

The Value of Teamwork

By David Tennant, PE, PMP, MBA

In almost every company or organization, teamwork plays a vital role in getting things accomplished. This may consist of planning and building a new hospital; implementing a new marketing campaign; or planning the next conference. However, how much thought is given to how the team will function? How can we ensure a high-performing team? What causes a team to be dysfunctional? In the book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, the author (Patrick Lencioni), delves into why teams fail and how to recognize and address the symptoms. The five dysfunctions include:

1. Lack of trust
2. Excessive conflict
3. Lack of commitment
4. Little or no accountability
5. Failure to focus on results

While the above factors appear “obvious,” there can be many other subtleties at work within the team’s dynamics. For example, does the team leader have credibility and the personality required to lead a group? And, in many organizations, a team leader has the *responsibility* of implementing a project, but not necessarily the *authority*. This is especially true in matrixed organizations where team members are assigned from different functional areas. Therefore, it is very important that team members have trust, commitment, etc. to be effective. The corporate groundwork for successful team performance lies within two sources: the culture of the company and the freedom (i.e. process) by which the team is allowed to function.

One key method to keep teams on track and motivated is constant communications between team members and the leader. It is the role of the team leader or project manager to extract as much information and opinion from the team as possible; and include the team members in key discussions.

Let’s consider a few key points about teams:

When should we use teams? Whenever a major program or project needs to be implemented across functional or corporate departments. Many companies have learned the value of putting teams together to accomplish specific objectives. And, more companies are embracing the concepts of “high performance” teams to accomplish challenging or complex projects.

The talents that are brought from others in different areas of the company strengthen a team. Plus, by working together to form the team’s objectives, approach, and planning, they will generally become a cohesive unit that can also adapt and change as new challenges become apparent. It is through this mechanism that teams are surpassing individual performance within companies—and companies are taking notice.

That brings us to the question of how do we recognize or reward team performance? When granting awards to great teamwork, we are acknowledging the team's ability to function together as a group.

But, it is also *crucial* to reward individual team member's exceptional behavior that has contributed to those results. Why? Because not every team member contributes at the same level and if all that gets rewarded is "the team" then each member's performance slides towards the average. But if exceptional individual contribution is recognized in front of the rest of the team, the team's overall performance is pulled towards the best. Managing a team effort to reinforce both good teaming behavior and exceptional individual contribution towards that team effort is hard, but well worth the extra effort it takes.

Finally, paying attention to individual team member skills, assigning accountabilities, the method of team planning, and a team charter in how they will work together are important factors. These should not be minimized in getting a team effort launched.

In closing, a significant challenge can serve to energize a team. Keeping the team informed, along with regular performance feedback and rewards, can go a long way in keeping the team engaged and motivated

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