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Teams in the Workplace

How do I:

✓ Form a team and help it progress through developmental stages?

✓ Form or join a high-performance work team?

✓ Ensure that all members of a team contribute equally?

✓ Handle differences in values and work styles in a team setting?

✓ Allocate team roles and responsibilities?

✓ Motivate a team to achieve its objectives?

Jeremy was perplexed. He had been looking forward to what was the first class team project of his college experience. He had heard from his father how prevalent teams were in the workplace. As a student, he hadn't encountered teams in the classroom, just in sports. He had done virtually all of his schoolwork on his own, such as doing research, writing papers, and studying for exams. This class was going to be different.

At the outset of the class, everyone was put into small groups. Each group was given a project on which to work. Over the course of the semester, the group was supposed to evolve into what the instructor called a high-performance work team. But now, at the project's midpoint, Jeremy felt his group was anything but high performance. Things had started out great. Right away, Jeremy hit it off with his fellow teammates. While the team was diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, and major, most members had similar interests and got along well with each other. They had even gotten together socially a couple of times during the semester. At the beginning, the group was very task-oriented. They seemed to communicate well and were able to clarify their objective, determine their topic and research priorities, allocate roles and responsibilities, and set up a planning schedule working backwards from their end of the semester project due date.

After a few initial organizing meetings, the group members were left to work on their own. That's where the problems started occurring. In preparation for an interim project due date, Jeremy and his team had planned a team meeting the night before to combine everyone's work and produce the deliverable that the instructor expected the next day. To his horror, Jeremy discovered that only he and one other team member were ready. The others had procrastinated and thought they could "wing it." He was contemplating pulling an all-nighter to make up the others' work. "This project is going nowhere," he thought. "Why didn't I just do everything on my own? I could have done better working on my own. This team stuff isn't all it's cracked up to be."

1. What is the situation faced by Jeremy? What are the core issues here?

2. How did this situation develop? What could have been done to achieve a different outcome?

3. How would you feel if you were Jeremy? Has a similar situation happened to you?

4. What would you do if you were Jeremy?

5. What should Jeremy do?

"We are a pack animal. From earliest times we have used the strength of the group to overcome the weakness of the individual. And that applies as much to business as to sport."[1]

Tracey Edwards (Skippered the First Women's Crew to Circumnavigate the Globe)

From the popular CBS television show *Survivor* (premiered Summer 2000) to most of the *Fortune* 500 and many high-tech startup firms to competitive sports, teams are an everyday occurrence in our personal and work lives. As the nature of work progresses from individually based work to group settings, understanding teams and how to work in team settings has become a crucial interpersonal skill. Not everyone is convinced that teams are more effective than individuals working on their own. But the reality is that many companies are attempting to set up a team-based structure when tackling particular issues or processes, and the ability to work as a team is one of the most commonly required skills in the work environment.[2] While teams may not provide the best structure for all work tasks, teams are so common now that they warrant a complete chapter in this book.

This chapter covers the basics of teamwork. We define teams and detail their importance in business today. We discuss strategies for forming teams and tips for making teams effective and successful. We also include several exercises at the end of the chapter for you to assess and further enhance your team skills, as well as resources available for further exploration.

What Is Teamwork?

A team is a formal work group consisting of people who work together intensely to achieve a common group goal. The essence of teamwork is to create a product through a collective effort that exceeds the quality of any individual endeavor or the collective efforts of several individuals.[3] The word *team* is not synonymous with *group*. A **group** is a collection of people who may or may not be working collectively toward the same goal. A **team** is composed of three or more interdependent individuals who are consciously striving to work together to achieve a common objective, which in business tends to encompass improvements in products, services, or processes. A group becomes a team when members demonstrate a commitment to each other and to the end goal toward which they are working. In a team, there is a higher degree of cohesiveness and accomplishment than in a group.[4]

From earliest times, human beings have used teams or groups to overcome the weaknesses of individuals. Collections of nomads in search of food and land, kingdoms composed of villagers and their leaders, native settlements, wagon trains and pioneers, the crews of ships—all were formed with the idea that more could be accomplished together than by an individual.[5] Even Adam and Eve decided to band together, as did the quasi-"alliance" on the CBS television show *Survivor*. Aside from gains in sheer horsepower, as in the case of a ship's crew, teams exist because few individuals possess all the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to accomplish all tasks. Simply put, two heads are often better than one.

Within many professional sports teams, we can find shining examples of teamwork. Michael Jordan, one of the world's greatest basketball players and author of the book, "I Can't Accept Not Trying," writes, "One thing I believe to the fullest is that if you think and achieve as a team, the individual accolades will take care of themselves. Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships." He says he never forgot that he was only one-fifth of the effort at any time.[6] Staying with sports for a moment, consider the differences between a gymnastics team and a football team. In gymnastics, the members of a team may work together, but the ultimate achievement of a team is based on the collective efforts of the individual gymnasts. A winning team has the highest combined score. In football, by contrast, a great quarterback is nothing without a great wide receiver, tight end, or offensive line that can keep him from getting sacked. A football team wins when all members work interdependently toward the same goal—passing and rushing their way toward touchdowns.

Returning to the workplace, it is estimated that between 70 and 82 percent of U.S. companies use the team concept, making teamwork skills one of the most commonly required skills in the work environment.[7] Many businesses are adopting a collaborative management approach that encourages the sharing of ideas and strategies throughout the organization. This collaboration provides many benefits to the organization as well as to the individuals who make up the teams.[8]

Why Teams?

Teaming is more than a phase or a buzzword. If it didn't work, organizations would abandon this strategy or mechanism for getting work done. There is much evidence that teams can be effective, especially when tasks are complex and task interdependence is high. It is not always appropriate, of course, for work to be done in teams. But when a team structure is employed, and those teams work effectively, many benefits accrue to the organization and to the team members themselves.

Benefits of Teams

- Increased creativity, problem solving, and innovation.
- Higher quality decisions.
- Improved processes.
- Global competitiveness.
- Increased quality.
- Improved communication.
- Reduced turnover and absenteeism and increased employee morale.

