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Team Building

# THE ROAD TO RESULTS FOR TEAMS

For teams, the road to good results is paved with expectations—especially those perceived by the stakeholders who create and sustain them. But much team building focuses only on internal processes; it fails to energize the team by focusing on the organization's mission and how team members can contribute to it. And critical management support erodes quickly when teams don't have a positive effect on the whole organization.

Teams can link their work results to the organization's business objectives by using the team development model described below.

## But first, team principles

Before beginning any team development process, both the facilitator and the team members must understand two basic concepts of team theory.

The first is that the basis for successful teamwork is sharing—sharing one mission, sharing tasks and experiences, and sharing consequences. The team building process can be considered one of the team's shared experiences, coupled with the day-to-day experience of working closely together.

The shared tasks idea is represented in the multiskilling objectives of most self-

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BY  
HARLAN R. JESSUP

managed teams, and it represents the appreciation each team member must have for the talents and contributions of the other members of the team. And sharing consequences means that team members share the pressure when results haven't been achieved, as well as the rewards and recognition for demonstrated performance.

The second important concept is the team growth process, described by B.W. Tuckman in 1965 as forming, storming, norming, and performing.

In the forming stage, new groups may have high morale even before they start to address the task at hand. In the storming stage, there may be competition for roles, and there may be recognition of performance shortcomings that cause discomfort among team members. In the norming stage, teams establish some roles and procedural standards as they begin to accomplish their tasks. In the final stage, performing, both morale and competence are high as teams begin to achieve the performance levels expected.

It must be noted, however, that this progression, while predictable, is seldom steady or rapid. Teams may retrogress if there are changes in team makeup or in external factors affecting team performance.

One objective of a team building activity should be to accelerate the team development process. The model described here may help establish the procedural norms required to move from storming to norming.

The model focuses specifically on understanding a shared mission. New teams or task forces can stay focused by using a road map similar to the diagram, "The Road Map: From Expectations to Results," and by using formal statements of mission, values, and vision.

I recommend working through the model during several classroom sessions that include developing the road map and teaching teamwork with some energetic and entertaining team building activities held off-site in a relaxed atmosphere.

**Stakeholders, mission, and values**

The basic objectives of any team are defined by the expectations of a large group of stakeholders. As a first step in understanding its mission, the team must identify all the stakeholders, including managers and customers as well as teammates, support organizations, and special-interest groups that care about the team's product, processes, or results.

For example, a defense systems plant in Florida recently reorganized by broadening and flattening its management hierarchy. But autonomy and responsibilities had not been

adequately defined, so former supervisors were unsure of their new roles.

In the first development session with each team, group members brainstormed a list of stakeholders. As expected, each team identified managers, customers, corporate executives, support groups, themselves, their teammates, and their families. Because this was a defense business, some teams also identified special stakeholders such as the American public, potential enemies, and peace protesters.

The next step was to identify the expectations of each stakeholder group. For example, top managers are interested in costs, quality and delivery, and regulatory compliance. Customers care about service, performance, and reliability. Families of the team members are concerned about pay, benefits, and job security. Teammates want interesting work, mutual respect, recognition, and a sense of accomplishment.

The teams then had to differentiate the prime stakeholders or "proprietary" who are responsible for creating and sustaining the teams. For most teams, this would certainly include the first- and second-line managers. It would also include the immediate customers or recipients of the teams' products.

Using storyboards, each of the plant's teams then listed the top two or three expectations of each stakeholder group. The prime stakehold-

ers expected high quality, conformance to schedules, and cost performance. In the case of the defense systems plant's ballistic missile component, absolute reliability was the cardinal expectation. Plant officers fervently hoped that the missiles would never be used, but after sitting in a silo for 20 years each needed to perform flawlessly.

Because any accident could seriously damage the reputation of the entire corporation, absolute adherence to safety and security procedures was also a compelling expectation of teams.

