to a manager or team leader working in the real world, where team size is usually something over which the manager has little control.

The reality for most team leaders and project managers is that the team size is dictated by the amount of work to be done and the time available. In a cross-functional project team, the size of the team is dictated by the functions that need to be represented. In either case, 95% of the time you will need to make the best of the team that you are given because the size and composition is something that you will not have much control over.

Similarly, you may have very little control over team rewards because some of the team members may not be under your direct control, remuneration may be decided at a higher management level, or you may be constrained by organizational policy.

All of this means that successful team building in the workplace has more to do with applying some basic principles to the team you have been given, rather than recruiting 'perfect' team members in order to build an ideal team from scratch.

The four principles of team building are:

Define Success Criteria

The first principle is to define and communicate the team objective. This should be easily understood by everyone and allow all members to contribute, regardless of their skills and experience.

For a project team, success criteria will be defined in the project plan and it will be obvious on a week-by-week basis whether or not the project is on track. In addition, team members will be able to compare their progress with their individual work schedule. This means that project teams seldom have problems in this particular area.

However, with other types of team, the objective is not always so clear and team members who feel as though they do not have a definite objective can easily become demotivated. There may also be a problem if the success criteria have been set at unrealistic levels and the team cannot 'buy into' them. This often happens when people who do not appreciate the day-to-day realities of the task have set the goals. This is illustrated later in this eBook with reference to one of the example teams.

Remember, success cannot be achieved unless the team actually knows what it looks like.

Lead by Example

In many instances, your team members will have more technical knowledge and more experience than you do. This is not a problem: leadership has more to do with 'soft skills' than technical ones. Having said that, you may need some technical skills—for example, knowledge of a project management methodology if you are running a project team. However, no amount of technical expertise will make up for poor leadership skills.

Leading by example means exhibiting the same professional behaviors to everyone you interact with, whether they are inside or outside your team. This includes customers and suppliers as well as other people within your organization.

It can be tempting to allow your frustration with people outside the team to show in your comments or body language during team meetings and in conversations with individual team members. You should always make a concerted effort not to show a lack of respect in this way, even if you feel it is justified.

Demonstrating the type of behaviors you expect from your team in your own interactions communicates your expectations of how your team members should behave towards you

and everyone else they come into contact with. If you can ensure that everyone on your team demonstrates respect towards customers, suppliers, and others who are not part of the team then this can prevent a lot of problems from taking root. There is always a tendency for teams to blame problems on those outside of the team and to ignore their own responsibilities. This is made easier for the team if there is an existing 'us and them' sentiment.

Lead by example through

your behaviors, attitudes & interactions
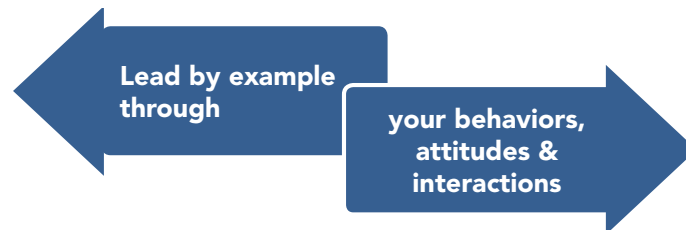
As part of your time management ensure that you allocate time to communicate and monitor your team informally. For example, on your way back from getting a coffee, ask members of your team how things are going and listen carefully to their responses. Listen for omissions and look for negative body language. Many potential problems can be caught early by paying attention to what team members do not say as well as what they do say.

By utilizing both formal and informal contact time with your team you will be more likely to pick up on underlying issues and resolve them before they become serious.

Value All Contributions

Many teams will be significantly larger than the ideal of five to nine people, which can make it difficult to recognize each person's contribution.

You will need to show that you value each member of the team and that their views matter to you regardless of the role they play. One simple way to exhibit this is by ensuring all views are heard when talking about issues at a team meeting or discussion.

Acknowledged

Valued

**All Members' Contributions**

Well Presented
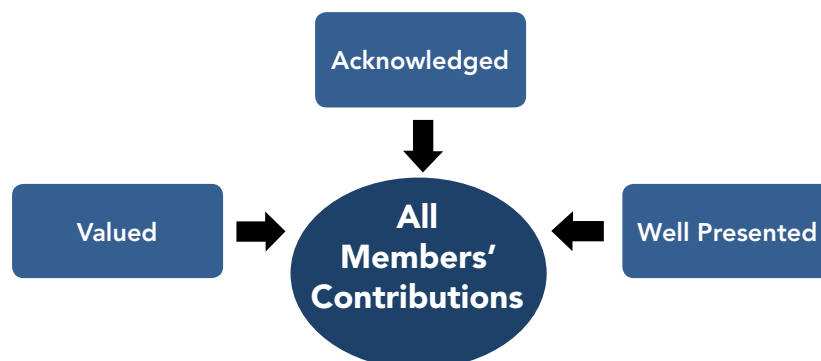
You should use your 'Chair' skills during these events to ensure that everyone who wants to voice an opinion feels as though they will get a fair hearing. When people feel as though their opinions are unwelcome the most common response is to withdraw from the discussion and then seek out others who feel the same way. This leads to the formation of cliques and sub-groups that can be difficult to deal with once they have formed. The best way to prevent this type of team fragmentation is to make sure that everyone feels involved.

Reward Group Success

As a manager, you will usually have the ability to reward those team members you are directly responsible for. However, the extent to which you are able to offer truly motivating rewards, especially monetary, will be influenced by your organization's culture and the amount of decision-making power you have.

There may be some team members who are not part of the organization (e.g. contract or freelance staff). In these cases you will need to think carefully about how to reward their efforts in a meaningful way. One way of doing this is to make it clear that you will try to help them to secure more work from your organization. Most contractors and freelancers place a high value on continuity of employment and would consider being recommended for other projects within your organization as the equivalent of a monetary reward.

