

# All together now

How to make corporate teams successful

## Question:

**I'm the president of a small company. Over the past three years, we have experienced significant growth. Along the way, we have upgraded our technology and expanded our scope of services. We spent this past year refining our work processes and fine-tuned our approach to customer service. Now, I want to turn my attention to the way we manage and develop our people.**

**As we get started, at the top management level, we have been working with a consultant on things like developing a common purpose, creating an effective communication climate, etc. One of our team members has been noticeably uninvolved at these meetings. He comes unprepared and doesn't participate much.**

**My concern is that if this attitude continues, he is going to send the wrong message regarding our work on building collaboration and participation across the company. What should I do to make sure his behavior doesn't bring down everyone he interacts with?**

## Answer:

Teams are essential to any organization faced with a growing need to achieve complex goals swiftly and efficiently and, perhaps, with fewer resources. To be effective, the team must stay in touch with these needs. It is important to realize that teams are not a solution to every business challenge, nor should an organization or department create teams just for the sake of having teams.

When you embark upon a team-building initiative, you have to realize you are also

engaged in culture shaping. You are sending a message that, "We are making some changes to the way we do things around here." As I have pointed out in previous articles, corporate culture is principally shaped by the words and actions of top management. So, the fact that you are starting the process by focusing on your practices at the executive level bodes well for the ultimate success of the program across the company.

However, it will take time to truly succeed at building a corporate culture of participation and involvement. Teams do not just happen. Focused and concentrated effort is necessary.

Here's a list of requirements for a fully functioning corporate team:

### **Clearly defined purposes and goals that serve the organization.**

Teams have to understand what it is they are attempting to accomplish and why they are trying to accomplish it. They must have a purpose and goals that are clearly linked to the larger organizational context—mission, goals, and strategies that deliver added value to clients and to the operations of the organization.

### **Clearly defined parameters.**

From the start, the sponsor of the team (i.e., you in this situation) must define the importance of the team's task in the context of the organizational system. The sponsor must explain what the importance of the task (i.e., the team's goal) is, what the parameters are, what the expectations are, what the timeline is, what the budget and available resources are, and what kinds of decisions the team is empowered to make.

### **Communication within the organization.**

The sponsor should help the team define how they are connected to other teams, departments, and clients. It is essential for

teams to know how to communicate with the organization, with whom to communicate and how often, or when.

### **People with the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities.**

Teams must make sure they have the right individuals to complete the work assigned to them. Depending on the team focus, this may mean having access to people with varying talents and points of view. For example, people may be needed who are skilled in planning, applying logic and data in problem-solving, decision-making, running effective meetings, communicating, documenting or conflict management.

### **A game plan for accomplishing their tasks.**

Teams work most effectively when they have a detailed understanding of how their work will proceed and how the team will accomplish its tasks. A team should be able to clearly identify the steps it will take to complete its work. Process mapping, as an example, is one step-by-step method for problem solving and creating process improvements.

As the team sponsor, you are responsible for assuring team productivity and effectiveness. The sponsor helps to make sure the team is connected to the business strategy and, occasionally runs interference for the team and represents the team to the larger organization. As the team sponsor, major responsibilities have been placed in your hands. It isn't enough to help gather a team and then step back and observe. There are a number of things you must do to ensure success.

Primarily, you will need to monitor and support the team's progress around three particular challenges or tasks, also known as the "three Ps":

- Developing the team's purpose.

- Establishing a partnership — ways of relating to each other.
- Generating methods to achieve goals — a process.

Staying focused on the three tasks requires that the sponsor:

- Work closely with the team.
- Ensure that the team's purpose and the organization's purposes are aligned.
- Make sure the appropriate people are on the team.
- See that the team members are clear about and committed to their roles and responsibilities.

Teams that are vague about their purpose, lack ways of relating with others or have no agreed upon approach for solving problems don't function well. It is fragmenting to work inside these teams and difficult for others in the organization to work with them. This appears to be where you are at the moment.

### **So, what can you do about it?**

Focusing on the three Ps above will go a long way toward dealing with your ambivalent team member. Obviously, at the present time, he is not engaged. Is this because he doesn't understand the team's purpose? Is this because he isn't interested in partnership? Is this because he finds the current process to be just fine, thank you, and not in need of improvement? Or, is it that he simply doesn't "buy in?"

Whatever the case may be, you have to be decisive in dealing with him. Making sure the appropriate people are on the team is your concern. You are worried that his bad attitude will rub off on others. Well, you are right to be worried. Frankly, you cannot tolerate this kind of behavior from so visible a member of the management team.

You need to help him see what it means for him to be a member of this evolving management team. You need to help him see the implications of continuing to operate as he has to this point. And you need to do so today, before any more time passes.

This will send the important message to others

that the team sponsor is committed about the work that is being undertaken. This will set a clear direction for what follows.



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