Working in Teams
Problem solving in Teams

Team

- Teamwork comes into play when a job is too big or the time is too short for one person to do the work, and also when no one person has the needed knowledge and skills. High stakes call for teamwork, both because the efforts of multiple talented people are needed and because no one person wants the sole responsibility for a possible failure.

Team Interactions

Teams can focus on different dimensions:

1. Informational dimensions focus on content: the problem, data, and possible solutions.

2. Procedural dimensions focus on method and process. How will the team make decisions? Who will do what? When will assignments be due?

3. Interpersonal dimensions focus on people, promoting friendliness, cooperation, and team loyalty.

Roles in Teams

- Individual members can play multiple roles within teams, and these roles can change during the team's work. Roles on teams can be positive or negative.

Positive roles and actions that help the team achieve its task goals include the following:

- Seeking information and opinions —asking questions, identifying gaps in the team's knowledge.
- Giving information and opinions —answering questions, providing relevant information.
- Summarizing —restating major points, summarizing decisions.
- Synthesizing —pulling ideas together, connecting different elements of the team's efforts.
- Evaluating —comparing team processes and products to standards and goals.
- Coordinating —planning work, giving directions, and fitting together contributions of team members. Positive roles and actions that help the team build loyalty, resolve conflicts, and function smoothly include the following behaviors:
- Encouraging participation —demonstrating openness and acceptance, recognizing the contributions of members, calling on quieter team members. • Relieving tensions —joking and suggesting breaks and fun activities.
- Checking feelings —asking members how they feel about team activities and sharing one's own feelings with others.
- Solving interpersonal problems —opening discussion of interpersonal problems in the team and suggesting ways to solve them.
- Listening actively —showing team members that they have been heard and that their ideas are being taken seriously.

Negative roles and actions that hurt the team's product and process include the following:

- Blocking —disagreeing with everything that is proposed.
- Dominating —trying to run the team by ordering, shutting out others, and insisting on one's own way.
- Clowning —making unproductive jokes and diverting the team from the task.
- Overspeaking —taking every opportunity to be the first to speak; insisting on personally responding to everyone else's comments.
- Withdrawing —being silent in meetings, not contributing, not helping with the work, not attending meetings.

Decision-Making Strategies

- Probably the least effective decision-making strategy is to let the person who talks first, last, loudest, or most determine the decision.
- Most teams instead aim to air different points of view with the objective of identifying the best choice, or at least a choice that seems good enough for the team's purposes.
- In many teams, someone willingly plays devil's advocate to look for possible flaws in an idea.
- To give ideas a fair hearing, someone should also develop an idea's positive aspects.
- To give ideas a fair hearing, someone should also develop an idea's positive aspects.
- After the team has considered alternatives, it needs a method for picking one to implement. Typical selection methods include voting and consensus.
- Voting is quick but may leave people in the minority unhappy with and uncommitted to the majority's plan.
- Consensus takes time but usually results in speedier implementation of ideas.
- Most people will agree to support the team's decision, even if it was not their choice, as long as they feel they have been heard.

Problem solving & dot planning

Two strategies that are often useful in organizational teams are the standard problem-solving process and dot planning.

The standard problem-solving process has multiple steps:

1. Identify the task or problem. What is the team trying to do?
2. Understand what the team has to deliver, in what form, by what due date. Identify available resources.
3. Gather information, share it with all team members, and examine it critically.
4. Establish criteria. What would the ideal solution include? Which elements of that solution would be part of a less-than-ideal but still acceptable solution? What legal, financial, moral, or other limitations might keep a solution from being implemented?
5. Brainstorm solutions (see Figure 8.3).
6. Measure the alternatives against the criteria.
7. Choose the best solution.

Dot planning

- Dot planning offers a way for large teams to choose priorities quickly.

Brainstorming Techniques

- Here are some techniques that will help produce successful team brainstorming sessions:
- Identify a clear, concrete goal before you start. That allows you to establish some boundaries for ideas—about practicality or cost, for example—and helps you keep your brainstorming session focused.
- Ensure everyone involved in the meeting knows the goal ahead of time. This step gives everyone a chance to have ideas ready when they come to the meeting.
- Set limits on meeting duration and size. An hour is enough time for a focused discussion, and it's easier for everyone to participate and be heard in a small team.
- Let the ideas flow freely without judgment. Any idea, however impractical, might inspire the best solution, and spending time weeding out weak ideas can stifle creativity.
- Build on each other's ideas.
- Brainstorm with a diverse team. Good ideas come from teams of people with different perspectives