

# Building Effective Teams

By

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## Group versus Team

The words 'team' and 'group' are generally used interchangeably, yet there is a distinct difference between the two. A 'group' is a number of individuals working together while a 'team' is a group of individuals working toward a common goal. A team can normally outperform a group.

The following paper outlines some characteristics and benefits of high performance teams and strategies for building them.

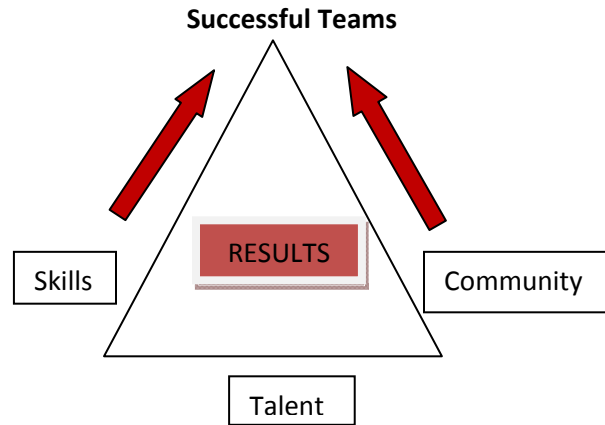
## Successful and Effective Teams

***“Most teams aren’t teams at all but merely collections of individual relationships with the boss. Each individual vying with the others for power, prestige and position.” – Douglas McGregor***

Don Clark (2011) suggests that an effective team can maximize the organization's human resources. A team can be effective if there is trust and mutual accountability between the members. Team members help each other and each member will lead other members at various points throughout the relationship. Successes and failures are equally felt by all members, not just an individual. This gives members more courage to take risks and therefore, realize bigger gains. Most importantly, a team's output is superior to a group of individuals due to the synergistic effect of a team (Major benefits of teams, para 1).

In order for a team to be successful, all the team members should be knowledgeable regarding the structure, mandate and the strategic direction of the organization. They should be familiar with the policies and operational processes. Rules of engagement and expectations are mutually agreed upon by all members in the team. They all share a common goal, and together they set concrete milestones for self-assessment and performance. Small wins are celebrated along the way to milestones.

As stated by Mark Miller (2001), successful teams begin with a focus on results. Having talented people in a team builds a strong foundation; however, the skill set within the team members and the sense of community/team spirit must be built simultaneously in order to get optimum results (p. 79). This model is depicted in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1.** Adapted from *The Secret of Teams*, Mark Miller (2001), p. 79

If given an opportunity, effective teams should be built strategically. The members should not only be competent, but also have a strong character and a unique skill set that compliment others' in the team. There should be chemistry between team members with each member being a custom 'fit' in the team (Miller, 2001, p. 28).

Fit = Character, Competency & Chemistry

### Effective Team Building through Principled Leadership

***“Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself.  
When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.”— Jack Welch***

All teams require principled leadership. Strong leaders provide mentorship while setting high standards of excellence. They are influential in securing adequate resources both internal and external (Larsen and LaFasto, 1989). Clear and sustainable targets are set in collaboration with the team. Specific direction to achieve these targets is mapped out together and mutual constructive feedback for continuous improvement is provided. Purpose of the project and the value added by the teams’ work is communicated effectively in order to get buy-in. Positive re-inforcement boosts the teams’ confidence while recognition and awards and quick wins are celebrated to increase the enthusiasm of the team.

### Effective Team Building through Strength Based Leadership

In order to accomplish a strategic plan with diverse goals, the team needs to be well rounded with each member bringing unique skills, strengths and talents. High performance teams align projects capitalizing on members’ strengths rather than focusing on improving their weaknesses (Conchie and Rath, 2008, p. 2).

All individuals have a distinct personality and areas of strength where they demonstrate leadership. It is beneficial and productive to focus on people’s strengths rather than try to improve their weaknesses. Some teams complete a psychometric assessment and share the results from these assessments with all members of the team. This gives members a new perspective when dealing with other members within

the team. Investing in people’s strengths maximizes their engagement, effectiveness and output (Conchie and Rath, 2008, p. 15).

Outlined in Tables 1 and 2 below are the four personality and behavior styles based on the DiSCProfile™ and complimenting them are the four leadership domains as defined by Conchie and Rath (2008). Effective and successful teams have members in each of the four domains (p. 23).

