

## *Creating Highly Effective Teams*

**“A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.” - *The Wisdom of Teams***

**Small Number:** Why is a small number important? Because large numbers of people - by virtue of their size - have trouble interacting constructively as a group, much less agreeing on actionable specifics. Ten people are far more likely than fifty to successfully work through their individual, functional, and hierarchical differences toward a common plan and hold themselves jointly accountable for the results. One real team in the midst of a large group will influence overall group performance more effectively than any number of mission or teamwork statements.

**Complimentary Skills:** Teams must develop the right mix of skills, that is, each of the complementary skills necessary to do the team's job. These team skill requirements fall into three categories: Technical or functional expertise; problem-solving and decision-making skills; interpersonal skills. While common sense tells us that it is a mistake to ignore skills when selecting a team - a team cannot get started without a minimum complement of skills - most teams don't have all the needed skills at the outset, hence the power of teams as vehicles for personal learning and development.

## **Committed to a Common Purpose and Performance**

**Goals:** A team's purpose and performance goals go together. Indeed, we have yet to find a real team without both. A common, meaningful purpose sets the tone and aspiration of the team. Most teams shape their purpose in response to a demand or opportunity put in their path, usually by management. Specific performance goals are an integral part of the purpose, and the combination is essential to performance. A team's purpose and specific performance goals have a symbiotic relationship; each depends on the other to stay relevant and vital. The specific performance goals help a team track progress and hold itself accountable; the broader, even nobler aspirations in a team's purpose supply both meaning and emotional energy.

**Committed to a Common Approach:** Teams also need to develop a common approach - that is, how they will work together to accomplish their purpose. Team members must agree on who will do particular jobs, how schedules will be set and adhered to, what skills need to be developed, how continuing membership is to be earned, and how the group will make and modify decisions, including when and how to modify its approach to getting the job done.

**Mutual Accountability:** No group ever becomes a team until it can hold itself accountable as a team. At its core, team accountability is about the sincere promises we make to ourselves and others, promises that underpin two critical aspects of teams: commitment and trust. Whenever people do real work together toward a common objective, trust and commitment follow.

**Conclusion:** Teams do not spring up by magic, nor does personal chemistry matter as much as most people believe. Focusing on performance - not chemistry or togetherness or good communications or good feelings - shapes teams more than anything else.

“Most potential teams can become real teams, but not without taking risks involving conflict, trust, interdependence, and hard work. For example, a common team purpose, set of performance goals, and approach rarely arise without conflict. Indeed, quite the contrary -- the most successful teams recognize their members' conflicting views and experiences as a source of strength.

Similarly, mutual accountability requires trust and interdependence, which usually do not grow without risk taking. And, finally, most potential teams include members who must develop the skills needed by the team after they have joined the team itself. This, too, implies risks and hard work for everyone on the team.”

- *"The Wisdom Of Teams"*  
by Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith

## *Questions for Your Team*

from *The Wisdom of Teams* by Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith

*Answering these questions can establish the degree to which your group functions as a real team, as well as help pinpoint how you can strengthen your efforts to increase performance.*

**Food for thought as you answer these questions:** Strong interpersonal commitments drive a number of aspects that distinguish high-performance teams.

Fueled by interpersonal commitments, team purposes become even nobler, team performance goals more urgent, and team approach more powerful. The notion, for example, that “if one of us fails, we all fail” pervades high-performance teams.

In addition, mutual concern for each other’s personal growth enable high-performance teams to develop interchangeable skills and hence greater flexibility. High performance teams also share leadership within the team more than other teams,

And, not insignificantly, high-performance teams seem to have a better developed sense of humor and more fun.

## **1. Small enough in number:**

- a. Can you convene easily and frequently?
- b. Can you communicate with all members easily and frequently?
- c. Are your discussions open and interactive for all members?
- d. Does each member understand the others' roles and skills?
- e. Do you need more people to achieve your ends?
- f. Are sub-teams possible or necessary?

## **2. Adequate levels of complementary skills:**

- a. Are all three categories of skills either actually or potentially represented across the membership (functional/technical, problem-solving/decision-making and interpersonal)?
- b. Does each member have the potential in all three categories to advance his or her skills to the level required by the team's purpose and goals?
- c. Are any skill areas that are critical to team performance missing or underrepresented?
- d. Are the members, individually and collectively, willing to spend the time to help themselves and others learn and develop skills?
- e. Can you introduce new or supplemental skills as needed?

### **3. Truly meaningful purpose:**

- a. Does it constitute a broader, deeper aspiration than just near-term goals?
- b. Is it a *team* purpose as opposed to a broader organizational purpose or just one individual's purpose (e.g., the leader's)?
- c. Do all members understand and articulate it the same way? And do they do so without relying on ambiguous abstractions?
- d. Do members define it vigorously in discussions with outsiders?
- e. Do members frequently refer to it and explore its implications?
- f. Does it contain themes that are particularly meaningful and memorable?
- g. Do members feel it is important, if not exciting?

### **4. Specific goal or goals:**

- a. Are they *team* goals versus broader organizational goals or just one individual's goals (e.g., the leader's)?
- b. Are they clear, simple, and measurable? If not measurable, can their achievement be determined?
- c. Are they realistic as well as ambitious? Do they allow small wins along the way?
- d. Do they call for a concrete set of team work-products?

- e. Is their relative importance and priority clear to all members?
- f. Do all members agree with the goals, their relative importance, and the way in which their achievement will be measured?
- g. Do all members articulate the goals in the same way?

**5. Clear working approach:**

- a. Is the approach concrete, clear and really understood and agreed to by everyone? Will it result in achievement of the objectives?
- b. Will it capitalize on and enhance the skills of all members? Is it consistent with other demands on the members?
- c. Does it require all members to contribute equivalent amounts of real work?
- d. Does it provide for open interactions, fact-based problem solving, and results-based evaluation?
- e. Do all members articulate the approach in the same way?
- f. Does it provide for modification and improvement over time?
- g. Are fresh input and perspectives systematically sought and added, for example, through information and analysis, new members, and senior sponsors?

**6. Sense of mutual accountability:**

- a. Are you individually and jointly accountable for the team's purpose, goals, approach, and work-products?
- b. Can you and do you measure progress against specific goals?
- c. Do all members feel responsible for all measures?
- d. Are the members clear on what they are individually responsible for and what they are jointly responsible for?
- e. Is there a sense that "only the team can fail"?

**Questions?  
Comments?**

Given what you learned today, is your team highly effective?

If not, what changes can you make to increase its effectiveness?