

How Effective Is Your Team?

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You've started using teams—for doing the job, for solving problems, for improving quality, for making decisions, and for everything else. It seems to be going fairly well, but how do you know for sure?

Newspapers and professional journals tell you that successful companies are run with teams, that teams are the wave of the future, and that you should focus on improving your team. Other articles tell you about using teams for total quality management and customer service. But the articles seldom give you any ways to measure the success of your team.

There are four reasons for worrying about measuring your team's effectiveness:

- ▶ An effective team frees up the manager or facilitator from being involved in the day-to-day details of the group's work. Effective team development results in employees taking control of their jobs and doing what needs to be done.
- ▶ An effective team can provide more timely and appropriate customer service. Many companies say they are focusing on service quality, but some employees are still "shackled"—prevented from delivering high-quality customer service. Taking off the shackles can free employees to meet and exceed customer expectations.

HERE'S A TOOL THAT CAN HELP TEAMS MEASURE THEIR OWN EFFECTIVENESS.

- ▶ Compared to employees who work individually, effective teams tend to have higher morale, productivity, and pride in the job and company.
- ▶ Effective teams understand the value of working together instead of against each other. As a result, barriers begin to break down between teams within departments and between different departments. The entire organization functions more effectively.

So, how do you know when your team is accomplishing all that? You don't—unless you have a way to measure the overall effectiveness of your team on an ongoing basis. Only through periodic assessment—along with continuing team development—can a team become effective and stay that way.

The tool

The Team Inventory can help a team periodically measure its own effectiveness and improvement in five areas:

- ▶ team mission
- ▶ goal achievement
- ▶ empowerment
- ▶ open, honest communication
- ▶ positive roles and norms.

The inventory, which appears in figure 1, on page 68, is straightforward. The team leader and each team member individually rate the team on 20 items. After each person has completed the inventory, average the team members' answers to each question. Do not include the team leader's ratings in the average; hold them out as separate measures, for later comparisons of perceptions of team effectiveness.

Transfer the team members' average for each item to the scoring sheet (figure 2, page 69), and total the numbers for each of the five areas. The team leader's scores should also be transferred to the scoring sheet and added up. This will provide a rating for each area—from the team's perspective and from the team leader's perspective—as to the effectiveness of the team in that area.

Then add together the ratings for all the areas, to calculate the total team-effectiveness rating—again, both from the team members' perspective and from the team leader's perspective.

A total of 100 points—or 100 percent effectiveness—is the ideal. But teams must realize that 100 percent effectiveness is virtually impossible to achieve. A team that can consistently, over the long-run, function at

FIGURE 1
Team-Effectiveness Inventory

Using the scale below, circle the number that corresponds with your assessment of the extent to which each statement is true about your team.
5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree

1. Everyone on my team knows exactly why the team does what it does.	5	4	3	2	1
2. The team leader consistently lets the team members know how we're doing on meeting our customers' expectations.	5	4	3	2	1
3. Everyone on my team has a significant amount of say or influence on decisions that affect his or her job.	5	4	3	2	1
4. If outsiders were to describe the way we communicate within our team, they would use such words as "open," "honest," "timely," and "two-way."	5	4	3	2	1
5. Team members have the skills they need to accomplish their roles within the team.	5	4	3	2	1
6. Everyone on the team knows and understands the team's priorities.	5	4	3	2	1
7. As a team, we work together to set clear, achievable, and appropriate goals.	5	4	3	2	1
8. I would rather have the team decide how to do something rather than have the team leader give step-by-step instructions.	5	4	3	2	1
9. As a team, we are able to work together to solve destructive conflicts rather than ignoring conflicts.	5	4	3	2	1
10. The role each member of the team is expected to play makes sense to the whole team.	5	4	3	2	1
11. The team understands how it fits into the organization.	5	4	3	2	1
12. If my team doesn't reach a goal, I'm more interested in finding out why we have failed to meet the goal than I am in reprimanding the team members.	5	4	3	2	1
13. The team has so much ownership of the work that, if necessary, we would offer to stay late to finish a job.	5	4	3	2	1
14. The team leader encourages every person on the team to be open and honest, even if people have to share information that goes against what the team leader would like to hear.	5	4	3	2	1
15. There is a good match between the capabilities and responsibilities of each person on the team.	5	4	3	2	1
16. Everyone on the team is working toward accomplishing the same thing.	5	4	3	2	1
17. The team has the support and resources it needs to meet customer expectations.	5	4	3	2	1
18. The team knows as much about what's going on in the organization as the team leader does, because the team leader always keep everyone up-to-date.	5	4	3	2	1
19. The team leader believes that everyone on the team has something to contribute—such as knowledge, skills, abilities, and information—that is of value to all.	5	4	3	2	1
20. Team members clearly understand the team's unwritten rules of how to behave within the group.	5	4	3	2	1

95 percent effectiveness is doing well. Remember that team development is an ongoing process. At any point, team members can slide back to a lower level of effectiveness if they do not continually work together as a team, listen and communicate effectively, deal with conflict effectively, recognize each other's unique contributions, provide honest feedback, and demonstrate other characteristics of an effective team.