Whilst these things are helpful in terms of each individual, it offers no opportunity for you as the manager to reward the whole team. As the complexity and diversity of organizations increase many organizations are beginning to make provisions for team-based rewards, but this is still far from normal.

Recognize	➡	Your Team	⬅	Reward
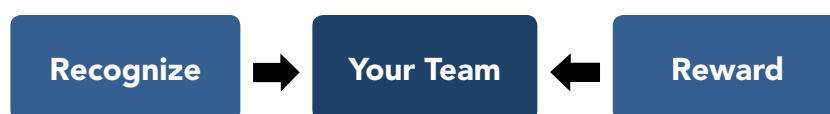
In situations where you are unable to offer a tangible reward you will have to seek ways to recognize the contribution and efforts of your team. This recognition can take many forms and can be large or small in relation to the achievement:

- Specific mention in your management report that you read to them.
- Mention of your team's achievement at the next divisional meeting. (This may mean for some teams that not everyone will be present on such an occasion, but the members will know that their efforts have been accredited.)

- Persuading a board member, senior customer contact, or someone they respect to acknowledge the team's contribution in an email or report, or if appropriate a visit to the team.

- Personal praise for the whole team in recognition of its efforts from you as their manager.

- Organize a social event. This can be as simple as taking everyone out for a meal at lunchtime. The amount of money you spend is far less important than the fact that you do 'something' even if it is fairly low-key.

It is important that the recognition is in proportion to the achievement attained, otherwise it will be seen as arbitrary and could have a negative effect on the morale of the team as a whole.

KEY POINTS

✔ You may find it impractical to apply much of the advice you read on team building, particularly if it is based on academic studies or the work of management consultancies.

✔ There will be certain factors in any team management situation where you have little or no control. These may include: team membership, team rewards, and individual rewards.

✔ The principles of team building offer a basis for your understanding but offer little in terms of practical day-to-day advice and assistance.

✔ Team-building principles are guidelines that you need to modify to suit your organization and team composition.

✔ Focus your time on managing the aspects of team building you can affect and work within the constraints you have to accept.

✔ Ensure your team knows how success is going to be measured.

✔ Your team members will reflect your own behaviors.

✔ Demonstrate that you value all contributions made by team members.

✔ Ensure that you recognize and reward group success as well as that of the individual member.
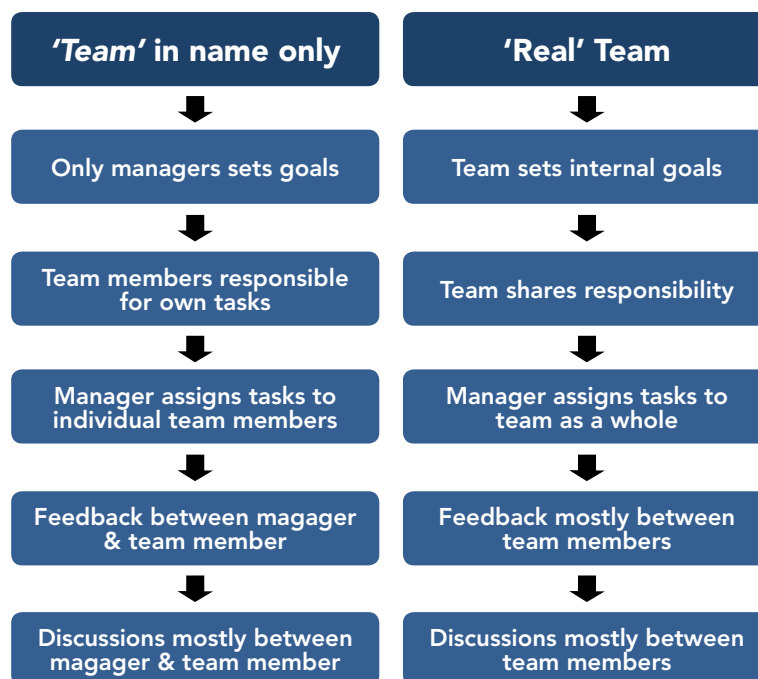
Beware of 'Teams in Name Only'

Some organizations use the word 'team' as a collective noun to refer to any group of workers that perform a similar task.

For example, an organization may refer to the 'Accounts Receivable Team,' to mean those people in the accounts department who chase late payments. In this case, these people all perform a similar role but they do not interact with each other very much and their work is done quite independently. Each 'team member' has a list of customer invoices that have not been paid and that they are expected to chase payment for.

When a group of workers are performing this type of work but the organization still insists on referring to them collectively as a team, you should consider them to be a 'team in name only' as opposed to a real team.

In this context a real team is a group of people who are working together synergistically to achieve something. This type of working is typified by project teams in which individuals who have complementary skills work together to achieve something that none of them could do individually.

'Team' in name only	'Real' Team
Only managers sets goals	Team sets internal goals
Team members responsible for own tasks	Team shares responsibility
Manager assigns tasks to individual team members	Manager assigns tasks to team as a whole
Feedback between magager & team member	Feedback mostly between team members
Discussions mostly between magager & team member	Discussions mostly between team members

These differences are also evident when you look at the responsibilities of individual team members. For those in the Accounts Receivable Team each person is responsible only for their own individual tasks. Project team members, on the other hand, are accountable to each other for getting their own particular deliverables completed.

There is also a marked difference in the occurrence of conflict within these two teams. In the Accounts Receivable Team, conflict is rare because team members work independently. In contrast, the project team experiences a lot of internal disagreement about the best way to tackle certain parts of the project. This conflict is viewed as normal and understandable due to the nature of the work and interactions between the team members.

