Team Handbook

This handbook outlines a set of tools to enhance team effectiveness. It is designed to help team members (managers, students, consultants, etc.) to jump-start their work together, to avoid common problems, and to continually improve over time. The hand-book can be used in its entirety to guide a team along its development, or it can be used in pieces to deal with specific issues as they arise.

The basic assumption of this handbook is that team effectiveness is enhanced when team members explicitly try to answer five important questions:

I. Who are we?

II. What do we want to accomplish?

III. How can we organize ourselves to meet our goals?

IV. How will we operate?

V. How can we continuously learn and improve?

For each question there is a brief description of what the team is meant to address. Then there are a series of suggestions, including tips and alerts to barriers, which ought to help the team as it works to answer the question. The suggestions included in the handbook are just that, suggestions, so feel free to be creative in designing your own method of answering the questions posed. Hopefully, this handbook will help your team experience to be both rewarding and fun.

A NOTE ABOUT GETTING STARTED

The start-up of any team is a unique time and opportunity to set core modes of operation. As Edgar Schein, Professor of Organization Studies at MIT, points out, it is also a time when four issues are raised for individuals: those related to identity (who am I in this team?); power/control (who will have it and what will that mean for me?); goals (which of mine will be met in this team?); and acceptance/intimacy (what will my emotional attachment be?). These questions play out over the life of the team, but are especially influential in the beginning stages. Stay aware of your own and others expectations, and be aware that finding tentative answers to these questions is as important as getting other work done. Teams are dynamic, fascinating entities. As the old adage goes, look to make this team a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

I. WHO ARE WE?

DESCRIPTION

The team should begin by coming to terms with its composition (i.e., understanding the make-up of the team). Individuals approaching a team task each bring their own "baggage"—positive and negative—reflecting their backgrounds, experiences, personalities, and prejudices. Members represent different races, genders, and religions, as well different hierarchical levels and functional backgrounds. Members bring different expectations, needs, and abilities to contribute to any particular task. Only through a process of mutual discovery can the team come to understand how to harness these differences toward the team's goals. By candidly exploring who is best suited to each task and each role, the team can configure itself to operate most effectively.

Before the team meets to start this process of mutual discovery, it is useful for each team member to think about what he or she brings in terms of expectations, needs, preferences, skills, experiences, biases, and commitment level. This information can then form the basis of initial discussions among members.

Plan to hold initial discussions in a setting where a comfortable atmosphere can be created. Members should try to listen carefully to one another, and try to put themselves in the shoes of the other person to understand what each team member needs and how those needs might be met.There should be some general discussion about how the team might best capitalize on the similarities and differences that exist. This discussion isn't a one-time event; it needs to be ongoing as member needs, preferences, and skills shift. Remember that the more individuals feel that their own needs are met, the more committed and productive they can be for the team as a whole.

SUGGESTIONS

To begin the process of getting to know each other;
1. Go around the team several times, having members convey the following:

- Birthplace, previous places lived
- College attended, major
- Hobbies and interests
- Unique skills and areas of expertise
- Prior team experiences-the best and the worst
- What you most want to accomplish in this team

Alternative: Break up into pairs. Have each member of the pair interview the other using the questions in #1. Then have the pairs report each other's responses to the rest of the team.

2. Discuss your responses as a team.

3. Discuss how you can capitalize on the similarities and differences that exist.

TIPS
- Determine how much time you have for this activity and pace yourselves accordingly.
- Distribute addresses and phone numbers to aid communication. Hold the initial discussion in an informal setting, e.g., over dinner, at the beach, or at someone's apartment.
- Don't be too serious; humor helps everyone to relax, and getting to know each other should be as much fun as it is work.

BARRIERS
- Some people have a harder time opening up than others.
- Be aware of cultural differences in participation.

(So be patient and respectful and consider using the suggested alternative.)

II. WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACCOMPLISH?

DESCRIPTION

Before a team can organize itself to work effectively members need to agree upon goals. Goals serve to focus team member activity on specific tasks and motivate members toward a similar endpoint. They also enable the team to set milestones and measure their progress. Clarity and specificity are important, because when goals are ambiguous they often create confusion and conflict Team goals come in four categories:

- *Performance* refers to team output Specific goals for the quality, quantity, timeliness, efficiency, and innovation levels that the team would like to produce determine the work that members need to carry out. For example, new product development teams set goals related to budgets, schedules, technical specifications, and product innovation. Student teams need to determine the grades they want, the level of preparation for each class, the standards for assignments and the time they want to devote to the class.

- *Member satisfaction* involves providing team members with a positive experience. It is often related to the level of commitment and trust created within the team. Satisfaction is also related to meeting personal goals, such as having a good time, getting to know other team members, or establishing a supportive environment. Personal goals also include the time and commitment that members wish to offer.

- *Team learning* refers to the team's ability to survive, improve, and adapt to changing circumstances. Learning goals include finding innovative approaches to problems, becoming more efficient over time, acquiring new skills, and changing norms and procedures when external circumstances warrant change.

- Outsider satisfaction has to do with meeting the demands of, and pleasing, outside constituencies, such as customers, suppliers, clients, government agencies, or community groups. For example, if a product development team has a high-quality product but they cannot convince the marketing group and the customers of its appeal, then there is a problem. Similarly a student team may work many hours on a project, but unless the professor is satisfied, they may not reap the rewards of their labor.

SUGGESTIONS

To begin the process of establishing goals:

1. Have each person rate the importance of a list of goals that you generate as a team. Some examples might be:
- Getting an A on our team project
- Being well prepared for class and for team assignments

- Having a high level of camaraderie in the team
- Having efficient meetings
- Learning a lot about organizational behavior and how to manage a team
- Satisfying the professor and other student teams

2. Tally up the results of your ratings. Then discuss the ratings, negotiate, and agree upon a preliminary set of team goals.

TIPS

- Identify some smaller goals that you can accomplish in the short term. Examples might be finding a firm for the course project within two weeks or finding a set time and place to meet every week.
- More challenging goals may give you more direction and a greater sense of purpose but require more commitment by all members.
- Continually test people's ongoing commitment to goals, and level of agreement. As deadlines approach, and/or team norms settle, you may need to explicitly renegotiate.

BARRIERS

- Conflicting goals can be a major barrier to a team's progress.
- Teams struggle without a definition of goals.

(Don't assume that others will share goals. Getting an A and having fun may seem obvious to you, but to others they may not be worth the time or energy they demand. All goals need to be negotiable at the start.)

III. HOW CAN WE ORGANIZE OURSELVES TO MEET OUR GOALS?

DESCRIPTION

Once goals have been set, the team needs to organize itself to meet those goals. Teams will develop different levels of structure depending upon their tasks and make-ups. Very detailed and predictable work is better suited to high levels of structure than abstract and ambiguous work. Some people enjoy lots of structure- and clarity while others like the free and easy approach. Your team can be creative in the way in which it structures its activities:

There are three major aspects to organizing a team:

- ***Creating a work structure*** requires that the team move from the goals to the work that needs to be done to achieve those goals. For example, if a new product team wants to be very innovative, it has to spend time brainstorming, looking at what the competition is doing, and experimenting with new materials. A student team that must analyze an organization needs to contact the organization, develop interview questions, analyze its data, and write up a report. Once the work has been identified, the team decides how it will organize itself to do the work. One key issue is determining when members will work alone and when they will work in subgroups or as a whole. Also important are when work must be done, what approaches will be taken, and who will be responsible.

- ***Roles*** are specific activities that are taken on by particular individuals. While there are many different role typologies that are available, here we focus on the roles of facilitator, project manager, and boundary manager. The facilitator focuses on task and maintenance functions during meetings. Task functions help the team to do its work, while maintenance functions hold the team together so that members can continue to get along with one another and even have some fun. The project manager organizes the work plan and sees that it is implemented. The boundary manager determines how the team will deal with key stakeholders such as clients, other teams, and upper management. As a team comes to understand its task and members better, additional roles will.