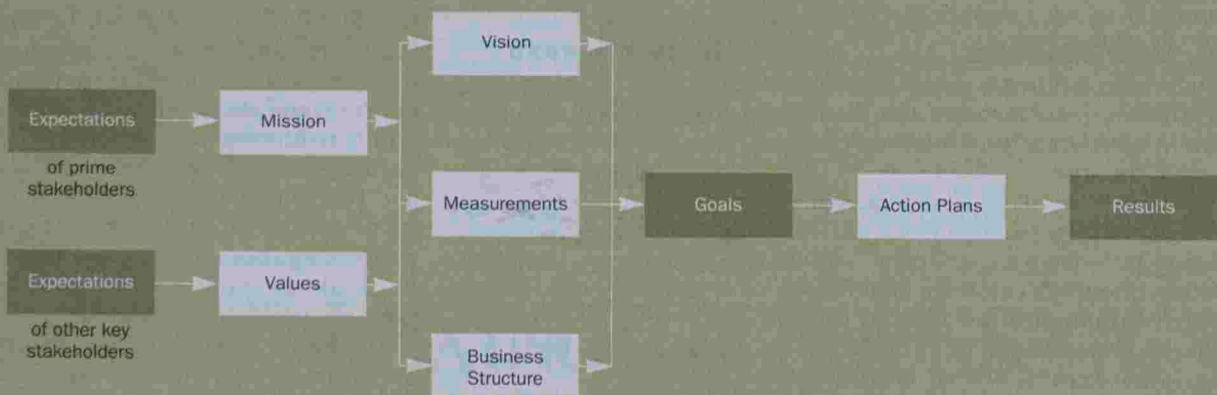
With the expectations clear, it was easy to write a statement describing each team's unique contribution to the business objectives.

A team's mission, then, is simply a restatement of the expectations of prime stakeholders. Such a statement must describe the team's product or service, succinctly represent the expectations of everyone on whom the team's existence depends, and be endorsed by the entire team.

The important expectations of other key stakeholders represent a set of values that guides the team members in addressing their mission. These values must be endorsed by the team and communicated to teammates frequently and respectfully. They should also provide interesting and challenging work for everyone.

The expectations of the defense plant's other key stakeholders

**The Road Map: From Expectations to Results**





included adequate pay and benefits, satisfying work and pleasant relationships for the team members, and integrity and cooperation among teammates and support groups.

At this point, as at others throughout the process, it is important to validate each team's mission and value statements. Teams can link their missions and values to the company's business objectives by involving their managers and support personnel in comparisons with the mission and culture of the entire organization.

### **Vision, measurements, and structure**

Having defined and validated its fundamental mission and values, a team can move on to its vision, measurements, and the organizational structure.

The vision describes a target—where the team wants to be at some

future time, in satisfaction of its mission and values. It can be difficult for a team to describe such a vision in the absence of visionary leadership in the overall organization. A corporate vision statement may help, but actions and executive commitment to excellence in such areas as quality, service, and teamwork are most important for ensuring success.

must understand them and have ready access to them. Typically, such measurements are posted in work areas.

A fine example of measurements used in a service environment can be found at AT&T Transtech in Jacksonville, Florida, where a team member has access to on-screen, real-time information and can report on 68 daily results. For example, an employee may report, "Yesterday we made money for the company. Our customer pays us \$1 each to answer simple inquiries. We have to give 27 such answers each hour to make a profit. And we have to complete six stock transfers each hour for a profit. So each day we measure the value of all our transactions against the time we apply."

Finally, a well-designed business structure must be built based on an understanding of the mission and

last month's 83 percent. Only then can team members begin the goal setting and action planning necessary to reach 90 percent next quarter, 95 percent next year, and so forth.

A set of viable goals may be viewed as a pivotal way station on the road from expectations to results. Appropriate goal horizons for production teams are often quarterly or monthly, whereas the vision may look five years or more into the future.