There are other types of team that could be placed somewhere in between 'teams in name only' and real teams like a project team. You can save yourself a lot of frustration by recognizing that the closer a team is to being a 'team in name only,' the less scope there is to apply team-building principles.

KEY POINTS
✔ The structure of your team and the ethos of your organization will enable you to decide to what extent you are managing a real team or one in name only.

Team Examples

The rest of this eBook will use three real-life example teams to illustrate how team-building principles can be applied.

Each of these teams is quite different in its purpose and structure. These same team examples have been used in our 'Team Leadership Styles' eBook. If you have already read that book and are familiar with these teams then you can go straight to the 'Challenges you are most likely to encounter' section of each team example.

The example teams are:

- The Development Team
- The Customer Support Team
- The Steering Team

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┌─────────┐    ┌──────────┐    ┌───────────┐
│  Size   │──▶ │ Function │──▶ │ Structure │──▶
└─────────┘    └──────────┘    └───────────┘
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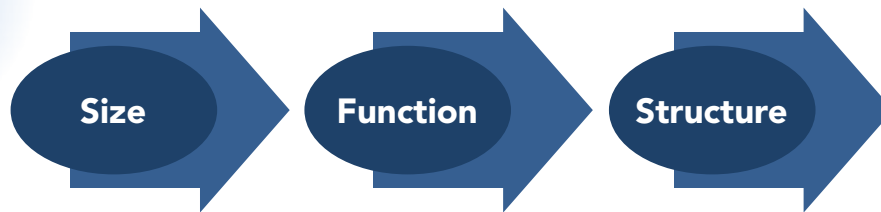
All of these example teams have a different size, function, and structure. They are based on real-life teams and are described in detail so that you can appreciate the differences between them and how these affect the way they are managed.

Background Information

These teams work within a large public utility company that was originally set up to provide water services. The company was originally owned by the state but has been privatized and now operates as a commercial organization.

The Water Services Regulator is responsible for ensuring that it continues to provide a quality service to all its customers and offers 'value for money.' This body ensures also that the water company adheres to all the required legislative regulations.

In the past, the company has operated with a traditional authoritarian management style, but it is endeavoring to alter this to a more commercial and empowered style of management through its change management program. All managers are expected to develop, coach, and mentor their staff so that they adopt the competencies required by the new commercial organization.

Development Team Example

The IT department is headed up by a new director who has been brought in from a software company to update the organization's IT systems so that operations become more efficient and profitable.

**Project Leader**

In this scenario, you have been with the organization for five years and witnessed its evolution from a traditional water authority to a modern water company. You are currently a team leader and have just been given the responsibility of managing a key IT project for the next twelve months. You are responsible for ensuring that the project is delivered on time and within budget.

Project Objective

Your objective is to develop a suite of software programs to enable the company to monitor water quality throughout its catchment area. This will be a web-based IT system that allows water quality data collected from remote locations to be entered into a central database where it can be analyzed by the water quality department.

Composition of Team

The members of this team are all university graduates, their ages vary between 25 and 45 years, and they are all consider themselves relatively well paid. Five of the team members work directly for the company and three are freelance contractors.
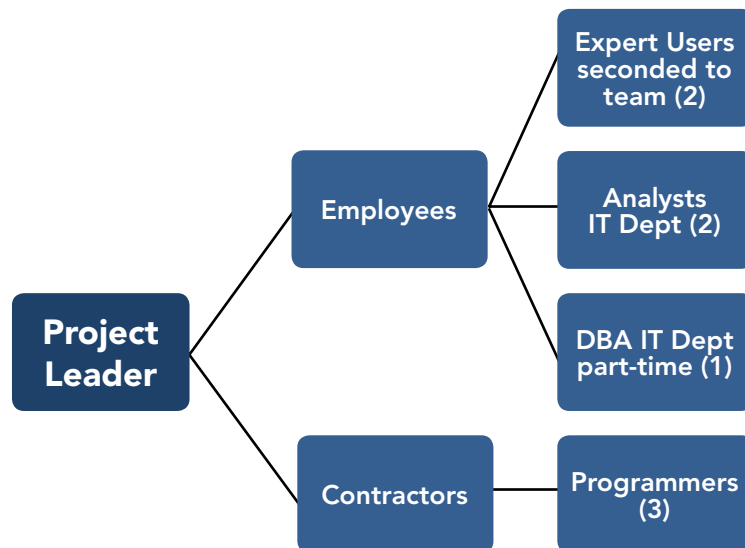
As you can see from the organizational chart above:

- The team has eight members excluding yourself
- Five of them are company employees
- Two have been seconded to the project from the water quality department
- One member, the database analyst, is only available to the team on a part-time basis
- Three of the team are external contractors

The first thing to notice about this particular team is that it is operating under what is known as a Matrix Management Environment. The expert users belong to the water quality department and the analysts and the DBA belong to the IT department. They are only assigned to you for the duration of the project, and when it is completed they will return to their respective departments. You do not have any direct control over them outside of the day-to-day running of the project. They still report to their own line managers, who are responsible for their appraisals, remuneration, promotions, etc.

The freelance contractors are all independent workers who have contracts with the company for the expected duration of the project. They have all worked for the company on previous projects and are keen to add another successful project to their resumes.

Challenges you are most likely to encounter

The composition of this development team highlights certain issues you could face as a project manager of this team. The high-level challenges are evident when you apply each of the principles of team building to this scenario.

Define Success Criteria

Arguably, the success criteria have already been defined as:

> *To develop web-based software that enables the company to centrally monitor water quality throughout its catchment area within twelve months.*

However, this is not terribly useful when managing the team on a day-to-day basis, which is why your first major task as project manager is to oversee the production of a detailed project plan that will specify all of the deliverables required and the timescales for producing them. A detailed description of these project milestones and individual work plans is beyond the scope of this eBook, but the important thing to note is that they define the most useful success criteria for individual team members as well as the project as a whole.

