

Building Effective Teams

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Teams can be an extremely effective method for accomplishing goals, motivating employees and problem-solving.

This article covers some tips on how to build effective teams for your organization.

1. Make sure team members are committed

A team is sure to fail if the members aren't committed to meeting the objectives of the team. Imagine a hockey team whose players aren't committed to winning games – the team won't do well.

2. Appoint a team leader

Regardless of how strong the individual members of a team might be, it is usually best to appoint one team leader who is accountable for the team achieving its goals and staying focused. Some teams may be effective when the various members share or rotate leadership responsibilities – this will depend on the strength of the members.

3. Expectations should be clear

What is the objective or purpose of the team? Is there/are there a particular goal(s) to achieve? How will you know if/when those goals are met? Are there ongoing goals or just one goal for the team? Team members should be clear as to the expectations and goals of the team, if/when/how will they be achieved and what happens if/when they are achieved? Does the team continue, does it change or does it disband upon meeting objectives?

4. Who will team report to?

Is there someone that the team will be accountable to or report to? How often should that reporting happen and in what method?

5. Budget

Does the team have a dollar or resource budget to help it meet its objectives? If so, who decides the amount and how often is it reported on?

6. Who are team members

Who decides who will be a team member? Is it based on a certain skill or experience level or on some other criteria? You need to also decide who will create the team and who will decide if/when someone should be removed from the team.

7. Let team members get to know each other

Teams become more effective the more they trust one another. As such, allow for time for members to get to know one another on a personal and not just professional basis.

8. Introduce new members

The team leader should introduce any new member to the team, explain the reason(s) why they were added to the team and allow for the new team member to say a few words. Each team member should welcome the new member.

9. Encourage idea generation

Team leaders should encourage everyone to contribute. Brainstorming exercises should allow for team members to not be shy about generating ideas even if, on the surface, an idea might not be viable. Someone else might take that idea and adjust it to come up with something better. Team leaders should prompt each team member at meetings for ideas.

10. Acknowledge differences in team members

Each team member will bring different strengths to the table. Differences in team members' experience, age, education, work ethic, etc. should help the team, not hinder it.

11. Schedule/Format of the meetings

Agree on the format and timing of the meetings early as well as the length of each meeting. There should be an agenda for each meeting and you should also decide how frequently the teams need to meet. Meeting too frequently or too infrequently can have negative effects on the team.

12. Team members should be competent

Each member of the team should be competent in the specific skill set that is useful for the team. They should also be experienced enough with the organization to anticipate problems with implementing ideas generated by the team.

13. Ensure appropriate training

The members of the team should either be already trained in their areas relevant to the group or should be trained before or during their involvement with the team.

14. Take minutes

Ensure that someone is appointed to take minutes and distribute to team members on a timely basis.

15. Create sub-groups

If there are too many members on a team or if there are too many inherent projects as part of a bigger objective, it might be better to create subgroups and assign team leaders to each of those sub-groups. Perhaps you may only need the sub-groups meeting regularly and then have the team leaders of the sub-groups meet periodically to share updates instead of having everyone meet all at one time.

16. Empower the team to make decisions

Give the team the power to make decisions or implement recommendations that come from the team, or make it clear what decisions need to be approved by upper management. Encourage the team to take risks as well as think outside the box to come up with ideas.

17. Stay focused

Ensure the team stays focused on the objectives. Regularly review what the original purpose of the team was and be flexible to change direction if necessary. The team leader and all members should be responsible for making sure the team stays focused on goals.

18. Use Technology

Use technology to improve the efficiency of the team. Perhaps meeting virtually such as via skype or using telephone conferencing can be more efficient than trying to get everyone to meet in person. Also, minutes and project updates can be uploaded to your organization's shared networks so anyone can access at any time, especially if someone missed a meeting.

19. Reward the team

Team leaders and/or management should reward the team for meeting their objectives or upon reaching certain stages.

Conclusion

When set up and managed properly, teams can be an excellent way to generate ideas to improve organizations or come up with solutions to difficult issues. Make sure to follow the tips noted above to maximize the use of teams.

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