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Effective Teams

Key Learning Points

1. Discuss why teams work, and what to do when they do not.
2. Become aware of what other team members needs are.
3. Witness different team behaviors, and explain how to deal with them.
4. Utilize appropriate skills to ensure productive communication with your teammates and other people in your organization.

Team Members Must Be:

- Skilled at managing their time to carry out their day-to-day responsibilities and participate in team activities as well.
- Able to shift easily among various thought processes to make decisions and solve problems.
- Able to understand the decision-making process and communicate effectively to negotiate individual differences and make decisions.

Characteristics of Effective Teams

- Clear Purpose
- Informality
- Participation by All
- Listening

- Constructive Design
- Consensus Decisions
- Open Communication
- Clear Roles and Work Assignments
- Leadership
- External Relations
- Style Diversity
- Self-Assessment

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Stages of Team Growth

1. Forming:

When a team forms, its members typically start out by exploring the boundaries of acceptable group behavior.

As each member makes the transition from individual to team member, each looks to the team leader and facilitator for guidance as to his or her role and responsibilities. As team members review the goal statement, they need to agree on and take ownership of the problem they have been asked to solve. As they move on to analyze symptoms, they need to learn how best to take a collaborative approach to data collection and symptom analysis.

2. Storming

This is the most difficult stage for any team to work through. Teams typically arrive at this stage when members realize how much lies ahead and feel overwhelmed.

They want the project to move forward as it should, but they are not yet experts at team and improvement skills. They often cling to their own opinions, based on personal experience, and resist seeking the opinions of their teammates. This can lead to hurt feelings and unnecessary disputes. In addition, long-standing conflicts or disagreements may surface among different parts of the organization as team members begin to imply or even assign blame for the problem they are addressing. This tends to sap team energy and interfere with the team's progress.

As the team begins to formulate theories about cause, the members are likely to have different views and wonder about how their ideas will be received. Disciplined use of the improvement process and the proper tools and communication skills can assist team members in expressing their various theories, lower their anxiety levels, and reduce the urge to assign blame.

3. Norming

At this stage, team members are more willing to accept one another, their team roles, and the team's ground rules (or norms).

They are less competitive and more cooperative, so they have considerably fewer

conflicts.

This allows team members to use more energy on extensive data collection and analysis as they begin to test theories and identify root cause.

4. Performing

As the diagnostic journey continues, the team usually begins to work effectively and cohesively.

Most teams reach this point well before completing the diagnostic journey. During this stage, the team may still have its ups and downs, so occasionally feelings that surfaced during the storming stage may recur during team meetings.

Team Launch

- The Champion, stakeholders, and team are helped.
- Information will surface to enable everyone to better understand what is going on.
- The Champion, stakeholder, and team feel ownership of the problem and all improvements made to the problem.

Teamwork Success

To be successful, the team must make the following preparations:

- Get to know each other to complete the project goal
- Define preferred ways of working together
- Agree on team objectives
- Assign accountability to completing assignments
- Build a set of operating agreements
- Create open and positive team meetings

The Agreed Upon Charter is in Charge!

Launch With Clear Responsibilities

- What is the project being worked on?
- What are the requirements or boundaries?
- What is the reporting relationship to the Champion?
- What authority to act or decision making power does the team carry?
- Who does the team report to?
- What issues should be brought to the Champion?

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- What are the deliverables?
- What are the milestones?
- What are the timelines?
- How will the team be measured?

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Communication Skills to Deal with Team Behaviors

- **Listening:** Active listening, without interrupting, lets others know you are paying attention to what is being said and are genuinely interested. When gathering information, you cannot afford to miss any details that might help you solve the problem.
- **Questioning:** When asking questions, use your questions effectively. Knowing how to ask the right questions at the right time and of the right person will determine the quality of the information you obtain and affect the quality of your decisions, as well.
- **Clarifying and Confirming:** Questions that help team members respond more effectively.
- **Providing Feedback:** When you report back to your team with information or offer an idea or opinion, be sure to highlight the most important points clearly and specifically, and indicate their relevance to the problem. This helps to focus the team's attention and minimizes the likelihood of misunderstanding.

Normal People and Team Behaviors

Typically the following challenging behaviors may create barriers to effective team interactions:

No response

Sometimes during team meetings, members are unresponsive to questions and issues. The discussion may break down, leaving some issues unresolved.