Lead by Example

It would quite common in this type of project team to find that the technical expertise of the IT staff and the contractors far outweighs your own. In addition, the expert users who have been seconded from the water quality department will know far more about this aspect of the business than you do.

This means that you cannot rely on your technical expertise to make you the natural leader. You will have to demonstrate your leadership through your organizational, planning, monitoring, and communications skills. You will also have to make your own assessment on how 'knowledgeable' you consider each of these experts to be and adapt your management style to suit your findings. The rest of the team will be looking to you for direction and qualification of their actions.
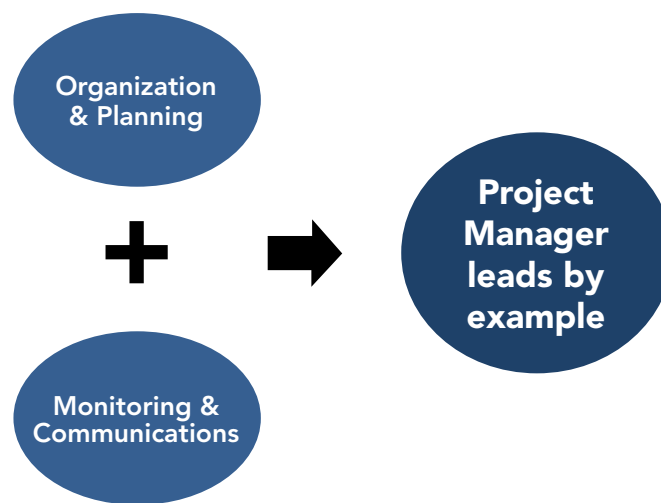
You will need to work with this team to set clearly defined tasks with an associated deadline and then allow them to use their expertise to deliver the required outputs. This would be done according to the project management methodology being used for this project. If you would like to improve your project management skills then you can download our series of project management eBooks from **www.free-management-ebooks.com**.

You should be prepared to be flexible in the level of supervision and monitoring you allocate for each team member, depending on how they perform against the project plan over the first few weeks. This aspect of team leadership is dealt with in the eBook 'Team Leadership Styles' which is also available from **www.free-management-ebooks.com**.

One of the most influential aspects of your leadership will be your communications and interpersonal skills, which will be visible to the team during team meetings. For example, do you make all members attend every meeting regardless of whether they have a contribution to make, or do you use other means of communication (e.g. emails) to keep the whole team informed?

Value All Contributions

You have direct control over how well each individual feels his or her contribution is received and valued by both yourself and the rest of the project team. You will be able to demonstrate this in your behavior and readiness to consider and evaluate each contribution in terms of its input and worth to the project.

The difficulty here is in striking a balance between considering everyone's point of view and making efficient progress. Success in this area is a matter of chairing the team meetings effectively. This topic is dealt with in detail in the eBook 'Meeting Skills—Acting as Chair' which is available from **www.free-management-ebooks.com**.

Team Recognition and Reward

You have two sets of people within this project team and each set is rewarded in different ways. For the company employees, rewards will be tied up with their own individual appraisals and these remain the responsibility of their respective line managers.

You should make every effort to brief the relevant line managers regularly about the progress of the project and their own staff member's contribution to it. This is important for two reasons.

Firstly, if the project looks like it is going to overrun then the line managers need to know as soon as possible so that they do not commit the staff member to another project when you need them most. Asking a line manager if you can hang on to one of their staff who they have already scheduled other work for will only lead to conflict and you may end up losing a vital team member at the worst possible time.

Secondly, the line manager is still responsible for the staff member's annual appraisal and they will actively welcome your detailed input to this process when they are not in a position get the information themselves.

You may want to discuss with all employees how each person's individual objectives can be met through their project involvement and ensure your feedback to their line manager achieves this. For example, permanent members of staff can be motivated to act 'beyond the call of duty' if they are told that this will be recognized in their annual appraisals or will count towards promotion.

In this way, you will be able to influence the recognition that each team member receives. You should also make sure that your written and verbal communications within the project team itself and to the senior management give recognition of each team member's performance and contribution whenever this is appropriate.

As discussed earlier, the freelance contractors are likely to place a high value on continuity of employment and would consider being recommended for other projects within your organization as a reward. If the organization is using the same contractors on an ongoing basis then offering them training opportunities can also work well for both parties. An extra place on an in-house training course costs very little, and provided that the training increases the contractor's marketability it can be seen as a substantial reward.

Other Issues

Managing the DBA will be one of your biggest challenges in this project due to the fact that you only have part of their time. Meeting with them and asking the best way to keep them informed of progress and what sort of notice periods they require will gain their respect and commitment to your project. It also enables you to assess them as an individual, so that you can determine how much 'management' they will require. Demonstrating to them that you are sensitive to their responsibilities outside of your project will go a long way to gaining their respect and commitment.

Most contractors are self-motivated professionals and will work best when given clear direction and support to allow them to do their job. Familiarize yourself with their contract terms so that you avoid any potential areas of conflict. For example:

- What will happen if they need to work more hours than the contracts stipulate in order to complete the project on time?
- Are they entitled to take any personal holiday time during the duration of the project?
- If they have a serious illness can you terminate the contract and get a replacement?

Getting as many senior people as possible on your side is vital because you will continually be competing for resources in this matrix management environment. Discovering which senior executives are champions of the web-based systems and their reasons why will help you overcome any resource problems you may face.

Furnished with this knowledge you will understand whom you need to keep informed of progress and any potential problems, as well as the best ways to communicate with these stakeholders. For example:

- Online water quality data will become a legal requirement in eighteen months. This means that the Finance Director has an interest in the project because of heavy fines if this requirement is not met.

