Creating High-Performance Teams

Larry Inks
Department of Management and Human Resources
Today’s Session

• A Simple Question About Teams
• High-Performance Teams
• Leadership and Team Alignment
• Team Member Effectiveness: A Deeper Dive
• Building a Strong and Effective Team
Some Characteristics of Effective Teams

• Clearly defined roles, responsibilities, norms and values
• Clear expectations related to how members will interact/collaborate
• Ability to effectively manage conflict without losing sight of the goal(s)
• Trust in other members of the team, the team as a whole, etc.
• Clearly understood decision making processes, procedures, etc.
• Clear communication in all directions
• Willingness to openly deal with issues re: productivity, etc.
• Accountability and candor re: individual and team performance
• ?
If we have such a solid and complete understanding as to what makes teams successful, why are there so many unsuccessful teams?
Larson and LaFasto (1989) evaluated 30 “high-performance” teams, including, among others:

- Boeing 747 Project team
- IBM PC Development team
- Mt. Everest Expedition team
- CDC Epidemiology teams
- Presidential Cabinet teams
- Challenger Disaster Commission

*Research yielded eight dimensions related to team effectiveness*
Eight Dimensions of Team Effectiveness

1) A Clear, Elevating Goal
2) Results-Driven Structure
3) Competent Team Members
4) Unified Commitment
5) A Collaborative Climate
6) Standards of Excellence
7) External Support and Recognition
8) Principled Leadership
Expectations of High-Performance Team Leaders

1) Not compromising the team’s objectives with political issues
2) Exhibiting personal commitment to the team’s goals
3) Not diluting the team’s efforts with too many priorities
4) Being fair and impartial toward all team members
5) Being willing to confront and resolve issues associated with inadequate performance by team members
6) Being open to new ideas and information from team members

These principles could be applied to team leaders at all levels
A Simple Team Alignment Process

1. Identification of Strategic Objectives
2. Team Working Session
3. Draft Initial Individual Objectives
4. Team Validation Discussion

Flow:
- Identification of Strategic Objectives → Team Working Session → Draft Initial Individual Objectives → Team Validation Discussion
- Team Validation Discussion → Identification of Strategic Objectives
# Accountability/Priority Alignment Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Priorities</th>
<th>Team Member 1</th>
<th>Team Member 2</th>
<th>Team Member 3</th>
<th>Team Member 4</th>
<th>Team Member 5</th>
<th>Team Member 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Priority 1)</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Priority 2)</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Priority 3)</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Priority 4)</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Priority 5)</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Priority 6)</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
<td>~~~~~~~~~~~~~</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Process Can Repeat in Top-Down Cascade

Tier 1 Team
- Identification of Strategic Objectives
- Team Working Session
- Draft Initial Individual Objectives
- Team Validation Discussion

Tier 2 Team
- Identification of Strategic Objectives
- Team Working Session
- Draft Initial Individual Objectives
- Team Validation Discussion

Tier 3 Team
- Identification of Strategic Objectives
- Team Working Session
- Draft Initial Individual Objectives
- Team Validation Discussion
What Makes An Effective Team Member?

- Additional empirical work by Frank LaFasto and Carl Larson
- Based on 15,000 assessments of team members by their teammates
- Two basic questions asked:
  1) What strengths does this person bring to the team?
  2) What could this person do to contribute more to the team’s success?
- Analyses indicated six distinct factors that distinguish effective from ineffective team members (in two separate categories)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working Knowledge Factors</th>
<th>Teamwork</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Experience</td>
<td>- Openness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Problem-Solving Ability</td>
<td>- Supportiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Action Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Personal Style</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Working Knowledge” Factors

Experience
- Understands business issues
- Has an appropriate technical background
- Demonstrates a realistic understanding of his/her role
- Keeps the “big picture” in perspective

Problem Solving Ability
- Has a clear direction of the problem and expectations for solving it
- Seeks input from others
- Demonstrates objective and fact-based judgments
- Shares information with others as appropriate and in a timely manner
- Is decisive
“Teamwork” Factors

Openness
- Surfaces issues rather than ignoring them
- Candid and open in discussions
- Listens to others’ input
- Open-minded

Supportiveness
- Stands behind and supports team decisions
- Encourages others and makes it “safe” for them to contribute
- Provides help to others when needed
- Actively helps the team vs. withholding effort
- Adaptable to changing team needs
- Does not let ego or need for control “get in the way” of performance
“Teamwork Factors” (cont.)

Action Orientation
• Has a clear bias for action
• Is persistent in the face of a challenge
• Likes being involved
• Willing to take calculated risks
• Seeks out and takes personal accountability
• Has high standards for excellence

Personal Style
• Has an engaging and energizing style
• Warm and approachable style
• Optimistic about the future rather than cynical
• Focused on others rather than just himself/herself
• Level-headed and rational
• Is fun and relaxing to work with vs. being someone who creates tension
How to Build a Strong and Effective Team

• Communicate high performance standards
• Set the tone in the first meeting(s)
• Create a sense of urgency and importance of the team
• Make sure members have the right skills—selection is key!
• Establish clear rules/norms for team behavior and model them as a leader
• Find ways to create and communicate early “successes”
• Give positive feedback and reward high performance
• Focus on building group cohesiveness
Team Building

- A process designed to improve teamwork and increase group cohesiveness
- Can be used within and/or across groups

Different Approaches to Team Building

- Single event/discussion (e.g., during a staff meeting)
- Recreational activity (e.g., bowling, sporting event, etc.)
- Low-key offsite (e.g., combining recreation and focused discussion)
- Intensive offsite experiences (e.g., use of surveys, intense discussion)
- Outdoor experience (e.g., Outward Bound)

Think **carefully** about your goals when planning a team building event
Summary Thoughts on Team Building

• Most people hate the thought of team building, but can “get into it” once it’s started

• Make sure people know why they’re involved in team building

• Know your audience and incorporate that into your choice of activities

• Be able to show a clear linkage between the team building activities and the important issues

• Remember that the debrief is a critical element of team building… without it, people may have few meaningful “takeaways”

• Ensure you’ve got visible, enthusiastic support from leaders

• Think strategically; it may require time and multiple events/activities
• Our different social styles allow for an engaging and productive work environment, but versatility and inclusion are crucial.

• Effective high-performance teams have their own special character and characteristics on which we need to continue to focus.

• Tools, systems and processes will only get us so far; the rest comes from a true focus on, and dedication to, a team discipline.

• Each of us has roles and responsibilities as both a team member and a team leader…both are vitally important.

• The most effective teams are those with a continuous improvement mindset, that continually ask “how can we be even better?”

• Teams improve to the extent that each person values improvement.