Possible Causes

- The topic of discussion is technical or complex
- Team members may be tired, particularly if this occurs toward the end of a meeting
- One team member is so forceful or knowledgeable that others are reluctant to speak

Strategies

If the silence is making some uneasy, team leaders can:

- Summarize the main points of the discussion

- Invite specific reactions to the summary from one or more individuals who are not responding

Ask questions that are most likely to be answered, such as:

- Request individual opinions (“How would you find out about...?”)
- Ask questions covering an individual’s personal activities in the process (“When...happens, what do you do?”)
- Request specific information an individual is likely to have

Discuss the no-response situation, and ask what can be done

Irrelevant Issue

Some team members may raise issues which are not relevant to the issues under discussion. This can be counterproductive to the team members’ ability to work together and achieve their goal. When people keep raising irrelevant issues, the meeting gets off track and off schedule, and other team members become frustrated.

Possible Causes

- Team members may often raise irrelevant issues because they:
- Do not understand the purpose of the discussion
- Want to avoid a topic
- Have their own agenda
- Have personal needs that create an obstacle for them to work with the team

Strategies

When team members raise irrelevant issues, team leaders can:

- Restate the purpose of the discussion. Ask those raising irrelevant issues if they have something specific to add to the issue under discussion.
- Tactfully point out that the issue is not relevant at the moment but might be useful during another meeting or discussion, specifying when it would be helpful (if possible).
- Encourage team members who have something to contribute relevant to the topics of discussion.

Side Conversations

It is very common that team members may hold side conversations during a meeting. These conversations can be extremely disruptive to the team process if not brought under control.

Possible Causes

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Team members often engage in side conversations because they:

- Are verifying their understanding of the discussion topic
- Have little interest in the meeting discussion
- Are tired of maintaining focus on the meeting topic
- Feel their opinions are not widely accepted so they share them with nearby people

Strategies

To discourage side conversations, team leaders can:

- Continue to follow the agenda, and ignore the side conversations if they are brief and they are not hindering group discussion
- Ask those holding side discussions to share their comments with the entire group
Take a break to give people a chance to relax and talk in small groups if necessary
If necessary, restate the team guidelines

Quiet

Silence should not be viewed outright as unproductive behavior by various members who do not participate in team discussions. Silence is reasonable when a team member is in general agreement with what is being said, has no contribution to make, or needs to hear more before commenting. However, team members may be quiet for other reasons, and their silence may be detrimental to the teams efforts. It will be up to team members to encourage the participation of their quiet colleagues.

Possible Causes

Team members may remain silent because they:

- Do not understand the topic
- Are confused and want to avoid embarrassment
- Do not feel comfortable with others in the meeting
- Are intimidated by others' knowledge or authority

Strategies

To encourage quiet individuals to participate, team leaders can:

- Create opportunities for less talkative people by directly asking for their opinions or input
- Ensure that the seating arrangements of the room are conducive to informal and easy conversation

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- Summarize the major points of the discussion frequently to clarify understanding
Review the purpose of the discussion and what is expected of everyone, respond to changes in facial expressions of quiet members and use them as opportunities to say something like: “Chris, you looked as if you were about to offer a suggestion, or see the problem differently.”
- Suggest that all team members write down their responses, and then share them with the group

Overly Talkative

Overly talkative team members dominate the discussion and slow down the Six Sigma improvement process. Other team members cannot contribute their information, ideas, opinions, and expertise. Other team members may perceive their own contributions as not being important. Ultimately, the team’s creativity and effectiveness may suffer.

Possible Causes

The overly talkative team member may:

- Be seeking recognition or leadership and control
- Have a genuine enthusiasm and desire to be helpful
- Have knowledge of the subject that others lack
- Have an antagonism toward authority or a desire to test the leader
- Feel he/she is not being understood and thus over explain

Strategies

To handle the overly talkative individual, team leaders can:

- Paraphrase the ideas of the team member to close the discussion
- Ask the person to summarize so that he/she is forced to draw a conclusion
- Give their own reactions and invite all team members to respond
Break the team into smaller groups so that more people will have a chance to participate
- Give the person a time limit when he/she is presenting information to the team (also suggest that if the person needs more time, it might be better to highlight the major points orally and provide details in writing)

Fear of Rejection

Throughout the project, team members will exchange many ideas and consider many suggestions before they solve their quality problem. Very few suggestions will contain the entire solution. More likely it will take the best parts of many suggestions to solve the problem. Disagreements are expected, but outright

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rejection should be prevented. If members feel their suggestions will be ridiculed or dismissed, they may stop making any suggestions. The team should work to avoid this problem, and alleviate it when it occurs.