- ***Norms*** refer to expectations of acceptable behavior. They are unwritten rules enforced by team members. Norms can cover all aspects of team behavior. Norms that seem to cause the most disruption to team behavior if they are not discussed include meeting norms, working norms, communication norms, leadership norms, and consideration norms.

SUGGESTIONS—WORK STRUCTURE

Follow these steps to help you manage your work:

1. List the goals that need to be accomplished.
2. List the major pieces of work that need to get done to meet the goals.
3. Work backwards from final deadlines to define the due dates by which each piece of work must be completed. Set milestones to measure progress.
4. Decide whether each piece of work will be done by an individual, a subgroup, or the entire team and then assign people to responsibilities.
5. Clarify which members have primary responsibility for the task versus those who will contribute to the effort.
6. Prepare and build in time for contingencies, problems, and emerging issues.

TIPS

- Ensure that each member buys into his or her responsibilities at outlined.
- Use a responsibility chart as part of your plan. Include who is responsible for which pieces of work by when.
- Distribute the plan and use it to measure progress.
- Use the plan as a picture of current agreements among members, and change it as circumstances warrant.
- Celebrate when milestones are reached and people have met deadlines.

BARRIERS

- Initial enthusiasm may lead to commitments that are not kept.
- Inadequate preparation can lead to a poorly written plan.
- A plan that is too structured can harm creativity.
- Changes in the plan may result in members resenting those who have not followed through on their commitments.

SUGGESTIONS—AGREEING UPON NORMS

Meet and discuss your team's norms. Include the following categories:

1. Meeting norms. Expectations include when, where, and how often to have meetings. What is expected of members with regard to attendance, timeliness, and preparation? Also, what is the balance between work and fun?
2. Working norms. Expectations involve standards, deadlines, how equally effort and work should be distributed, how work will be reviewed, and what to do if people do not follow through on commitments.
3. Communication norms. Expectations center on when communication should take place, who is responsible, how it should be done (phone, e-mail, etc.), and how to discuss feelings about the team or members.
4. Leadership norms. Expectations include whether a leader is needed, if leadership is rotated, responsibilities, and how to keep the leader from doing all the work.
5. Consideration norms. Expectations center on being considerate of members' comfort with things like smoking, swearing, etc., and their ability to change norms if they are uncomfortable with what is going on in the team.

TIPS

- Spend time discussing norms in order to agree upon a common approach.
- Keep norms simple and consistent (e.g., meeting every Friday at 1:00 p.m. is easier than picking a new time each week).

BARRIERS

- Subjects that are difficult to talk about often remain undiscussed.
- Members often shy away from responsibilities or team needs for leadership.

(The facilitator should push to see that all categories of team norms are discussed, especially when there are problems.)

IV. HOW WILL WE OPERATE?   'i^

DISCUSSION

One of the most interesting and exciting aspects of teams is the way their dynamics unfold. The interaction among team members is often unpredictable and different than anticipated when the team began. This interaction among team members is called team process. As team process unfolds it often reshapes the team's structure, which, in turn creates a new process. Thus, structure and process remain interrelated throughout the life of the team.

Team process includes communication, influence, task and maintenance functions decision making, atmosphere, and conflict resolution; that is, who talks to whom, how often, who is influencing decisions, how the team organizes itself, how conflict is handled, and what happens in and between meetings. While the previous section outlined the plans how the team will operate, team process focuses on the behaviors that actually take place among members. For example, while the plan may give responsibility for a certain activity to one member, influence on decisions may come entirely from another.

There are a number of tools that have been developed to help harness the of team process. Here we include *agenda setting, brainstorming, multivoting*, and tips on cross-cultural communication. Agenda setting helps to organize meetings and improve efficiency, brainstorming is a tool for generating a lot of creative ideas, and multivoting enhances the team's ability to reach consensus. Consensus means that there is a solution that is acceptable to all, not necessarily the top strategy or preference of any or all. It is achieved by negotiating key requirements among the parties so that everyone can "live with" the outcome. The suggestions for cross-cultural communication help communication among diverse team members.