- 40% of customers are in remote areas where the water quality is highly variable. This means that the Customer Services Director has an interest because of the ongoing impact on the business.

- Collection of water quality data is ad hoc and no formal standards exist. This means that the Operations Director has an interest because of the practical issues of collating this data at reduced cost.

Their view of you as a leader will also be influenced by how quickly you are able to overcome obstacles to progress.

Your experts from the water department, whilst they are responsible to you on a day-to-day basis, may still feel part of the water department, and as such may have conflicts of interests throughout the duration of the project. At the commencement of the project you will need to ensure that they feel their expertise is valued and can make a real contribution to the design of the system. You should take the time to understand the issues associated with these remote areas and what information is needed to properly assess the water quality.

It often helps to establish a rapport with such experts by asking them how aspects of data collection could change in the future especially with regard to legislation. This will enable the system to be designed with an element of adaptability built into it so that the organization can more easily respond to future needs.

In a team like this one where some individuals have much greater technical knowledge than others, you will need to encourage them to communicate in everyday language whenever possible. Some technical terms can't be avoided, but project members must be prepared to explain terms to others in the team as needed.

Your own behavior in offering explanations for IT and industry terms will encourage an exchange of terminology as the analysts work with the expert users to define and design

the system. It is important that you encourage the analysts to be honest in their defini-tions of how well the system can meet users' needs, as compromises from the business and IT aspects may be required in order to write the system specification.

KEY POINTS

✔ The project manager is not an expert in all of the technical aspects of the proj-ect (database design, interface design, programming, and testing) but is still expected to coordinate the team's efforts.

✔ You are expected to ensure that the expensive human resources are utilized as effectively as possible and to produce a final deliverable within the allo-cated time and budget.

✔ Utilize the principles of team building as appropriate for the matrix manage-ment environment.

✔ Be aware of areas where a conflict of issue can arise within the team, e.g. sec-onded and part-time members.

Customer Support Team Example

Customer Support is one area of the Customer Services department, which is managed by the Customer Services Director who has been with the organization for over twenty years. His role has two main objectives relating to customer service:

1. To ensure customer complaints are resolved quickly and to both parties' satisfaction.

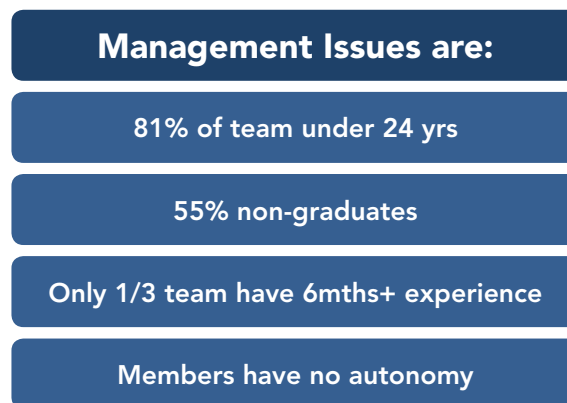2. To ensure the number of complaints referred to the regulator are minimized.

Customer Support Manager

In this scenario, you have been working in the customer support area for three years and have recently been promoted to Customer Support Manager. You are responsible for ensuring that:

● Calls received by the support desk wait no longer than five minutes to be answered.

● 90% of issues are resolved on the first call.

Composition of Team

Your team is a group of 22 permanent members of staff who all report to you. The age of your team ranges from 16 to 28 years, with 18 of the staff being under 24 years. Ten members of the team are graduates and only seven members of the team have been with the organization for six months or more.

Management Issues are:
81% of team under 24 yrs
55% non-graduates
Only 1/3 team have 6mths+ experience
Members have no autonomy

The team members have virtually no autonomy over their work because their workflow is handled by an automated telephone system, which routes queued calls to the first available team member.

The average time it takes to deal with a call is ten minutes and the average number of incoming calls per day is one thousand, which means that the team needs around 20 members to handle demand.

10mins to resolve call

+

1,000 calls a days

Requires a Support Team of 20+
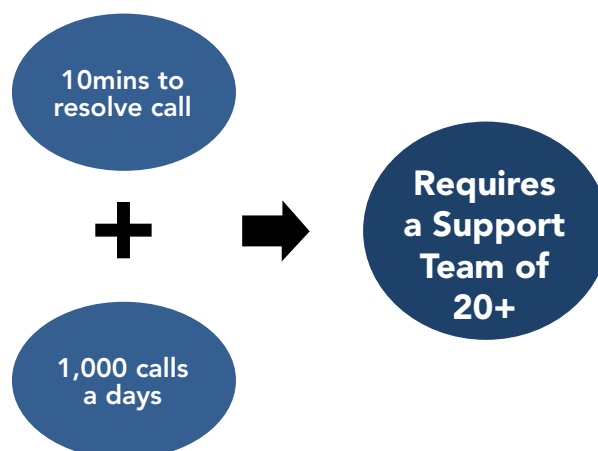
This explains why your team is large, much larger than the ideal of six people. You could look at splitting the team into two groups of eleven. This could be done through specialization—for example, billing queries and payment problems.

This type of split might be relatively easy to implement using the existing call handling system as customers already pre-select the reason for their call before getting through to the support desk. Splitting the group into two teams would also enable you to offer more focused training to each team.
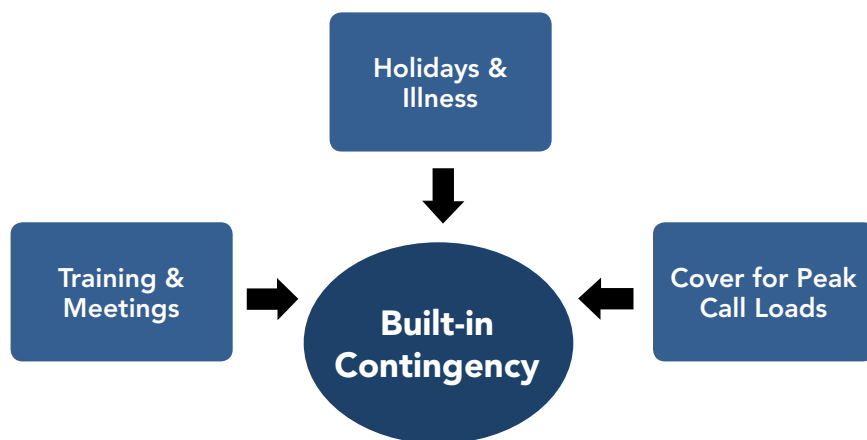
You would have to give careful consideration to how this would impact on your management time, as you would need to duplicate certain activities like team meetings.