■ Increased creativity, problem solving, and innovation: Bringing together a group of individuals who possess a wealth of ideas, perspectives, knowledge, and skills can result in a synergy through which new ideas can be entertained. We each have a unique set of skills. Working with others allows us to combine our skills and talents with those of others to create new approaches to solving problems.[9] An example is a team of marketers where each person applies his or her strengths to the issue at hand. One person who is very creative can lead the process of coming up with ideas; another who is detail-oriented can do the initial research; a third person who is skilled in graphic applications can put together a great sales presentation.

■ Higher quality decisions: Teamwork enhances the quality of the outcomes. Teamwork involves the collective effort of a group of people who represent diverse backgrounds and experiences. As more ideas are produced and alternatives are considered, the team gets closer to optimal decisions—decisions that are stronger because they have been made with various perspectives and interests in mind.

■ Improved processes: Teamwork results in a systematic approach to problem solving. Because of the necessary coordination between and transfer of learning among team members, teamwork results in organized approaches to the situation at hand. For example, a team is more likely than an individual to set up project checkpoints and

planning systems to enable all team members to contribute to the project as it unfolds. Teamwork also permits for distribution of workloads for faster and more efficient handling of large tasks or problems.[10] When members representing different organizations work together to improve a process that cuts across multiple organizational functions, more glitches and interdependencies will be uncovered and addressed than would be if individuals working independently were to tackle this project.

■ Global competitiveness: Teamwork enables companies to compete globally. Firms in the United States are relying increasingly on diverse teams to compete in the global economy.[11] Diverse teams have skill sets and perspectives that are superior to what a single individual can bring to the table. For example, back in the 1980s when Clairol marketed its popular Mist Stick in parts of Germany, it flopped. Had the Clairol marketing team included someone of German origin, they could have informed the group that mist was a slang word for "manure." As we continue developing and marketing our products in a global marketplace, combining diverse perspectives is essential.

■ Increased quality: Studies show that those large, complex, global companies that have moved to teams show increases in productivity, employee ownership of and accountability for their work, timeliness, efficiency, and customer service.[12] This results in higher quality standards than are possible when individuals or groups of individuals, who lack a common goal, are doing the work.

■ Improved communication: The use of teams in the workplace enhances employee communication. In a traditional, hierarchical organization, communication tends to flow primarily in one direction—downward. In a team-based organization, communication flows laterally, upward, downward, and even outside the organization's boundaries (e.g., customers and suppliers). Teamwork requires collective action that is grounded in words and actions. It's not sufficient for one person to determine how he or she wants to work. Each person must get others on board before proceeding. In effective teams, there is rich sharing of information and ideas that improves communication within the team and between the team and the organization.[13]

■ Reduced turnover and absenteeism and increased employee morale: Teamwork results in changes in employee behaviors and attitudes. Teamwork fosters a camaraderie that helps many employees to feel more a part of the organization than when working independently. They feel ownership to the problems on which they work, get immediate feedback from teammates, see the fruits of their labors, and feel they have an impact on their job and the organization. Compared with the alienation often experienced by employees in traditional firms, employees in team-based organizations are happier, more committed, and more loyal to their organization.

The chart below contains examples of the positive outcomes that resulted when organizations embraced and encouraged team-based work:

Examples of Successes by Self-managed Teams[14]

Organization	Reported Successes
Harley-Davidson	Returned to profitability in six years.
Hallmark	Two hundred percent reduction in design time. Introducing 23,000 new card lines each year.
Liberty Mutual	Fifty percent reduction in contract process time. Saving of more than $50 million per year.
Johns Hopkins Hospital	Patient volume increased by 21 percent. Turnover reduced, absenteeism reduced by 20 percent.
Monsanto	Quality and productivity improved by 47 percent in 4 years.
Saab and Volvo	Four percent increase in production output. Inventory turnover increased from 9 to 21 times a year.

Potential Limitations of Teams

While this chapter focuses primarily on the effectiveness of teams and how-tos for being a productive team member, there are some concerns about teams and their ability to make the most effective decisions. Some of these concerns are expressed briefly below.

Limitations of Teams

■ Group think. **Group think**—or individuals agreeing reluctantly with a group's decision—is a potential problem for teams. Group think can happen when a decision is made in a hurry, when one or a few members are extremely dominant in a group setting, or when one or more members present believe they haven't had a chance to air their concerns before an action is taken.

■ **Social loafing.** By definition a team is a collection of three or more people. Invariably, a team will be composed of members with different work ethics and work styles, and this can result in some individuals doing more work than others.

■ Quality concerns. Ironically, although there is much evidence that teams produce quality outcomes, the fact is that some individuals have the expert knowledge necessary to be able to make decisions independently without the benefit of a team.

■ Timeliness. Individuals can make decisions more quickly than teams, especially if gaining buy-in from others is not an essential component of the action under consideration.

■ Diversity. In general, diversity of background and thought process is a good way to ensure that multiple perspectives will be incorporated into a particular decision. Sometimes, especially when expedience is desired or when management has a clear preference for a particular course of action, a homogenous group can make decisions more quickly and easily than can a more diverse group.

Organizing work into teams is the wave of the future. But like any new phenomenon, it is important to understand that teams have both upsides and downsides. Teams may not be optimal for every business situation. But when you are placed in a team, be aware of the potential problems and develop strategies early on that can overcome these concerns.

Types of Teams

In the same way sports teams differ in function, makeup, and ultimate goal or purpose, so do teams in the workplace. Based on the purpose or goal of the team, organizations may choose among several options by which to structure teams: cross-functional, self-managed, task force, process improvement.

The more commonly used team types are:

Cross-functional teams: These include members from various departments or business specialties such as marketing, information systems, communications, public relations, operations, human resources, accounting, finance, planning, research and development, and legal. Cross-functional teams are usually charged with developing new products or investigating and improving a companywide problem such as the need to increase speed and efficiency across departmental lines or the need to adopt a new companywide computer system. Cross-functional teams derive their strength from diversity. By including representatives from all or most of an organization's primary functional areas, the team can diagnose a problem from multiple perspectives simultaneously, ensuring that all relevant points of view are taken into account. This can speed up the problem-solving process and result in an outcome that is more readily accepted by the various departments that are affected by the change.

