HUMAN RESOURCES ▶ TEAM BUILDING

# 12 Tips for Team Building in the Workplace

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People in every workplace talk about building the team, but few understand how to create the experience of teamwork or how to develop an effective team. Belonging to a team, in the broadest sense, is a result of feeling part of something larger than yourself. It has a lot to do with your understanding of the mission or objectives of your organization.

## Contribution to the Success

In a team-oriented environment, you contribute to the overall success of the organization. You work with fellow members of the organization to produce these results. Even though you have a specific job function and you belong to a specific department, you are unified with other staff members to accomplish the overall objectives. Your function exists to serve the bigger picture.

You need to differentiate this overall sense of teamwork from the task of developing an effective intact team that is formed to accomplish a specific goal. People confuse the two team building objectives.

It is

why so many team building seminars, meetings, retreats, and activities are deemed failures. Leaders failed to define the team they wanted to build. Developing an *overall sense of teamwork* is different from building an effective, focused team.

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## Types of Team Building

Executives, managers, and organization staff members universally explore ways to improve business results and profitability. Many view team-based, horizontal, organization structures as the best design for involving all employees in creating business success.

No matter what you call your team-based improvement effort (whether it's continuous

or a self-directed work team), you are striving to improve results for customers. However, few organizations are pleased with the results their team improvement efforts produce.

If

your team improvement efforts are not living up to your expectations, this self-diagnosing checklist may tell you why. Successful team building—that creates effective, focused work teams—requires attention to each of the following.

## 1. Clear Expectations for the Team

Has executive leadership communicated its expectations clearly for the team's performance and expected outcomes? Do team members understand why the team was created?

Is

the

organization demonstrating constancy of purpose in supporting the team with resources of people, time, and money? Does the work of the team receive sufficient emphasis as a priority in terms of the time, discussion, attention, and interest directed its way by executive leaders?

## 2. The Context for the Team

Do team members understand why they are participating in the team? Do they understand how the strategy of using teams will help the organization attain its communicated business goals?

Can team members define their team's importance to the accomplishment of corporate goals? Does the team understand where its work fits into the total context of the organization's goals, principles, vision, and values?

## 3. Team Commitment

Do team members want to participate in the team? Do team members feel the team mission is important? Are members committed to accomplishing the team mission and expected outcomes?

Do team members perceive their service as valuable to the organization and their careers? Do team members anticipate recognition for their contributions? Do team members expect their skills to grow and develop on the team? Are the team members excited and challenged by the team opportunity?

## 4. Competence of the Team

Does the team feel that it has the appropriate people participating? For example, in process improvement, is each step of the process represented on the team? Does the team feel that its members have the knowledge, skill, and capability to address the issues for which the team was formed? If not, does the team have access to the help it needs? Does the team feel it has the resources, strategies, and support needed to accomplish its mission?

## 5. Charter of the Team

Has the team taken its assigned area of responsibility and designed its mission, vision, and

its anticipated outcomes and contributions; its timelines; and how it will measure both the outcomes of its work and the process the team followed to accomplish their task? Does the leadership team or other coordinating group support what the team has designed?

## 6. Team Control

Does the team have enough freedom and empowerment to obtain the ownership necessary to accomplish its charter? At the same time, do team members clearly understand their boundaries? How far are members allowed to go in pursuit of solutions? Are limitations (e.g., monetary and time resources) defined at the beginning of the project before the team experiences barriers and rework?

Are the team's reporting relationship and accountability understood by all members of the organization? Has the organization defined the team's authority to make recommendations? To implement the plan? Is there a defined review process, so both the team and the organization are consistently aligned with both direction and purpose?

Do team members hold each other accountable for project timelines, commitments, and results? Does the organization have a plan to increase opportunities for self-management among organization members?

## 7. Team Collaboration

Does the team understand the team and group process? Do members understand the stages of group development? Are the team members working together effectively interpersonally? Do all team members understand the roles and responsibilities of team members, team leaders, and team recorders?

Can the team approach problem solving, process improvement, goal setting, and measurement jointly? Do team members cooperate to accomplish the team charter? Has the team established group norms or rules of conduct in areas such as conflict resolution, consensus decision making, and meeting management? Is the team using an appropriate strategy to accomplish its action plan?

## 8. Team Communication

Are the team members clear about the priority of their tasks? Is there an established

the organization provide important business information regularly?

Do the teams understand the complete context of their existence? Do team members communicate clearly and honestly with each other? Do team members bring diverse opinions to the table? Are necessary conflicts raised and addressed?

## 9. Creative Innovation

Is the organization really interested in change? Does it value creative thinking, unique solutions, and new ideas? Does it reward people who take reasonable risks to make improvements? Or does the company reward the people who fit in and maintain the status quo? Does it provide the training, education, access to books and films, and field trips necessary to stimulate new thinking?

## 10. Team Consequences

Do team members feel responsible and accountable for team achievements? Are rewards and recognition supplied when teams are successful? Is reasonable risk respected and encouraged in the organization? Do team members fear reprisal? Do team members spend their time finger-pointing rather than resolving problems?

Is the organization designing reward systems that recognize both team and individual performance? Is the organization planning to share gains and increased profitability with the team and individual contributors? Can contributors see their impact on increased organization success?

## 11. Coordination of the Team

Are teams coordinated by a central leadership team that assists the groups to obtain what they need for success? Have priorities and resource allocation been planned across departments? Do teams understand the concept of the internal customer (i.e., anyone to whom they provide a product or a service?)

Are cross-functional and multi-department teams common and working together effectively? Is the organization developing a customer-focused process-focused orientation and moving away from traditional departmental thinking?

Does the organization recognize that the team-based, collaborative, empowering, enabling the organizational culture of the future is different than the traditional, hierarchical organization it may currently be? Is the organization planning to, or in the process of, changing how it rewards, appraises, hires, develops, motivates, and manages the people it employs?

Does the organization plan to use failures for learning and support reasonable risk? Does the organization recognize that the more it can change its climate to support teams, the more it will receive in payback from the work of the teams?

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