Creating smaller groups within your team could also reduce areas of conflict that you have identified within the team; for example some team members are prone to antagonize each other for 'entertainment' in their otherwise mundane and repetitive day.

Challenges you are most likely to encounter

Unlike the development team, your team has not been selected on the basis of their individual skills. You have been given this team to manage and you will have to work with the team members you have and do your best to meet your objective.

Define Success Criteria

The success criteria for the customer support team are visible to the team as a 'mission statement' pinned to the office notice board.

- Calls received by the support desk wait no longer than five minutes to be answered.
- 90% of issues to be resolved on the first call.

There are two problems with these criteria, which have been set by someone in the company who has no idea of the day-to-day workings of the team.

Firstly, at peak times, the number of incoming calls is such that even if all of them are dealt with as quickly as possible, some callers will still be waiting for more than five minutes before their call is answered. In fact it would be necessary to double the size of the team to achieve this target at peak times—something that is totally unrealistic.

Secondly, whilst over 95% of the billing queries are resolved on the first call, only 60% of the payment problems are. This is because the payment problems often require the team member to obtain information from banks and the state welfare department. When this happens, they agree to call the customer back later—something that the customers prefer, rather than being kept waiting. Since payment problems make up around 30% of the incoming calls, this makes the 90% target impossible to achieve.

The implications of this for you as a manager are that the success criteria are inappropriate for your team and you need to take action on this straightaway. No one likes being set targets that are unrealistic or impossible and it is quite likely that the consistent failure to hit these targets is badly affecting team morale. This is something you will need to take up with your director, once you have developed some success criteria that would be motivational for your team as well as acceptable to him.

You could also try to boost motivation by having some 'unofficial' success criteria of your own. For example, you could use the call statistics output by the call management system to post a league table showing the team performance every week. This would give the team some targets to beat (i.e. last week's figures) and allow you to give them some feedback about their performance that was both meaningful and fair.

Lead by Example

Your first challenge as team leader is to change the perceptions of any of your team members who you have previously worked alongside on the customer support desk from seeing you as a co-worker to seeing you as a manager. You need to demonstrate the competencies of a manager through your behaviors. For example, coach and mentor team members how best to deal with difficult calls instead of taking over the call and resolving the problem for them.

From your knowledge of working on the support desk you will be able to empathize with your team. Your three years of industry knowledge will benefit the team considerably as two-thirds of your team will have less than six months' experience.

Whilst your team has no autonomy over their work, as their manager you can help them to feel they have some control by letting the team members organize lunch and break covers themselves. You will need to set the parameters they must adhere to—for example, at least twelve members must be available to answer calls between 12pm and 2pm.

Value all Contributions

You need to demonstrate that you welcome their feedback from customer calls. Very often, the first sign that the organization has done something to confuse or annoy customers is an increase in the frequency of incoming customer calls.

For example, the new design of bill may be misleading, or it is unclear to the customer what action to take if they have problems paying. Both of these issues would result in the support desk receiving additional calls. Being sensitive to any changes in the nature or frequency of customer problems would be an important part of your job. In this scenario, feeding back this type of information to the relevant manager or director so that the company can reword the information and the bills would represent an improvement in customer service and also reduce the number of incoming calls that your team needs to deal with.

Often issues raised will not be so easily solved, but if you show that you are fair and consistent in your dealings with your staff they will feel valued and more willing to express their views when asked.

Team Recognition and Reward

In this type of team your most difficult task is to keep your team motivated and committed to the organization. The transient nature of the team is reflected in the high turnover of staff, with two-thirds of your team having been in the job for less than six months. It may also reflect the high levels of stress that the team members are under as they deal with irate and agitated customers all day.

You may decide to negotiate with your director to split the annual bonus for your team over the four quarters so that the team get more regular incentives, rewards, and recognition. If this is not a possibility then you may want to discuss other ways to recognize your team's achievements—for example through meal vouchers, theater or club tickets, go-karting or paintball vouchers, etc.

Recognition can also be given for highlighting a certain type of call that requires specialist resources to resolve. An example could be bringing to your attention the rising number of calls due to communication problems, e.g. callers needing special assistance, elderly or those who speak little English.

As manager you will have access to numerous statistics, which will highlight to you any team member who is having problems with high absenteeism or lack of motivation. It is important that you have regular contact with each member so that you can discuss such issues, understand the reasons behind them, and seek a resolution.

One of your greatest challenges as a manager of this type of team will be your ability to motivate and reward the individual team members sufficiently to retain them. You will need to look at ways to counter the lack of career opportunities, perceived low pay, and the endless stream of difficult calls.

Looking at all the ways your organization allows you to reward your staff will help to a degree, but it is likely you will need to be creative in offering non-financial rewards. You could allow a dress-down or theme dressing day to raise money for charity. In fact, anything that would improve team spirit whilst maintaining a high level of customer service. For the individual you may be able to gain tickets to a corporate sponsored event, e.g. a sporting or cultural event.