Case in point: Prior to producing their LH line of cars, Chrysler followed what most would call a serial design process. Engineering would design a car and throw it over the wall to manufacturing. "We can't build this," manufacturing replied, and sent it back over

the wall to engineering. This would continue for months or years until marketing was charged with marketing a car that no one wanted. From product inception to market, this process could take as long as six years or more. By that time, technologies were obsolete and other companies easily stole market share. Realizing this, Chrysler moved to a simultaneous, cross-functional team-based design process. Everyone who had a stake in or was affected by the design of a new product was on a team that hashed it out—together. This included people from marketing, sales, engineering, design, and many others. These meetings had conflict, but the conflict was actually helpful. Chrysler was able to reduce the cycle time from over six years to less than 18 months!

Another example of a cross-functional team is a top management team. In many large organizations, the CEO typically makes strategic decisions in collaboration with the leaders of the major functional areas. Even at this level in the organization, top management recognizes their individual strengths and weaknesses and the value that diverse perspectives can add when making key organizational decisions.

Self-managed teams: These are "groups of employees who are responsible for a complete, self-contained package of responsibilities that relate either to a final product or an ongoing process."[15] Also known as self-directed, self-maintained, or self-regulating, self-managed teams are typically given a charge by senior management and then are given virtually complete discretion over how, when, and what to do to attain their objective. Self-managed teams are expected to coordinate their work without ongoing direction from a supervisor or manager. Self-managed teams set their own norms, make their own planning schedules, set up ways to keep relevant members and others informed of their progress, determine how the work is going to be accomplished, and are held accountable for their end product or "deliverable." Many of these teams are responsible for hiring, training, and firing team members. The flattening of organizational structures, resulting in less hierarchy and fewer managers, makes self-directed teams a popular concept in business today. Of course, it's not as if management flips a switch and a team becomes self-managing. It's a long process of team building and teamwork combined with sufficiently greater responsibility and accountability gained through the team's demonstrated capabilities and performance.

Task force: This is an ad hoc, temporary project team assembled to develop a product, service, or system or to solve a specific problem or set of problems. Companies are always faced with the challenge of getting ongoing, day-to-day work done while utilizing available resources to work on various change processes or product innovations. For example, a technology company might designate a group to study the next wave in software development while others are maintaining and servicing existing software programs. Often task force members are individuals who have demonstrated interest or skill in the area being examined by the task force, so the members are enthusiastic about the project and its potential. The task force process is very common in business today. It is lower in cost than hiring an outside consultant or group of contract workers and allows for management to allocate resources at will to various projects as the needs of the company and the interests of its employees change.

Process improvement teams: These teams focus on specific methods, operations, or procedures and are assembled with the specific goal of enhancing the particular component being studied. Process improvement teams are typically composed of individuals with expertise and experience in the process being reviewed. They are assigned the tasks of eliminating redundant steps, looking for ways to reduce costs, identifying ways to improve quality, or finding means for providing quicker, better customer service.[16] Process improvement teams are often given training on problem-solving tools and techniques to help them map processes, identify root causes of problems, and prioritize potential solutions.

To analyze a system and make recommendations for changes, process improvement team members diagnose the current state of a process and chart how it occurs step by step. They review customer or internal data and collect data from other sources such as managers, competitors, and others as needed. They identify ways the process can be enhanced, make their recommendations, and sometimes assist the operating units

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involved in implementing the changes. Process improvement teams are usually temporary and disband once the process being studied has been changed to the satisfaction of management.

Team Developmental Stages

Groups typically pass through a series of stages as they grow and evolve into teams. Theorists postulate that a team goes through five stages in its life cycle:[17] forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning. Each phase has distinguishing characteristics and presents particular challenges to team members and their managers.

Stage One—Forming

In this stage, a team is established to accomplish a particular task. Typically the group members will not know each other, and even if they do, there is a feeling of uncertainty and tentativeness because people haven't had a chance yet to get to know one another and set group objectives.[18] In the **forming** stage, members will engage in behaviors such as defining the initial assignment, discussing how to divvy up the necessary tasks, understanding the broad scope and objectives of the project, and learning about the resources (time, equipment, personnel) available to the team as it works to complete the project. In this stage, there is some testing by members of leadership roles, some discovery of personality similarities and differences, some initial disclosure, and usually relatively little progress on the task.

As a team member or team leader, your role in stage one is to encourage the group to establish its mission and purpose, set up a work schedule, get to know one another, and establish some initial norms for working together.

Stage Two—Storming

In this stage, a group experiences differences over factors such as direction, leadership, work style and approach, and perceptions about the expected quality and state of the end product or deliverable. As is true of any relationship, conflict is inevitable. Many couples feel bad when they experience their first fight, and teams are no exception. When the first conflict among group members emerges, some or all of the members begin to feel less enthusiastic about the group and might even doubt the group can come together and achieve its objective. There may be struggles over leadership ("my way is best"), power ("if you don't agree we'll leave you behind") and roles ("who appointed you chief?"). In the **storming** stage, feelings emerge such as resistance to the task or approach being taken by the group, resentment about differences in workload, anger about roles and responsibilities, and changes in attitude about the group or toward individual group members and concerns. Typically in the storming stage, the group is in conflict and chaos, as the group has not yet established ways to communicate about these differences. During this stage, few if any processes and procedures are in place, as the need for them wasn't anticipated due to the lack of prior conflict. All of this can result in arguing among members, emergence of subgroups, and disunity. If and when a group on which you are serving enters this stage, what can you do?

In the storming stage, your role as a group member or leader is to refrain from taking sides. Encourage the group to develop communication channels. Help your group members to focus on the task and not on personal differences. Promote an environment of open communication to ensure that the inevitable conflict is healthy and results in improved communication and commitment to the group's task. Remember that an appropriate level of tension motivates a team, but too much or too little can affect productivity.[19] If your group cannot resolve or work effectively with conflict, request the assistance of a trained process consultant or facilitator. A group that can't resolve this conflict may never achieve its deliverable.