**Personality and Behavior Styles**

<b>Profile</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Dominance	Direct, decisive, driven – problem solvers, achievers
Influence	Influencer, image, enthusiasm – communicators
Steadiness	Steady, stable, supportive – process oriented
Conscientiousness	Conscientious, correct, careful – detail oriented, focus on quality and accuracy

**Table 1.** Adapted from discprofile.com

**Leadership Domains**

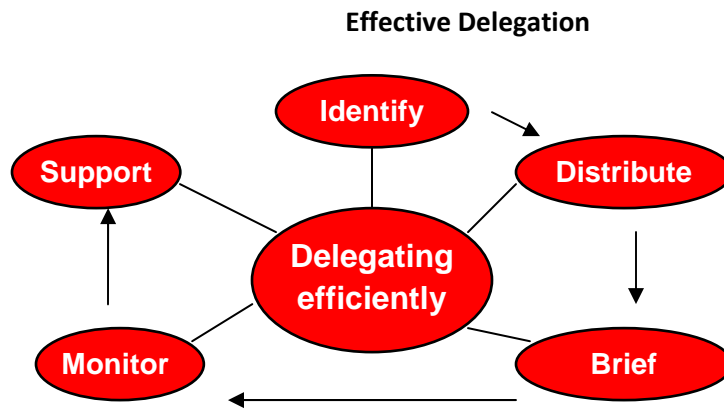
<b>Domains</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Strategic Thinking	Absorbs and analyzes information to help the team make better decisions
Relationship Building	The essential glue that holds a team together
Executing	Makes things happen; implements solutions
Influencing	Sells ideas to others; gets the team heard

**Table 2.** Adapted from *Strength Based Leadership*, Conchie and Rath, 2008.

**Delegation in an Effective Team**

In effective teams, the leadership shifts from time to time depending on the expertise required. This allows for growth and development of the team members and contributes to a more productive team. It also helps with transition planning.

Delegation of tasks is a way to shift leadership within the team and develop team capability. However, delegation of responsibility needs to be done effectively in order to achieve optimum results. The first step is to identify and define the tasks to be delegated. Next, distribute the tasks to individuals based on their strengths and passions. Ensure adequate resources are allocated. Then brief the team on expectations and desired outcomes. Give team members both responsibility and the authority to make decisions and take action. Monitor progress at regular intervals and ensure each employee is performing. Finally, provide support to all the members by giving guidance and feedback regularly in order to set them up for success (Doke et al, 2011, p. 126-7).



**Figure 2.** Adapted from *Building a Team*, DeeDee Doke et al (2011), p. 127

### Types of Team Members and Engagement

Generally a team is comprised of three kinds of members in terms of levels of engagement:

1. **Engaged:** These members are high performers and are a breath of fresh air. They are the ‘go to’ people in the team. These members are knowledgeable about the organizations strategic goals and direction. They are influential and communicate effectively with other members in the team. Research suggests that only 29% of the team members are generally engaged (Crabtree, 2013).
2. **Not engaged:** These members are the minimalists to middle performers. They do just enough to get by and fly under the radar. It is suggested that in any team, generally 54% of the members are not engaged (Crabtree, 2013). The way to engage them is to direct them towards their area of passion, give them clear direction, give them responsibility with authority and make them accountable for their actions.
3. **Actively Disengaged:** The third and the most concerning are the actively disengaged members. They are also known as CAVE (Consistently Against Virtually Everything) dwellers. They actively work on being disengaged. They are low performers, generally irrational and miserable. These members need to be counseled to leave and find other options away from the team. Seventeen per cent of team members generally fall in this category (Crabtree, 2013). It takes four high performers who are engaged to counteract one actively disengaged individual.

*Teams can be effective and successful with engaged and disengaged members but cannot achieve that with actively disengaged members present. Actively disengaged members either need to transform or leave!*

### Effective Teams in a Positive Work Environment

*Equity, fairness and trust form the foundation of an effective team*

A climate of mutual trust, equity and fairness is essential in a high-performing team. The work environment can contribute to building an effective team; ideal characteristics include:

- The working environment is safe, comfortable, relaxed and positive;
- All members are respectful of others and communicate openly and honestly;
- Team members are engaged, vested and interested and carries his or her own weight;
- Creativity and risk taking are encouraged.

Meetings are a reality in the work environment and are essential for communicating, planning and relationship building. They can also be a huge time-waster so it is important to conduct meetings effectively. Some tips for effective meetings include:

- All meetings have an agenda, a chair, minute-taker, process observer and a time keeper. Agenda items are allotted time by team members based on importance in order to keep focused and on track;
- Rotate the chair to help develop people. This gives everyone in the team an opportunity to direct the meeting and have an appreciation for the rules of engagement when someone else is chairing;
- Members come prepared and arrive on time to respect each other's time;
- Meetings always start and end on a positive note. An example would be to start meetings with some good news from team members. It can be personal or professional; something that the member feels comfortable sharing. End the meeting by appreciating people that have helped in any way or made a difference.

The agenda should be circulated to all team members prior to the meeting giving them time to reflect and come prepared to contribute. For particularly challenging issues or problems, an issue statement can be prepared by a team member prior to the meeting giving members a summary of the issue, why it is important, relevant background, potential options with the corresponding pros and cons, and a statement about what decision needs to be made or what input is required so that people who need more time to think about it are not caught off-guard (Scott, 2007, p. 10).