Possible Causes

Team members will reject suggestions when:

- Their personal, normal impulse is to brush aside, ignore, or disagree with anything that is being said
- They do not understand what has been said
- They are favorably biased toward a suggestion that has already been offered
- They have different ideas that they have not yet offered

Strategies

When one individual rejects a suggestion, team leaders can:

- Confirm that the individual rejecting the suggestion actually understood the original suggestion
- State their own appreciation for the person offering the original suggestion
- Ask the person rejecting the suggestion why he/she rejects it and have him/her be specific
- Ask the person rejecting the suggestion to offer a better suggestion
- Invite suggestions from other team members

Disagreement

A good meeting is an open exchange of ideas. As the team discusses and debates the ideas on the table, there may be conflict. In these situations, it is important to view the conflict as one of ideas rather than of people and feelings.

Possible Causes

Disagreement among team members may occur when:

- They are experiencing frustration or anger about the topic of discussion
- Their perspectives on the topic of discussion differ
- One person's ideas are rejected in favor of another's
- They have misunderstood information
- They have different information

Strategies

Confirm what has been said to ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of

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the topic of discussion

- Ask questions that require factual answers
- Refocus the discussion toward a more productive end by asking those in disagreement very specific questions
- The three strategies above are helpful because they start the individuals on the first steps of the negotiating process.

Senior Member

Often a project team is comprised of individuals who represent different levels of authority within the organization. The presence of the more senior members may inhibit other team members.

Possible Causes

Team members may feel inhibited by seniority when:

- Senior members share their views and ideas first.
- Some members always look to the senior members to see how they are reacting to an idea.

Strategies

When working with senior individuals, you should:

- Have other team members present ideas and suggestions before senior people do
- Have team members write down their ideas and then have one person read them all out (A specific form of this approach is Nominal Group Technique)

Consensus Decision Making

Definition: All team members have the opportunity to express disagreements and give input.

Not all team members need to say the decision is their preferred choice. Sufficient agreement is necessary so all members will support and implement the decision.

Listening and Active Listening Techniques

- Demonstrate feelings and thoughts of others
- Stating the understanding in your own words, i.e. paraphrasing
- Checking that paraphrasing is correct

Affirming

Affirming is making a verbal equivalent of a nod of the head. By making these comments, you encourage the speaker that you are listening and understanding

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what he/she says.

Examples Include: “Really, Uh-huh, I see..., Right, etc.,.”

Bridging

Bridging confirms that you have been listening by referring back to something said earlier and connecting the earlier reference to another topic.

Examples Include: “As you mentioned earlier..., I’d like to follow up on something you said earlier...”

Organizing

Organizing so that you are better prepared to listen may require that you eliminate distractions so that your focus is entirely on the speaker.

Confirming

Confirming to check understanding of someone’s thought or idea, does not necessarily mean agreement with what is being said. Confirming demonstrates that what was said was heard and that the contribution was valued.

Questioning

Ask questions to gather information needed to make decisions. You can use both open- and closed-ended questions. You can also ask to clarify and confirm.

Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions are broad and are best used when you want to solicit judgments, opinions, values, perceptions, ideas, and insights from the speaker. Some examples of open-ended questions include:

- What do you believe caused the problem?
- How would you handle this situation?
- Explain what happened when you changed the billing process.
- Why do you believe the team reacted in this way?
- In what way did your department change the sign-in procedure?

Closed-Ended Questions

The result of closed-ended questions is specific, factual information and data that confirm your understanding and eliminate opinions and perceptions.

The purpose of asking closed-ended questions is to:

- Restrict discussion to topics of the questioner’s choice
- Both to clarify and confirm understanding
- Find out specific, factual information

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- Eliminate opinions and focus on data

Closed-ended questions usually begin with:

- How often...
- How many...
- When...
- Where...
- Who...

Clarifying and Confirming Questions

Clarifying questions

- Ask a question about what was said
- Ask why the statement was said

When to use:

- Not enough information or confused
- Don't understand what's been said

Confirming questions

- State understanding in own words
- Check that understanding is correct

When to use:

- Ensure understanding of what's been said
- Resist the immediate reaction to reject, ignore, or disagree

Negotiating Differences

Differences often occur during a project when the team is trying to reach agreement and two or more individuals have differences that are difficult to resolve. These differences can create anger, frustration, or anxiety. When unresolved, they can have a negative impact on a team's effectiveness and motivation. When team members fear that they will either "win" or "lose," they are more likely to defend their positions than to explore ways to resolve their differences.