SUGGESTIONS—PLANNING AN AGENDA

When planning an agenda:
1. Write down the major items that the team wishes to tackle.
2. Ensure that all team members have the opportunity to contribute.
3. Clarify what the team wants to accomplish for each item-discussion, brainstorming, making a decision, taking action, etc.
4. Prioritize items and allocate time to each.
5. Leave time at the end to discuss how the meeting went.

TIPS

- The first item on the agenda should be a "check-in," in which each person spends a minute or so telling other members what is currently on his or her mind. This activity legitimizes air time for everyone.
- Make the agenda available to members before the meeting.
- Assign a timekeeper to keep the team on track.
- Leave time to discuss the team process, not just the task.

BARRIERS

- An agenda that is too structured can stifle creativity and an open atmosphere.
- An agenda that is not followed can frustrate team members.

SUGGESTIONS - BRAINSTORMING

When brainstorming:

1. Clearly define the subject or problem to be discussed.
2. Give people time to think and write responses individually.
3. Invite everyone to call out their ideas (or go around the team).
4. Write down all ideas.

TIPS

- Don't evaluate. Something that sounds unrealistic or off the mark may spark a great new idea. (Beginning ideas aren't imperfect solutions, they are just beginning ideas.)
- Encourage creative and different thinking. (There are many creative tools available.)
- Encourage people to *hitchhike*, i.e., build on others' ideas.
- Some people take longer than others to form their ideas. Allow some silence to get everyone's ideas out.
- Do not stop too soon. Eventually people will come up with more ideas.

BARRIERS

- People are sometimes afraid that their beginning ideas will be "wrong" or sound stupid. (This is why it is essential to avoid evaluating too early and to set up an uninhibited atmosphere.)
- Once you have generated a number of ideas, their quantity and lack of realism may be overwhelming. (This is why it is equally essential to set up a non-threatening way to select and build on those ideas with the most promise for a new but workable solution.

SUGGESTIONS—MULTIVOTING

To multivote you should:
1. Brainstorm ideas.
2. Discuss what each idea means and how it will solve the problem at hand.
3. Have each person vote on the top four choices. You can split your votes any way you want to across the set.
4. Choose the three to five ideas that are the highest priorities.
5. Identify similarities and differences among ideas, then positive and negative aspects of each idea, then what is really important to each person.
6. Rework the top priorities as needed, and have each person vote on his or her top two priorities.

TIPS

- Sometimes ideas are similar and votes are split. Consolidate ideas so that strong support is not watered down.
- Try to be open to the ideas of others. You are trying to come to a team decision, not to win at all costs.

BARRIERS

- Some members will Find this method too structured.

SUGGESTIONS-COMMUNICATING CROSS-CULTURALLY

Members of cross-cultural teams generated this list of suggestions based on their experiences over several months together:

1. Recognize the different cultures and languages represented in the team.
2. Meet in areas with minimal noise and distraction.
3. Have adequate time for meetings.
4. Start meetings with a check-in, in which each member spends a minute or so telling other members what is on his or her mind. This exercise forces everyone to contribute equally at the start of the meeting.
5. Record main points on a chalkboard or similar display. Distribute meeting notes.
6. Check frequently to make sure all members are in agreement with what the
7. Get to know each other personally.
8. Assign pairs of buddies: one buddy from the host country and one from a foreign country.
9. Do not use slang or complex language.
10. Be aware that behavior is viewed differently in different countries. Check on what it means to interrupt, to resolve conflict, to discuss feelings, to disagree

Be patient! Remember, the relationship you build in this team is not just for now, can also bring great rewards in the future. Cross-cultural communication can demand a great deal of time and energy. Yet the relationships that are forged provide a network that bridges people, companies, and countries.