Stage Three—Norming

In this stage, the group faces its issues, conflicts, and power and leadership struggles openly and directly. The members establish and adhere to patterns of acceptable behavior and learn to incorporate new methods and procedures into their working together. In the **norming** stage, members feel a new ability to express constructive criticism; they feel part of a working team and a sense of relief that everything will work out.[20] In this stage, members attempt to achieve harmony by avoiding unnecessary conflict, acting more

friendly toward and trusting of each other, and developing a sense of team unity ("together, we can solve this").

As a team member or leader, your role is to encourage team members to take on more responsibility, work together to create means acceptable for solving problems, set challenging goals, and take personal responsibility for team success. As a leader, you set the tone. Don't expect others to "do as you say, but not as you do." If you are seen bickering with colleagues and secretly plotting political moves, team members are less likely to emulate the helpful norming behaviors and may regress to the storming stage.

Stage Four—Performing

In the **performing** stage, teams have worked through their differences. Their membership is stable, the task is clear, and eyes are on the prize. Team members are highly motivated to accomplish their task and focused on team objectives rather than individual interests. Through working closely together, team members have developed insights into each other's strengths and weaknesses (many even finish each other's sentences), feel satisfied with the team's progress, and believe the team will successfully reach or even exceed its goals. In this stage, members engage in constructive self-change for the good of the group; experience greatly enhanced ability to communicate with and give feedback to each other; are able to anticipate, prevent, or work through group problems; and, as a result, develop a close attachment to the team.[21]

As a team member or leader, your role at this stage is to encourage members to provide support to and serve as resources for each other. Make sure the team continues with its progress and maintains its cohesion and morale, and guide it toward success. Do remain vigilant, however. It's easy to kick back and relax, believing that once a team gets to this phase of development, it stays there. That may or may not be true. Changes in membership, scope of the task, or broader organizational changes can cause a team to regress developmentally. In addition, the close attachments members have to a team could possibly blind them to other developing problems.

Stage Five—Adjourning

After successfully completing the task or objective, teams may disband permanently or take a temporary break. Some may get new members or receive a new objective. This stage is usually brought on by an imminent deadline. At the **adjourning** stage, members are likely to feel disappointment—if the experience was positive—or gratitude—if the experience was negative! The task at this stage is to tie up loose ends and complete final follow-up on projects.

As a team member or leader, your role at this end stage is to encourage the team members to debrief the project, discussing the lessons learned that members can take with them to new projects and convey to new teams tackling similar issues. It is also helpful at this stage to recognize the team for its efforts. This could take the form of public recognition (a blurb on the team's accomplishments in the monthly newsletter), a reward (some organizations reward teams with a percentage of the savings or revenues realized as a result of the team's work), or other benefit (use company funds to take the team out for lunch). By providing encouragement and recognizing accomplishments, hard work, and efforts, you help to continue momentum and build motivation.[22] Of course, ongoing work project teams may not physically adjourn. They may remain intact, continuing with a new set of objectives once a particular project is complete. In this case, rather than adjourning, the team members may choose to debrief at certain checkpoints along the way, evaluating their processes and communication efforts to ensure they're keeping current and are as productive as they can be.

It is healthy for groups to move through each of these stages as they evolve into a team. Not all groups go through all the stages, and some go through them at different paces. For example, if a group's members knew each other previously and had similar values and goals—as well as a tight deadline—they might be able to move almost immediately to the norming stage. In another case, where the group members don't know each other well and they have some time before the deliverable is due, they might take longer to reach the norming phase and coalesce as a real team just before the deliverable is due. Some may get stuck in one of the stages and disband before progressing to the

next stage or perform at a lower level than what might have been possible. A group stuck in the storming stage but facing an imminent deadline has to continue performing. In this case, it is likely that its performance will suffer due to the inability to function cohesively. In some extreme cases, a group will be dysfunctional and will require outside intervention in order to complete their task. As is true with relationships, teams have developmental cycles. Understanding this ahead of time can help you to develop strategies for helping your group evolve into a team and to increase its effectiveness every step of the way.

Characteristics of High-Performance Teams

As former Notre Dame coach Lou Holtz said, "Winning is never accidental. To win consistently you must have a clear plan and intense motivation." As we have said, not all teams are alike. As a team member or leader, your primary goal is to encourage your group to evolve into a motivated, goal-oriented, successful team; we refer to these types of teams as high-performance teams. In **high-performance teams,** there is a commitment to quality and a dedication to producing the best outcome possible. Research shows that most high-performance work teams possess the following characteristics:[23]

■ Common purpose and goals: High-performing teams have a clearly defined mission, purpose, and goals. Individual team members understand why the team has been formed and what is expected from the team.[24]

■ Clear roles: High-performing teams have clarity about roles and responsibilities. Team members understand their roles and assignments and how they impact the group, have clear and stable boundaries, awareness of task interdependence and how their work affects other members, and the direction that is needed to get there.[25]

■ Communication processes: High-performing teams have extensive communication mechanisms. They communicate regularly with each other either in person, via telephone, or through e-mail and keep those unable to attend meetings informed of the group's progress. They constantly update their planning calendar and communicate about adjustments, as they are needed.[26]

■ Accepting and supportive leadership: Studies have found that team leaders, who function more as coaches than managers, facilitate the development of participative, motivated teams.[27] These leaders were proactive, committed to the team, and provided encouraging, positive influence over the team and its members. Whereas a manager pulls a group along, a coach gently pushes it from behind; a manager works to maintain control, and a coach works to give up control.[28]

■ Small size: The size of the team can be essential to a team's success. The optimal size is between 6 and 10. This is large enough to accomplish the work and provide enough human resources and ideas, and small enough for a team to coalesce and reach consensus on major issues.[29]

■ High levels of technical and interpersonal skills: High-performing teams are composed of members who have a breadth of both specialty and people skills. Understanding how to work with and through others, problem solving, managing project work flow, giving and receiving feedback, goal setting, time management, and conflict management are some of the most valuable skills in team settings.[30]