KEY POINTS

✔ As Customer Support Manager you will have little flexibility or choice over who is in your team, but you can organize the individuals you have in the way that best achieves your objectives. It is important to:

✔ Exhibit your own personal commitment to your work and actively listen to team members' comments and feedback to gauge the mood of the team.

✔ Look at ways to ensure sub-groups within your large team are operating as close to the ideal group size as practical.

✔ Utilize your organization's reward structure and source creative ways to offer additional team and individual incentives, e.g. tickets to corporate sponsored events

✔ Use formal and informal means of communication to identify, defuse, and address issues of motivation or conflict.

✔ Create a thorough induction pack to handle staff turnover issues and bring new team members up to speed quickly.

Steering Team Example

Many corporations make use of Steering Teams in their drive to stay ahead of competitors, research future market trends, and plan for changes in legislation that will affect them. Organizations that operate in highly regulated sectors also use this type of team to consider the impact of new rulings on the business.

Predict Competitor Activities

Research Future Market Trends

Monitor Watchdog Rulings

Plan for Changes in Legislation

Steering Team Leader

In this scenario, you are the Business Development Executive of the water company. You have been an employee for two years. Your previous experience includes commercial legal expertise and management of deregulation in the leading telecommunications corporation. Your team's long-term objective is to identify the most profitable business opportunities that are available to the water company following the deregulation of their operations. The legislation removes the restrictions that previously meant that the organization could only sell water services.

The team also has a short-term objective to present a report on the potential opportunity and profitability of selling insurance to the water company's existing customer base of 14 million households.

Composition of Team

The Steering Team has some permanent members and some who have been brought in to look at specific issues. The permanent membership is made up of a senior person from each department within the company and the function of this group is to identify new business opportunities as described earlier.

In order to evaluate an opportunity, the team leader will need to bring in additional expertise from both inside and outside of the company.

For example, when investigating the possibility of selling insurance to its customer base the Steering Team would need to bring in representatives of:

- Customer Services Department
- IT Department
- Finance Department
- Regional Directors
- Marketing Department
- Law Firm
- Potential Partner Insurance Company
- Insurance Industry Regulator

This is a total of seventeen people as shown in the diagram below.
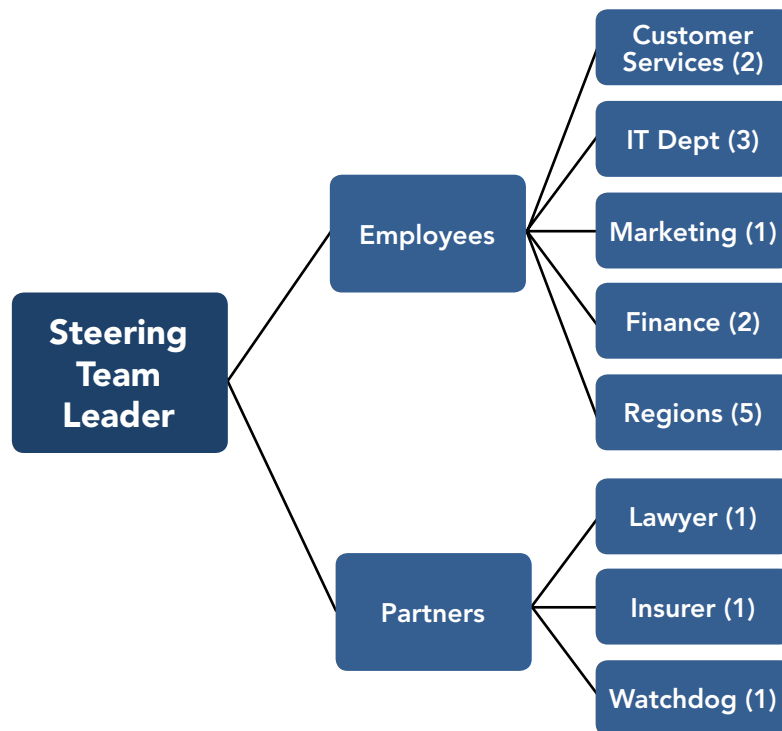
Each team member has his or her own responsibilities and career path, and even the permanent members of the team are only assigned to it on a part-time basis. Your team size of seventeen people is on the large side, but it is necessary to have all the departments and partners represented who could be impacted by the decision to sell insurance. An informed decision simply cannot be made without involving all of these parties.

Challenges you are most likely to encounter

As team leader of the Steering Team your main challenge is to strike a balance between keeping the team focused on specific projects (in this case the decision to move into the insurance market) and allowing the team the freedom to explore other possible areas of interest to the business.

Define Success Criteria

The success criteria for this team are more difficult to specify than for the other examples we have looked at. Whilst the current project provides this team with a short-term goal, the output from this project needs to be properly defined and a deadline set. If this

is not done, then it will be difficult to motivate the team members, who still have their normal day-to-day responsibilities, to allocate the necessary time and effort.

At the same time, the permanent members of the team need to be thinking strategically about the changing business environment, which will be continuously presenting new opportunities for the company.

These two distinct areas will need to be managed separately to prevent the team from either becoming totally focused on the current project or alternatively spending too much time on strategic issues at the expense of the current project.

With this in mind, the best approach would be to keep these two functions separate.

All meetings and communication relating to the insurance project should be limited to that topic alone. This policy will need to be strictly enforced because there is always a tendency for this type of team to become a general talking shop and whilst some viable ideas may occasionally emerge it is an inefficient use of everyone's time.

There should be a formal procedure for bringing new opportunities to the attention of the team. This could involve a team member preparing a report that is then considered by a sub-group before being presented at a monthly strategy meeting at which individual projects are not discussed.

As leader of this team your responsibility is to concentrate all the efforts of the members on the current issue, whether it is an ongoing project or consideration of a new opportunity. This will involve setting meeting agendas that are highly focused, as well as making sure that the agenda is stuck to.