Even if the team consistently practices all of the factors that contribute to an effective team, there is no guarantee of top effectiveness. The demands and expectations put on a

team—by its own members and by other people—are constantly changing. We live in a chaotic business environment in which the only thing that is constant is change. The definition of perfection changes on a daily basis. So to expect perfection is to set a team up for failure. The results can be demotivation, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, and reduced productivity and team pride.

The similarities and differences between the team members' ratings of the team and the team leader's scores are an important topic for discussion. Before beginning an effort to improve team effectiveness, the

team leader and team members should be able to reach agreement on the team's current state. Without that agreement, the team and its leader may head down different paths, harming the team environment rather than enhancing it.

Use figure 2, the team-effectiveness scoring sheet, to compare the team members' perceptions to the team leader's perceptions. If the members and leader scored a factor the same, record the rating in the "consensus-rating" column on the chart. If differences exist, the team will want to explore the reasons for those differences, citing specific

FIGURE 2
Team-Effectiveness Scoring Sheet

THE FIVE EFFECTIVENESS AREAS	RATINGS ON NUMBERED INVENTORY ITEMS	TEAM RATINGS	TEAM LEADER RATINGS	CONSENSUS RATING
Team Mission	1 6 11 16			
Average of team members' ratings	___ + ___ + ___ + ___ =	_____	_____	=====
Team leader's ratings	___ + ___ + ___ + ___ =	_____	_____	=====
Goal Achievement	2 7 12 17			
Average of team members' ratings	___ + ___ + ___ + ___ =	_____	_____	=====
Team leader's ratings	___ + ___ + ___ + ___ =	_____	_____	=====
Empowerment	3 8 13 18			
Average of team members' ratings	___ + ___ + ___ + ___ =	_____	_____	=====
Team leader's ratings	___ + ___ + ___ + ___ =	_____	_____	=====
Open, Honest Communication	4 9 14 19			
Average of team members' ratings	___ + ___ + ___ + ___ =	_____	_____	=====
Team leader's ratings	___ + ___ + ___ + ___ =	_____	_____	=====
Positive Roles and Norms	5 10 15 20			
Average of team members' ratings	___ + ___ + ___ + ___ =	_____	_____	=====
Team leader's ratings	___ + ___ + ___ + ___ =	_____	_____	=====
Total Team-Effectiveness Rating				

examples to support the ratings. This may result in a revision in the total team-effectiveness rating, which would then be recorded in the consensus rating column.

Five areas of team effectiveness

When you have finished tallying and recording the results of the survey, what you'll have is a chart that shows the team's consensus on its own effectiveness in the five areas. Now let's look at the five areas individually.

Team mission. A team has to have a mission. Each person on the team should know exactly why the team exists and what it contributes to the department and to the company as a whole. It's easier for the team to do its job if it knows why it is doing the job.

You may have a wonderful organizational mission statement, but a team that has no expressed mission of its own is unlikely to understand how its work contributes to the accomplishment of the organization's mission. That is especially true for teams in support functions rather than line functions.

But every team's mission should support a departmental mission, which in turn should support the organization's mission. That helps every team member understand the

importance and positioning of his or her job in the organization.

A jointly developed and agreed-upon mission tells everyone on the team why the team exists, where it is going, and why it is going that way. The team mission gives team members something to hold onto when it seems that everything around them is changing. And, if it's lived on a daily basis, it inspires people to do their best to accomplish the team mission—and the organizational mission. In essence, the team mission is a building block in the organization's mission pyramid.

A team mission statement can also affect the quality of service the team provides to customers. The mission statement should be customer focused, reminding everyone that the team exists to serve the customer. Without the customer, of course, the team ceases to exist.

Goal achievement. Team members should be committed to establishing team goals, measuring progress toward them, and attaining them. The goals should support the team's mission and the organization's mission.

Most people want to know where they stand. Employees constantly ask their bosses, in one way or another, "How am I doing?" Too often the response is "not bad," or "pretty

good," or "If I had any complaints, you would have heard from me."