■ Open relationships and trust: In high-performing teams, the members develop cooperative behaviors including understanding what is needed from one another; defining the interrelated activities necessary to complete the project; volunteering to assist each other in doing what's needed; and completing assigned tasks competently, on time, accurately, and with quality. Trust is built through behaviors such as being dependable, doing what is agreed upon, being kept informed and informing others of necessary facts and information, keeping confidential information private, and allowing others to use their specialized knowledge and abilities.[31]

■ Accountability: High-performance team members understand for what (and to what degree) they and others are held accountable. The team receives the message from the organization that performance matters—that it makes a difference whether goals are achieved or not. Expectations are clarified, and members are held responsible as individuals (quality standards) as well as mutually responsible as members of the team (team's performance on the deliverable or task).[32]

■ Reward structures: High-performing teams are rewarded for team accomplishments in addition to individual recognition. Organizations that support the team concept organize their recruiting, training, development, sales, business development, strategic planning, compensation, performance appraisal, and promotion strategies so that teamwork is supported and rewarded.[33] When these strategies don't match with or undermine team processes or philosophies, the organization sends a mixed message and members find ways to game the system—often at the expense of their team. If an individual team member who "saves the day" for the department is rewarded for individual behavior, it sends the message that collaboration is not as valued as individual contributions or heroics, even if management's rhetoric suggests teams are truly valued.

Tips for Effective Teams

As a member of a team, it is important to be self-directed and work for the betterment of your team. You and your team members will be working with minimal supervision, and it is everyone's responsibility to make the team work. As athletes have learned, if one team member doesn't come through, this affects the quality and performance of the entire team. Teamwork requires full dedication and participation by all members of the team.

The following tips can help make your next team experience more positive and successful.

■ Be focused. Cooperate with your team members in concentrating on the current issues being faced by the team. Cooperation builds trust and mutual respect. Be willing and dedicated to working towards the common purpose.

■ Handle conflict directly and be willing to compromise. Be willing to explore conflict in a constructive, win–win fashion. Stand up for things that are important to you, but don't insist on getting your way in every discussion. When working together, put personalities aside and confront issues that arise. Resolve conflicts and walk away from sessions with regard, respect, and esteem for yourself and your team members.[34]

■ Focus on both process and content. Pay attention to the *process* of becoming and working together as a team as well as the *result* or end goal that is expected from the team. Teamwork is more than producing a deliverable. It also entails the approach or process used when people are working together.[35] The ends don't necessarily justify the means if team members despise and lack respect for team members because of the way decisions and outcomes were rammed through as opposed to using a consensus approach. At team meetings, review both the processes being used as well as the status of the project.

■ Actively participate, and encourage others to do the same. At the beginning of a project, talk about roles and responsibilities. Also talk frankly about team members' schedules and their availability to participate fully in the project. Set up checkpoints to ensure that all are contributing equally.

■ Keep sensitive issues private. At the beginning of a project, discuss the importance of confidentiality. All teams engage in discussions that could be hurtful if made public. Have a pact that private information and views shared will be just that—not relayed to others outside of the group. "What's said in the room, stays in the room."

■ Communicate openly and positively. In order to have full team participation, and for the team to learn and develop, it is essential that team members do not embarrass, reject, mock, or punish someone for speaking up and sharing ideas and perceptions. Foster a climate of psychological safety in order to motivate members to participate, admit errors, and share ideas and beliefs openly and comfortably.[36]

■ Take time to establish operating guidelines and clarify expectations. Make sure everyone is present for initial discussions of roles, responsibilities, and operating guidelines. For these guidelines to work, it is best that everyone participate in establishing and agreeing to uphold these guidelines. Put them in writing and have everyone sign them.

■ Monitor what's going on with the team. Watch for reactions, nonverbal cues, level of participation (or lack thereof), and general changes in the group's dynamics. Develop

observational skills to help the team reach its full potential. A side benefit of doing this is that you increase your own interpersonal skills as you try to set a tone that is conducive to all members enjoying and participating in the team experience.[37]

■ Practice giving (and receiving) effective feedback. Express support and acceptance by praising and seeking other members' ideas and conclusions. If you disagree with others' viewpoints, criticize ideas but not the people. Be specific about the ideas that concern you and accept others' concerns about your ideas.

■ Work with underperformers to keep them in the flow of the project and prevent them from becoming excluded from the group.[38] If slackers are an issue in your team, talk with them immediately, preferably one on one. Find out if there is a personal problem preventing the member from being more engaged. Offer to be supportive but don't carry the workload. Give that team member specific, manageable tasks and hold him or her accountable. If the underperformance continues, talk with your manager or instructor. The person may need to be removed from the group or reassigned to a different team.

■ Energize the team when motivation is low by suggesting new ideas, through humor or use of enthusiasm. Encourage a time-out, if one is needed, or suggest a work or coffee break.

■ Be reliable and conscientious. Respect other members by honoring deadlines, commitments, and project milestones.[39] If you are having difficulty making a deadline, don't wait until the last minute—discuss this immediately with a team member or with the team. There might be a different way of approaching the problem. It's easier for a team to be flexible when there is adequate time to review the situation and come up with a different plan.

■ When needed, give direction to the team's work by stating and restating the purpose of assignments, setting or calling attention to time limits, and offering procedures on how to most effectively complete the assignment.

■ Be supportive of your team members. Always ask how you can help. It's a great way to remind everyone you're a team with collective objectives, not a group of individual contributors competing against each other.

Why Teams Fail

A note of caution: for teams and teamwork to succeed, there must be ample time in which to complete an assignment. Also needed are adequate resources to achieve the stated objectives and full management support of the team's effort. While the concept of teamwork is prevalent in both work and nonwork settings, not all situations warrant or are conducive to teams. Teams may be faced with tight deadlines; merging of processes and responsibilities; technological challenges; mismatched skills and abilities; unresolvable personality clashes, styles, and behaviors; limited work or teaming experience; or power struggles. In these situations, or in cases where there is no interdependence or need for collaboration, teamwork is going to be difficult if not impossible. These issues should be addressed early so that modifications can be made if necessary.