To maintain a productive working environment, members must be willing to "give and take," so they can preserve the commitment to complete their goal successfully.

To Negotiate Differences:

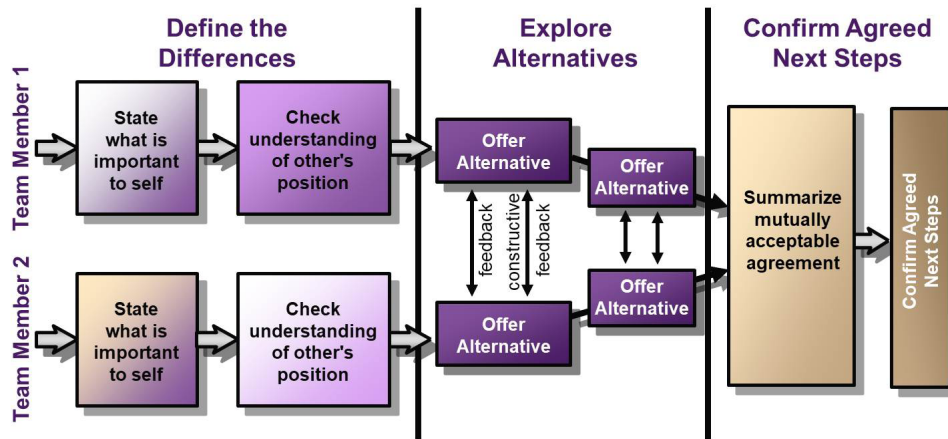
- Define the Difference

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- Explore Alternatives
- Confirm Agreed Next Steps

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Team Decision Making

The ability to make decisions is critical to the success of an improvement team because decisions are required frequently throughout the quality improvement process.

- Making Decisions
- Decisions by Consensus
- Reaching Consensus
 - Multivoting
 - Nominal Group Technique

Inputs

- Data on problem symptoms
- Theories about possible causes
- Data for testing theories
- Creative ideas on designing the remedy

Team Process

- Use tools to sort information and determine relevance
- Use communication tools of questioning, listening, and feedback

Outputs

- Data-driven decisions

- Consensus
- Decision by authority

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Meeting Guidelines

The team sets these guidelines—or ground rules—during the first meeting. Guidelines are important because they define how the team will work together throughout the project and what roles members will fulfill. Guidelines also provide each team member with a set of expectations by which to work. This can help prevent misunderstandings and disagreements over the long term.

Important topics include:

- Attendance: The project team meeting is key to a project's success, so it is important that every member attend sessions regularly. Identify what might be legitimate reasons for missing a meeting, and develop procedures members should use to inform the team leader when they are unable to attend.
- Promptness: To ensure that team members' time is used efficiently, each meeting should start and end as scheduled.
- Meeting Logistics: The team needs to identify a regular meeting time and place, as well as a procedure for notifying members of meetings.
- Assignments: When members are assigned responsibilities between meetings, it is expected that they complete such assignments on time.
- Interruptions: The team needs to decide when and how interruptions, such as phone calls and emergencies, will be handled.
- Courteous Communications: A team member should be able to speak freely and without interruptions. At the same time, no member should dominate the discussion with excessive speaking. While this book provides specific communications skills and techniques, it is important to address basic communications courtesies during the first team meeting.
- Impasses: In some instances, team members may not agree on something, e.g., how to interpret data or whether to proceed to the next step. To avoid unnecessary conflict and keep the project moving forward, team members need to establish guidelines that outline how they will work through such impasses. Typical guidelines include:
 - Always listen to everyone's view
 - Always allow the team to reach a decision—that is, do not block progress with continual objection
 - Actively support implementation of the final decision.
- Clarification: Every member of the team must have a good understanding of the problem. Often, the team will need to work with information that may be technical or new to some members. If an individual is

unclear about a topic being discussed during the meeting, it is his or her responsibility to ask for clarification and the responsibility of the remaining members to provide the clarification.

- Confidentiality: During the project, the team's discussions may focus on sensitive information. The team needs to establish a confidentiality code when handling such information to protect the integrity of the project and all involved. You may think of other guidelines for your team.
- Full Participation: All team members must be willing and able to take part in the work and discussion taking place.
- Consensus Decision Making:
 - All team members have the opportunity to express disagreements and give input.
 - Not all team members need to say the decision is their preferred choice.
 - Sufficient agreement is necessary so all members will support and implement the decision.

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