Lead by Example

Your own expertise and knowledge is well known within the group, but each individual is involved in your team because of the knowledge they can contribute, so you need to work towards gaining from them. Your own behavior will define and portray your expectations of others:

- Always arrive on time
- Prepare fully for each meeting
- Complete all your actions in a timely fashion

- Always issue accurate meeting minutes swiftly after each session
- Communicate clearly
- Ensure your commitment to the objective is evident in all your judgments

You will find that your role is comparable to that of a meeting 'Chair' where you have to listen to information being communicated and make a decision about what actions need to be taken. This decision needs to have the support of the team and should be arrived at through discussion and consensus.

One problem that you could come across in this scenario is that you will often be trying to control a meeting in which most of the attendees have as much or more seniority than you do. This can be made easier if the format of the meetings is as formal as you can make it and includes timed slots for each agenda item. How to stay in control of meetings where you do not have seniority is dealt with in detail in the eBook 'Meeting Skills—Acting as Chair,' which is available from **www.free-management-ebooks.com**.

Another key activity for you as leader of the Steering Team is to develop the support of the senior management for the team's investigation and ultimately their decision on its objective.

Value all Contributions

Wherever possible you should break up the team into sub-teams because most discussions will only impact on certain areas of the business and simply do not need everyone's involvement. This will not only save the company money but will minimize any resentment that team members feel as a result of being distracted from their other work.
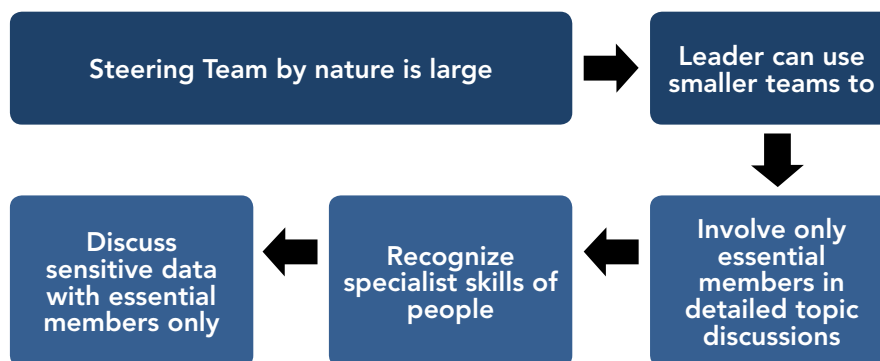
Only very rarely will you need to call the whole Steering Team together and you can use a variety of communications methods—email, secure intranet, and meeting minutes—to keep everyone informed of each sub-group's progress and findings.

Whenever you have sub-groups working in this way, you will need to make sure that the whole team, and not just the sub-group, knows the contribution of each team member. Many of the members of this team are motivated by the career-boosting visibility and recognition that team membership brings. Since you are not in a position to offer monetary rewards, you need to make sure that everyone feels as though their efforts are recognized as widely as possible within the company.

You can do this by communicating your appreciation for their input or the role they have played; it may be something as simple as saying 'Thank you' to the individual and in team situations. Listing all contributions in meeting minutes and making sure that any report summaries you send give full credit to the authors can also help achieve this.

Team Recognition and Reward

Involvement in this team is welcomed because each individual appreciates the benefit their inclusion provides for their career development.

The reward people are looking for in this type of team is career-boosting recognition. As team leader, your objective is to make sure that each participant feels that senior management will recognize his or her contribution as discussed earlier.

This doesn't mean that you don't need to bother showing your appreciation and acknowledging individuals' contributions. In fact, it is essential that you as leader of the team do recognize the role each individual has played at each stage of the investigation and the decision-making process.

Without this recognition from you, some team members may feel undervalued, and this could result in resentment and a lack of motivation. It is important that this recognition occurs within the Steering Team, at a senior level within the organization, and as appropriate within any partner organizations.

KEY POINTS

✔ The Steering Team is a unique team that is composed of individuals who each have complementary skills and knowledge. In this instance the team leader devolves responsibility as much as possible, offering recognition and reward to team members

✔ Using careful questioning to tease out key facts demonstrates your appreciation of an individual's contribution.

✔ Lead the team by exhibiting the behaviors you expect and desire others to display and adopt.

✔ As manager of the Steering Team you are responsible for managing the public relations issues of the project within the organization.

✔ Clearly communicate your appreciation and thanks for each member's input so that everyone receives the recognition and reward they desire.

✔ Steering Teams may be quite large, with many being between 12 and 25 people. You can easily divide such a team into smaller sub-groups of working parties focusing on specific aspects.

Summary

Successful team building in the workplace has more to do with applying some key principles to the team you have been given, rather than recruiting 'perfect' team members in order to build an ideal team from scratch.

The four key principles of team building are:

Define Success Criteria

This means defining and communicating the team objective so that it is easily understood by everyone and allows all team members to contribute, regardless of their skills and experience.

Lead by Example

Leading by example means exhibiting the same professional behaviors to everyone you interact with, whether they are inside or outside your team. This includes customers and suppliers as well as other people within your organization.

Value All Contributions

You will need to show that you value each member of the team and that their views matter to you regardless of the role they play. One simple way to exhibit this is by ensuring all views are heard when talking about issues at a team meeting or discussion.

Reward Success

You will usually have the ability to reward those team members you are directly responsible for. However, the extent to which you are able to offer truly motivating rewards, especially monetary, will be influenced by your organization's culture and the amount of decision-making power you have.

There will always be certain factors in any team management situation where you have little or no control. These may include: team membership, team rewards, and individual rewards.

The principles of team building offer a basis for your understanding but you will need to modify them to suit your organization and team composition. Remember, focus your time on managing the aspects of team building you can affect and work within the constraints you have to accept.

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