For example, if a team lacks the proper skill sets, additional members or training sessions can be added. If a power struggle is unfolding, a facilitator can be appointed. Inexperienced team members can be assigned informal mentors or coaches. Sometimes, if it's in the best interests of an organization, a team can be disbanded altogether. Perhaps the mission wasn't clearly defined at the outset of a project and the team members find they are unable to devote the time necessary to do the job. Or perhaps management requested individuals to work on a team project but made no allowances for mandatory day-to-day tasks. In situations such as these, it's appropriate for the team to be reconfigured (or disbanded) so that the original objective can be attained through either a different team or a different approach. Oftentimes, teams ignore early problems—perhaps believing such problems can be overcome—and become dysfunctional.[40] Intervening

early, in a proactive way, can turn a team around or cause the organization to consider other, non-team-based approaches to solving a problem.

How can you deal with team members who aren't performing? Following are some tips.

Dealing with Problem Team Members

■ **Absentee member:** A member can become distracted by a work or personal problem that prevents him or her from following through on commitments made to the team. In this case, the best strategy is to be direct immediately. Discuss the situation with the team member in a way in which the person does not feel he or she is being put on the defensive. Explain the problem and find out the team member's perception of the situation. Ask specifically if the team member still has the time necessary for the team. If not, part ways if possible. If this is not possible, determine a way for the team member to make contributions outside of the normal meeting times and make the person accountable for a specific segment of the work that limits reliance on the team.

■ **Social loafer:** As mentioned earlier, it is not uncommon for one or more persons on a team to be able to "hide" the fact they're not contributing. This typically happens when the team members' work ethics differ and one or more team members "step up to the plate" and take on additional responsibility to ensure the work gets done, effectively covering for the less productive team members. Work standards will always vary from person to person. A strategy for dealing with this is to raise the issue at the onset of the project. Divide the responsibilities and set up checkpoints to ensure each member is contributing roughly equally. If a discrepancy appears, try to quantify it and reallocate the workload so all members are contributing roughly equally.

■ **Procrastinator:** We're all human, and a seemingly human tendency is to "put off until tomorrow what we should be working on today." This is particularly problematic for work teams. Teams are composed of individuals with different work schedules and work styles. Some people thrive on the pressure of imminent deadlines while others find waiting until the last minute to be overly stressful. In this situation it is best to do two things: (a) set up interim checkpoints, or minideadlines, to ensure the work progresses at a reasonable pace, and (b) be realistic when work schedules are drawn up and deadlines determined. Prior to establishing deadlines, ask all team members to check personal and work calendars to catch any problems before they occur. At each meeting reclarify the commitments that might affect a person's inability to adhere to a deadline set earlier. And build in some slack: Set the final deadline for a few days before the *actual* deadline—just in case!

Teams may not be a cure for all that ails an organization. But, teams can be very effective if the team structure makes sense and members practice the suggestions outlined in the chapter. Other steps team members and their managers can take to improve the likelihood of team success are summarized in the chart below:

Tips for Managing for Outstanding Results

■ Care about the people you work with—understand them, know what's important to them, and be able to motivate them.

■ Don't worry about who gets the credit—emphasize team effort and rewards; use the "whatever is best for the team" approach.

■ Respect individual differences—accept individuals and work to emphasize strengths and minimize weaknesses.

■ Subordinate yourself to a higher purpose—keep the common goal in the forefront.

■ Know yourself—be aware of your strengths and admit your weaknesses; surround yourself with people who can compensate for your weaknesses.

■ Don't be afraid to follow—some of the best teams are those where the leader doesn't call all the shots.

Source: Stephen Covey, "Team Up for a Superstar Office," *USA Weekend,* Sept. 4–6, 1998, p. 10.

Summary

Workplaces in the United States and abroad have embraced teaming. This is no accident. Organizations that implemented work teams as a way to improve products, services, and processes have witnessed tremendous measurable benefits. Some of these benefits accrue because of synergies—the notion that teams produce more and better solutions than individuals—gained from the combining of various skill sets, perspectives, abilities, and workstyles on a single team. Not all teams produce phenomenal outcomes. By understanding the normal phases of group development and ways to gain and maintain group productivity and motivation, you can help your teams reach their full potential.

Key Terms and Concepts

Adjourning	Performing
Cross-functional teams	Process improvement team
Forming	Self-managed team
Group	Social loafing
Group think	Storming
High-performance team	Task force
Norming	Team

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Exercise 15–A
Assessing Yourself

Circle the response that most closely correlates with each item below.

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
1. When working on a team project, I first attempt to define the objective and scope of the project.	1 2 3 4 5		
2. I encourage my team to clarify its mission and purpose and assess the resources that will be necessary to complete the task.	1 2 3 4 5		
3. I try not to take sides in conflicts between team members.	1 2 3 4 5		
4. I encourage team members who are in conflict with each other to communicate openly and directly.	1 2 3 4 5		
5. I help team members to focus on the task at hand and not on personal differences.	1 2 3 4 5		
6. I encourage team members to take personal responsibility for the team's success.	1 2 3 4 5		
7. I encourage team members to debrief a project once it's completed.	1 2 3 4 5		
8. I encourage team members to provide support to and serve as resources for each other.	1 2 3 4 5		
9. I consciously make an effort to become aware of my own and my team members' strengths and weaknesses.	1 2 3 4 5		
10. I encourage groups of which I'm a part to evolve into high-performance teams.	1 2 3 4 5		

