Coaching Teams for Effectiveness

_Caveat:_ No team can be coached or managed effectively when organizational structures, especially reward structures, prohibit collaboration. Insure that assigned tasks are compatible with both individual and team levels of responsibility, access to resources, and goal/reward structures of the company.

**Starting Out**

If you are able to assign team members, do so with an eye toward resources that will be needed for the project/task. When tasks are variable, ongoing, or unknown, provide the team with methods for maximizing internal resources (i.e. personality/style assessments, vocabulary, training, counselling).

Managers are generally responsible for providing organizational and external resources. Insure that your team is aware of the resources and able to access them efficiently.

Your team will need these foundational resources:

a) knowledge of effective team processes and individual skills within the team to carry them out. (i.e. at least one person needs to know how to facilitate meetings; someone needs to know how to put together a Gantt chart)

b) time and organizational permission to carry out effective team processes. (i.e. team members must be released from their individual jobs long enough to get acquainted, and providing pizza would be appropriate.)

c) capacity to use the tools required for the project. These might be specific technical skills or tools (i.e. know how to access and use the relevant databases; know how to create and upload HTML pages to the company website), or project-specific decision-making skills or tools (i.e. company DSS or industry best practices). In most teams, generic decision-making or document production skills and tools are also needed.

**Troubleshooting**

Once a team is up and running, problems typically occur in expected ways. Often, symptoms are not apparent until later in the project, but their causes can be traced to early steps that were not adequately performed. It is not always possible to fix an early problem after the fact; the team might need additional resources or supervision to remediate the situation. Use these situations as coaching opportunities by identifying skills, resources, or process steps that an employee can learn before beginning another team activity.
Goals and Purposes of Team

Unclear, unstated, or incompatible goals can all be the source of ongoing problems. Consider all stakeholders, as well, and consider that teams might be unaware of conflicting organizational priorities.

Are team goals reasonable, valuable and achievable? Teams will only be frustrated if goals are not achievable.

Are team goals clear and held by all members? Individual values and interests must not be counter to team goals for success.

Do explicit and implicit goals of the team differ? When in conflict, implicit goals are more powerful than explicit goals.

Do short and long-term goals of the team differ? Short term rewards are more powerful, and should be supportive for long-term success.

What are the actual goals of each stakeholder? Goals must be at least compatible, and never in conflict.

Do measured and unmeasured objectives of the team differ? Measured objectives will garner most attention, effort, and reward.

Are team goals best achieved in a team format? Shared objectives, task interdependencies, and information sharing requirements should all support the stated (and unstated) goals of the team.

Team/Process Design

Team organization and the place of the team within the larger organizational structure can vary, with different requirements for success. Be sure to specify whether a team is self-directed, or cross-functional, for example, and be careful that both task and process design analysis is appropriate to the organizational context.

Task Processes

Are task elements, resources adequate to accomplish goals? Team members might not believe resources are adequate even though management does.

Are task process measures relevant to team goals? Ideally, outcome measures are set by the team, and teams might need training to understand utility of external metrics.

Are performance measures relevant to task process? Look especially for individual performance measures that are counter to group goals.

Are team members satisfied with team outcomes? Satisfactory outcomes increase satisfaction with team dynamics.

Are team members satisfied with individual work results? Interdependent individual goals, achievements required for team
Team Processes

**How well do team members know each other?** Predictability of behavior leads to trust, stability, and efficiency of communication; unrecognized communication style differences will introduce unpredictability. Homogeneous and long-term teams have more shared assumptions of team goals, values, and processes; shared assumptions and values require less explicit definition but when misunderstandings do occur, they can be harder to locate.

**Is the communication process explicitly defined?** Information gathering, information transfer, decision-making, task feedback, environmental and process changes

**Does the communication process support task information/decision-making/feedback requirements?**

- Information should flow freely within teams and across team boundaries to maximize system responsiveness
- Team environments typically mix information gathering, decision-making and implementation responsibilities
- Environmental and managerial information resources must be adequate and useful for team efficiency

**Are team members satisfied with team processes?** Trust in decision-making/problem-solving/action coordination process allows support of outcomes

**Are team members satisfied with interpersonal relationships?** Humans judge ability to work together before committing resources and effort

Project Implementation

**Do environmental, team, and/or individual resources support team goals?**

**Do environmental, team, and/or individual resources support team organization?**

**Are explicit/implicit/short/long/measured/unmeasured goals rewarded?**

**Is the task process effective and efficient with respect to resources?**

- External, internal resources must be adequate to complete process as designed
- Resource use must be reasonable with respect to other business needs for organizational support
- Resource use must be reasonable with respect to other member responsibilities for individual goals to remain compatible

**Is the team process effective and efficient with respect to resources?**

- Meeting, group communication time, costs must be reasonable
- Information must be of acceptable quality and timeliness
- Team and individual resources must be adequate to perform team and individual responsibilities
- Teams must have feedback with respect to process effectiveness in order to maintain or improve processes
- System and resource stress reduces team and individual effectiveness

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