Concise and precise minutes are taken. These can be referred to in the future to avoid repeating the discussion or reinventing the wheel. Action items are clear and focused (who-what-when) thus providing clear direction to members facilitating acceptance and completion.

***“Ordinary people can come together to achieve extraordinary results” - Brian J. Dunn, CEO, Best Buy***

### **Effective Team Building and Conflict**

Many people do not like to deal with conflict yet there are a few that thrive on conflict. However, managers must make sure that all opinions are heard and discussed and difficult conversations are conducted if needed.

It is important for all members in the team to make an informed decision. Every member should have an opportunity to voice their opinion in order to feel valued. Concerns, difference of opinions and disagreements are resolved through discussion (not suppressed or overridden by the team without being addressed). If conflicts cannot be resolved, the members together find a happy medium to live

with, without letting it block their progress. Sometimes, despite discussion, the group is unable to come to a resolution and an executive decision is made by the manager.

The other strategy extremely beneficial in dealing with conflict to enable progression is the ‘fist of five’. Many people believe that it is important and, in fact, imperative to be in love with an initiative in order for it to succeed. However, it is important to realize that everyone will not be in love with every initiative. As long as one can live with the initiative in order to move forward and re-evaluate later, it is fine to proceed. If an initiative is being discussed and the team members have different views and cannot reach an agreement, then the ‘fist of five’ strategy can be used whereby a show of hands by the team members occurs with numbers between zero (fist) and five (all five fingers extended) based on their comfort level with the initiative being proposed. If members are in complete agreement with the proposal, they vote for it with a ‘five’ and if they are totally against it, they vote with a fist. Others vote somewhere in between based on their comfort level with the initiative. If members are unsure but are willing to at least try it and assess the consequences later, they vote with a ‘three’. A minimum of ‘three’ by the entire team is required to progress with the initiative. Anything less than a ‘three’ requires the issue to be brought back to the table for further discussion to try and alleviate people’s concerns, revise the plan and vote again. This strategy is helpful when dealing with initiatives where the team is at two ends of the spectrum and a middle ground which would work for all is needed. It is extremely important that all members ‘buy in’ and are vested in order for the initiative to succeed.

### Five Dysfunctions of a Team

Patrick Lencioni (2002) proposes that teams are susceptible to five dysfunctions. These dysfunctions are not distinct issues but interrelated as depicted in the model illustrated in Figure 3 below. The evidence that one or more of these dysfunctions might exist in a team is listed to the right in the model. For example, if team members are not willing to be open and vulnerable with each other, this indicates a lack of trust within the team (p. 187-9). Fortunately, Lencioni (2005) also suggests some strategies to overcome the dysfunctions and these are listed on the far right in the model below.

### The Five Dysfunctions of Team and Solutions to Overcome Them

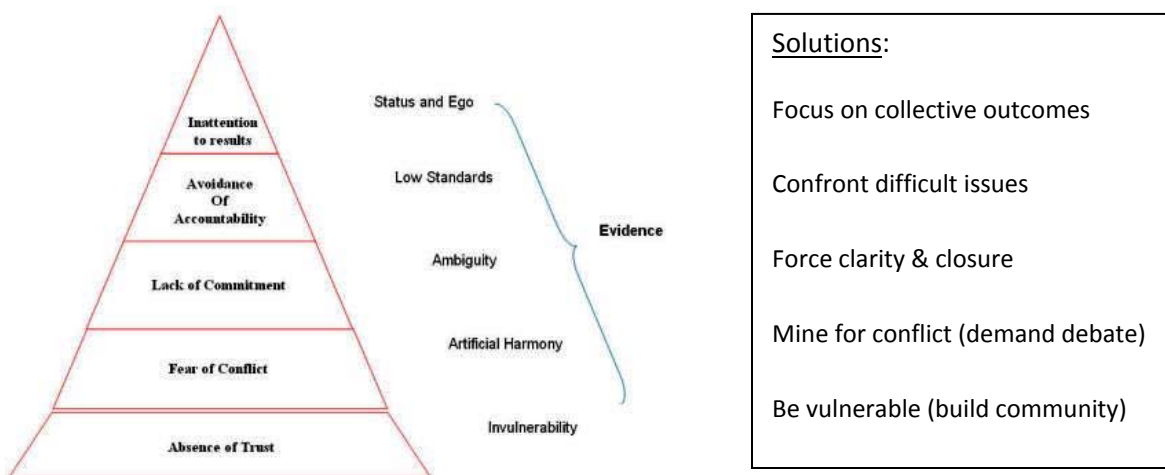


Figure 3. Adapted from *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni (2002), p. 188

## Summary

- An effective team is one where every team member feels valued and contributes.
- Align responsibility with authority.
- Acknowledge and appreciate people and their efforts.
- Focus on team members' strengths rather than dwelling on their weaknesses.
- Give team members autonomy and respect.
- Regardless of what position you are in from a middle level manager to CEO of a company, you always want your team to stand by you!

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