		Agree		**Neither**		**Disagree**
11.	I am committed to the best, highest quality product possible in any team effort of which I'm a part.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	When I'm in a position to lead a team, I assume the role of coach or facilitator rather than director.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I encourage open communication and trust building when I am in team situations.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I regularly provide support, recognition, and positive feedback to team members.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I consciously do things to build team morale.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	I cooperate with team members and concentrate with them on the current issues being faced by the team.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	In teams, I stand up for things that are important to me but don't insist on getting my way in every discussion.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	In teams, I pay attention to both the process of working as a team and the content or end goal that's expected from the team.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	I actively participate in the work of the team and encourage others to do so.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	I encourage the team to talk frankly about team members' schedules and set up checkpoints to ensure that all are contributing equally.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	I keep sensitive information and information shared in confidence private.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	I foster a climate where team members are supported for sharing their ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I encourage the team to establish and adhere to group operating and communication guidelines.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	I try to use observational skills to monitor what's going on with the team.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	I express support and acceptance of my team members by praising and seeking their ideas and conclusions.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	I willingly accept others' feedback about my ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	I work with underperformers to keep them in the flow of the project and to prevent them from being excluded from the group.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	As a team member, I am reliable and conscientious.	1	2	3	4	5
29.	As a team member, I participate willingly.	1	2	3	4	5

Sum your circled responses. If your total is 87 or higher, you might want to explore ways to improve your skill in the area of working in teams.

Exercise 15–B
Bridge Building

Teams will be given four paper cups, four paper plates, and three sheets of heavy freezer paper and tape. Their task is to build a bridge that is 8 inches high and 16 inches long and can withstand rolling a light ball across it.

Groups of four–six are tasked with creating a bridge out of the materials provided. You have 30 minutes in which to complete this task. When the project is complete, or time is called—whichever comes first—your instructor will roll a ball across your bridge to ensure it meets the project specifications. Following this activity, discuss these questions in your group.

Questions

1. How did your group decide how to build the bridge? Did it make a plan or did it just start building?
2. Did anyone play a leadership role in the task? Explain.
3. What made building the bridge as a group, rather than as an individual, more difficult?
4. In what ways did the group make the project easier? Explain.
5. Was your group a group or team? Explain.

Exercise 15–C
The Story: A Team
Exercise

1. Read the story below and answer the corresponding questions. You will have between 5–10 minutes to complete this task.
2. You will then be assigned to a group of five or six. Each group will be given a "clean" answer sheet and 10–15 minutes in which to complete the task, as a group. You should not change any of your individual answers to the questions.
3. After time has elapsed, your instructor will help your group score the exercise.
4. Answer the questions which follow the activity, first as an individual and then discuss in your small group.

What Does the Story Tell?

Instructions

Read the following story and take for granted that everything it says is true. Read carefully because, in spots, the story is deliberately vague. Don't try to memorize it since you can look back at it at any time.

Then read the numbered statements about the story and decide whether you consider each one true, false, or questionable. Circling the "T" means that you feel sure that the statement is definitely true. Circling the "F" means that you feel sure that the statement is definitely false. Circling the "?" means that you cannot tell whether it is true or false. If you feel doubtful about any part of a statement, circle the question mark.

Take the statements in turn and do not go back later to change any of your answers. Do not reread any of the statements after you have answered them.

Story

The owner of the Adams Manufacturing Company entered the office of one of his foremen where he found three employees playing cards. One of them was Carl Young, brother-in-law of foreman Henry Dilson. Dilson, incidentally, often worked late. Company rules did not specifically forbid gambling on the premises, but the president had expressed himself forcibly on the subject.

Statements about the Story

1. In brief, the story is about a company owner who found three men playing cards.	T F ?
2. The president walked into the office of one of his foremen.	T F ?
3. Company rules forbade playing cards on the premises after hours.	T F ?
4. While the card playing took place in Henry Dilson's office, the story does not state whether Dilson was present.	T F ?
5. Dilson never worked late.	T F ?

6.	Gambling on the premises of the Adams Manufacturing Company was not punished.	T	F	?
7.	Carl Young was not playing cards when the president walked in.	T	F	?
8.	Three employees were gambling in a foreman's office.	T	F	?
9.	While the card players were surprised when the owner walked in, it is not clear whether they will be punished.	T	F	?
10.	Henry Dilson is Carl Young's brother-in-law.	T	F	?
11.	The president is opposed to gambling on company premises.	T	F	?
12.	Carl Young did not take part in the card game in Henry Dilson's office.	T	F	?

Questions

1. What process did you use to come up with the group answers?

2. Did anyone act as a leader or facilitator in the exercise? Explain.

3. In what ways was it difficult to achieve a group decision?

4. What behaviors blocked the group's process?

5. What behaviors helped the group's process?

6. What are the advantages or disadvantages of working in a group compared to working as an individual?

Exercise 15–D
Team Self-assessment

1. Working on your own, complete the following self-assessment.

2. Meet with your team. Appoint a facilitator, recorder, and spokesperson.

3. Engage in discussion about each member's results, strengths and weaknesses, and the meaning of the results for everyone's participation in the project at hand.

4. Discuss potential pitfalls faced by the team and ways you can work together for the success of the project.

5. Using the form below, summarize the combined strengths and weaknesses of the team and the pitfalls and ways to improve and share with the large group or class.

6. Report your results to the large group or class.

7. Discuss with the large group or class ways to improve participation in teams—lessons learned from past team experiences (negative and positive) and ways to make the current experience better.

Team Self-assessment

	Agree		Neither		Disagree
1. I participate willingly in team activities.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I stay with tasks I have taken on or been assigned.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I try to encourage the group to get back on track when needed.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I use team experiences as a potential learning activity.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I try consciously to be aware of my own behavior style and that of others.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I try to engage in active listening during team projects.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I help the team by keeping track of time, facilitating, recording our discussions, summarizing results, taking notes, and being a team spokesperson as needed.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I practice disclosure of feelings and perceptions of the team process.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I practice giving constructive, honest feedback.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I do what I can to make the team experience a positive one for all involved.	1	2	3	4	5

Our Top Combined Strengths as a Team:

1. _____

   _____

2. _____

   _____

3. _____

   _____

Our Top Combined Weaknesses as a Team:

1. _____

   _____

2. _____

   _____

3. _____

   _____

Potential Pitfalls We Face (e.g., conflicting schedules, lack of specific skills) and How We Can Overcome These:

Ways We Can Contribute to the Success of This Project:

**Exercise 15–E
Case Study on Forming Teams**

Due to reorganization and downsizing, a manager was told to develop teams to work on issues that were important to his department, division, and business unit. He sat down with several of his colleagues and developed a vision and mission statement for his people. They then identified four major areas of concern to the department and division.