When employees or teams hear such responses, they feel that they're not getting enough information to do their jobs to the best of their abilities. Many people and teams also feel that the boss is hiding some information that she or he is going to use to beat them over the head with at performance-appraisal time.

What these employees and teams are asking is that their bosses measure them against clear, specific goals. Without goals, it is difficult, if not impossible, to tell someone how well, specifically, he or she is doing. To most people, that lack of concrete feedback is frustrating.

People feel motivated when they have agreed-upon goals that are clear, specific, measurable, realistic, and achievable. As they get periodic feedback on how they are doing in reaching those goals, they can keep track of their performance.

Having goals also helps a team provide high-quality customer service—it keeps the focus on the customer. The team knows exactly what its customers want and can track how well the team is doing in meeting or exceeding their expectations.

Empowerment. In an empowered environment, each person on the

team has confidence in the team's ability to achieve its mission. When teams and individuals are empowered, people's hands aren't tied behind their backs. They have the authority, the responsibility, and the accountability that they need to get their jobs done—with a minimum of hassles and red tape.

But empowerment also means providing every team member with the knowledge, skills, information, resources, and support that are needed for doing the job well.

Are employees in your firm making statements like these to customers?

▶ "I can't do anything for you. My hands are tied."

▶ "I'm not authorized to make this change. I'm going to have to take this problem up a level and see what my boss can do for you."

▶ "I'm pretty sure that I can do that, but I've got to get an OK from my boss first."

If you've heard such statements at your company, you probably have disempowered teams and individuals.

Empowerment means giving people credit for being able to think, reason, and plan—and giving them the power and freedom to act accordingly. Most people know what their limits are. They understand the way the system works. Empowerment means giving them the freedom to go to their limits. People will generally ask for help when they know they have reached their limits.

Empowerment means better customer service. When employees and teams are empowered, they can respond more quickly to customer inquiries and resolve problems faster. As a result, each employee and the team as a whole feels more of a vested interest in helping the customer—and, ultimately, helping the organization.

Open, honest communication. Communication must exist between the team and its leader or facilitator, between team members, and between teams.

Everyone on a team must be able to communicate openly and honestly

with each other without being afraid to tell the truth—even if the truth isn't what people really want to hear. People should never be punished for being open, honest, and truthful; they should be positively recognized for that type of behavior. A team, department, or organization cannot grow and cannot provide high-quality customer service unless it faces up to the truth—no matter how ugly the truth is.

Listen for comments like these from employees:

▶ "I'm not going to return that manager's call. Why should I help a person who wouldn't help me last year when I needed some information?"

▶ "I don't know what's going on. All I know is that my boss has been locked away for the past two days, not saying anything. Do you think they're cutting jobs?"

▶ "I don't know why we have to do this. The big boss just said to have it done by the end of the day. So, we'd better get started."

If such statements are common among employees, then your organi-

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zation has communication barriers.

People and teams simply cannot be effective if they can't get the information they need to do their jobs well, whether that information should come from a manager, a team leader, or another part of the organization. Teams can't operate effectively with such barriers in place.

Opening the lines of communication—and working together to solve problems rather than place blame—is vital for successful individuals, teams, and organizations. It also improves customer service, because better information allows employees to respond more quickly to customer needs.

Positive roles and norms. Effective teams assign work based on the strengths of each team member—even if that work is not in their job descriptions. Also, team members help each other work on their individual areas of weakness.

Team morale increases when people understand the roles that contribute to an effective team—and when they see that cooperation rather than com-

petition is the key to team success.

The team's norms are the rules of behavior that team members have agreed to follow. Norms may be enforced by sanctions that range from a look of disapproval to removal from the team.

The norms of the team need to be positive and to contribute to the goals and missions of the team, the department, and the organization. Negative norms—or norms that are positive for the team but negative for the department or organization—only impede success.

Team pride

The most effective teams are those that excel in all five areas.

Team members know what end result they are working for and can track their progress toward reaching their goals. They have the authority, accountability, and responsibility to act and react appropriately and in a timely manner to problems, issues, and concerns. They do not have to be afraid of being honest and open

with other people in the organization, and they can feel confident that they will receive accurate and timely information, as well.

In addition, they understand their individual contributions to the team and the organization, and the behaviors that are expected of them while working with the team.

When those five elements are in place, employees feel proud of their contributions to the team, the department, and the organization. Customers receive high-quality service. The end result is that your company accomplishes its mission. ■

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