The goals of a newly formed team are often focused inwardly—perhaps on the work environment (improve housekeeping) or on a group process (participate in meetings). The team has control of these areas and is often rewarded with early successes.

But how has productivity or quality or customer service really been enhanced? Good managers will welcome cosmetic improvements only if they are perceived as concrete steps toward genuine business results.

Furthermore, goals that are seen as too easy just don't motivate. Neither do goals that are perceived as impossible. To motivate, goals must be both challenging and achievable. And, if the degree of challenge is to be properly calibrated, the performance must be tracked. That is why good measurements and performance trends must be posted in work areas for team members to review.

Finally, for genuine challenge and tangible accomplishment, "try harder" goals are not good enough. The team may, in fact, be discouraged and demotivated by extraordinary efforts that result in marginal or temporary gains. Sustained and substantial improvement requires deliberate changes in operating procedures, and these changes require action planning with substance.

Such action plans result from the kind of persistent focus on performance gains that is described by Masaaki Imai as *kaizen* or continuous improvement. Each action plan must answer who, what, and when, and it must designate specific people to take specific short-term actions.

Team members should acquire training in problem solving so that when they meet regularly to receive progress reports, they can define the

## TEAM MEMBERS SHOULD ACQUIRE TRAINING IN PROBLEM SOLVING, SO THEY CAN DEFINE THE NEXT STEPS TO BE TAKEN

future time, in satisfaction of its mission and values. It can be difficult for a team to describe such a vision in the absence of visionary leadership in the overall organization. A corporate vision statement may help, but actions and executive commitment to excellence in such areas as quality, service, and teamwork are most important for ensuring success.

Additionally, the goals set as the intermediate steps toward achieving the vision are meaningless unless concrete measurements are developed and used to record team progress. These measurements must be timely and should be used as a basis for corrective action rather than for historical documentation. They should compare current performance with norms and trends, and must support the basic, business-focused mission.

The measurements also should reflect total team results, leaving individual performance to be managed by the team itself. Workers

values. Aspects of this structure include basic organization, data and scheduling systems, and compensation systems. If work teams are to be the basic building blocks of the business, then they define the structure. They may appear as blocks on the organization diagram, as nodes on the master schedule, and as cost centers in the financial reports.

If work teams are not the integral blocks of the structure, it is no less critical to describe how team results should contribute to business goals. For example, many firms need to integrate the goals of functionally organized teams within product-oriented business divisions.

### **Goals, action plans, and results**

Goals represent incremental, short-term steps toward realizing a vision. A vision statement may promise something like world-class customer service, but the team has to know that this means maintaining 99 percent of delivery promises rather than



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next steps to be taken. And inviting expert and influential support personnel to these meetings should be standard practice. Only this kind of persistent attention accomplishes the business-oriented and clearly perceived results that the team strives to achieve.

Going back to the example described earlier, the defense plant's teams left defining their vision, determining measurements, and formal goal setting for a later time, and instead began to identify the actions most needed to organize themselves and address the mission. (Shortcuts like this are often useful to jump-start struggling teams, but the skipped steps should be revisited later to avoid imprecise focus and inferior results.)

In one classroom session, using the nominal group technique, each team set priorities for all the elements of the work situation that were favorable to team performance and listed all the conditions that interfered. On a scale of 1 to 10, the teams rated their potential influence over the top five or six factors on each list. Surprisingly, items such as availability of capital equipment or quality of incoming parts were rated high, as team members recognized how much these conditions might be influenced by concerted team problem solving.

The next step was to list action plans for each factor that could be influenced by the team—reinforcing the positive factors and minimizing the effects of the negative ones. Typical action plans included scheduling regular team meetings and drafting and posting a statement of the team mission and values.

Plans to address the skipped steps of measurement and goal setting also were included. A criterion for all action plans was that responsibilities were assigned only to team members who were present.

Through action planning, team results in the defense plant were linked directly to the expectations of the stakeholders, and the teams soon gained well-earned recognition for their superior performance. ■

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