In a subsequent meeting, the manager presented the mission statement, and the four identified areas of concern to all of the employees in the department. He then established four teams—one per major area of concern—by assigning 8–10 members to each team.

Questions

1. Given this scenario:

   ■ What do you think the outcome will be?

   ■ What did the manager do wrong?

2. As a team, develop an effective managerial approach to forming teams. (Use the first sentence of this case study as a starting point.)

**Exercise 15–F
Case Study on Gaining Appropriate Membership on Teams**

This is the team's third meeting. The team's task, deliverables, and membership have been dictated by a steering committee which oversees the teaming efforts of a division. Members represent different labs and management levels within the division. A new team member, one who missed the first two meetings, enters the room. The discussion goes something like this:

SCRIBE: "Okay. Here's our agenda. Does this sound okay to everyone?"

NEW TEAM MEMBER: "Well, not exactly. I have a question regarding the team's task. I know I missed the first two meetings, but I'm unclear about our purpose. I mean, without a well-understood purpose, are we ready to talk about membership? I'm not even sure if I should be here!"

SCRIBE: "Well, I suppose we can add "team purpose" to the agenda. How much time should we allot?"

TEAM LEADER: (Feeling strained by all the necessary structure.) "Could we hold off with the agenda for a few minutes . . . I know we need the agenda, but I think we should talk about purpose for a few minutes at least; then we can get back to the regular agenda. She (the new team member) brings up a good point."

Some discussion ensues. It becomes clear that the team's purpose *is* unclear. Other additional information is revealed, such as the fact that there had been three other team members who, shortly after being appointed by the steering committee, decided to excuse themselves from the team. Also, the team leader brought a new person in (call her Possible New Member), who is not really a full-fledged member until the steering committee okays it.

SCRIBE: "Back to the agenda. Were there any corrections to the minutes? (No response.) Okay, now for today's meeting roles . . . oh, our time keeper isn't here today."

NEW TEAM MEMBER: (Looking at Possible New Member) "Would you like to keep time?"

TEAM LEADER: "Well, we're not sure if she is an official team member yet. Remember, the steering committee hasn't okayed her yet. Should she keep time if she's not?"

NEW TEAM MEMBER: "What's the difference? And why do we have to have the steering committee's blessing? Let's just do it."

TEAM LEADER: "Actually, there are some other names, in addition to Possible Team Member, that we've submitted to the steering committee. After all, we've lost three people since the team began."

NEW TEAM MEMBER: "Do we need additional people? Why? Again, doesn't it depend on what we're trying to accomplish?"

Questions

1. Why is it important to clarify a team's purpose? Once the task is given, why is clarification necessary?

2. What role does this purpose play in defining team membership? Why do you suppose others have "excused themselves" from the team?

3. How effective is the team leader? Explain.

4. Meeting management techniques—using agendas, having a scribe and timekeeper— are intended to make meetings more effective. In what ways could these techniques have the opposite effect?

5. If you were asked to participate in this meeting, what would you do to get the process back on track? Explain.

**Exercise 15–G
The Case of the Take-Charge Team Leader**

You are a member of a team that is meeting for the third time. Your goal is to reduce the number and dollar amount of workers compensation claims. The team consists of members from safety, human resources, legal, and medical (e.g., staff nurses and doctors). The team leader—a senior level manager—demonstrates a "take-charge" approach in that he/she believes he/she knows more about the task and assignment than anyone on the team. Early in the team's existence, the leader shared a project milestone chart that the team accepted. While the group has kept up with its assignments and is working rather effectively, the team leader seems impatient with the team's progress. In fact, the leader would like to exert greater control over the team's activities because he/she already has supporting data from outside groups and departments about the task and wants to complete the project in record time. However, you and other team members are concerned that (1) there may be other issues that have not yet surfaced, and (2) if his/her ideas are accepted, one of the team members may lose his/her position in the firm.

Questions

1. What issues are at play?

2. How would you feel in this situation?

3. If the leader is so capable, why do you suppose management created a team to address this particular (and highly visible) problem?

4. At this point, what would you do and why?

5. If no changes were made, what do you think the final outcome would be?

**Exercise 15–H
Try This . . .**

1. Watch a sports team in action—either at your school, in your community, or via a televised game. What effective teaming behaviors are displayed? What ineffective teaming behaviors are displayed? Explain and discuss the impact of how members interact on the outcome and how members seem to feel about the outcome.

2. Watch a video or movie that has a primary focus on a group or team, such as one listed below. Write an essay in which you compare this group with elements contained in this chapter. As appropriate, include a discussion of the following:

- Is this a group or a team? Explain, and discuss the process by which the team develops.
- What is the team's goal? How do you know?
- Does the team achieve its goal? If so, to what do you attribute the team's success? If not, to what do you attribute the team's failure?
- What barriers did the team face? How did it overcome those barriers?
- What roles did individual participants play in the functioning of the team? Was there a leader? A facilitator or mediator? A devil's advocate? A follower?
- If you were asked to be a consultant for this team, what improvements would you recommend and why?

Some videos to consider for this activity include: *A League of Their Own, Twelve Angry Men, The Mighty Ducks, Bull Durham, Sneakers, Dirty Dozen, Memphis Belle, Three Musketeers, Red Dawn, Stripes, Lord of the Flies, Galaxy Quest, Remember the Titans.*

**Exercise 15–I
Reflection/Action Plan**

This chapter focused on teams in the workplace—what they are, why they are important, and how to improve your skill in this area. Complete the worksheet below upon completing all the reading and experiential activities for this chapter.

1. The one or two areas in which I am most strong are:

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. The one or two areas in which I need more improvement are:

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. If I did only one thing to improve in this area, it would be to:

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Making this change would probably result in:

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. If I did not change or improve in this area, it would probably affect my personal and professional life in the following ways:

_____

_____

_____

_____