5

CHANGE

Devising More Effective Ways of Working Together

The last "C" in our model refers to *change*, the key meta-competency in our model. High-performing teams not only understand what is impeding their performance but are able to take corrective action to achieve their goals. *Team building* refers to the activities in which a team can engage to change its context, composition, or team competencies to improve performance. In this chapter we will discuss (1) the common problems found in teams and how to diagnose those problems, (2) how to determine whether the team itself can solve its problems or whether a consultant is needed, and (3) the basic elements of a team-building program.

Common Problems Found in Teams

Usually a team-building program is undertaken when a concern, problem, issue, or set of symptoms leads the manager or other members of the team to believe that the effectiveness of the team is not up to par. The following symptoms or conditions usually provoke serious thought or remedial action:

- Loss of production or team output
- A continued unexplained increase in costs
- Increase of grievances or complaints from the team
- Complaints from users or customers about quality of service
- Evidence of conflicts or hostility among team members

At times conformity may represent true acceptance of the leader's position. But at other times it may simply represent avoidance of conflict. A leader who is surrounded by people who are dependent on him or her eliminates any possible conflict but also eliminates the richness of diverse opinion. Or the team members may have learned over time that conformity is the best strategy and may now automatically go along with whatever the leader suggests instead of making their own suggestions. At other times, conformity may represent passive resistance. People may agree with the leader publicly but privately resent and resist. Resistance may take subtle forms, such as avoiding the leader or ignoring or never fully implementing the leader's decisions.

Another type of consequence is overt resistance—openly fighting or resisting what the leader wants. In this type of situation, ordinary problem-solving procedures have been abandoned, and a struggle ensues whenever the leader gets together with team members. Or the struggle may go underground, and although on the surface the interaction seems compatible, heavy infighting is going on behind the scenes.

Some superiors try to manage subordinates and the possibility of resistance by assuming a very strong authoritarian stance. The authoritarian leader demands obedience and uses a variety of control methods, both formal and informal, to influence behavior. People who are threatened by authority or who are used to high controls tend to become conforming. Those who do not accept authoritarian processes become resistant, either openly or under cover.

Other difficulties arise from a lack of trust. Team members may not trust the leader to give them honest information, represent them honestly, keep confidences, or carry through on promises. When trust is low, team members try to protect themselves. They are very guarded in what they say and are very suspicious of decisions and promises of action. Lack of trust between the leader and team members was a core problem in John Smith's team described in Chapter One. In fact, the trust level was so low between John Smith and his team that team members refused to meet with him

Figure 5.1. Team-Building Checklist.

I. Problem Identification: To what extent is there evidence of the following problems in your team?

	Low Evidence		*Some Evidence*		*High Evidence*
1. Loss of production or output	1	2	3	4	5
2. Grievances or complaints within the team	1	2	3	4	5
3. Conflicts or hostility among team members	1	2	3	4	5
4. Confusion about assignments or unclear relationships between people	1	2	3	4	5
5. Lack of clear goals or low commitment to goals	1	2	3	4	5
6. Apathy or general lack of interest or involvement of team members	1	2	3	4	5
7. Lack of innovation, risk taking, imagination, or initiative	1	2	3	4	5
8. Ineffective meetings	1	2	3	4	5
9. Problems in working with the boss	1	2	3	4	5
10. Poor communications: people afraid to speak up, not listening to one another, or not talking together	1	2	3	4	5
11. Lack of trust between leader and members or among team members	1	2	3	4	5
12. People not understanding or agreeing with decisions	1	2	3	4	5
13. People feeling that good work is not recognized or rewarded	1	2	3	4	5
14. People not encouraged to work together in better team effort	1	2	3	4	5

Continued

reward systems, or even the resources available to get teamwork done. These changes are initiated at a "kickoff" meeting and continue through the next several months or years while the group learns to function more effectively as a team. The philosophy one should have about team building is the same as the philosophy behind *kaizen* or continuous improvement—the job is never done because there are always new "bottlenecks" to improved team performance.

The team-development process often starts with a block of time devoted to helping the group look at its current level of team functioning and devise more effective ways of working together. This initial sequence of data sharing, diagnosis, and action planning takes time and should not be crammed into a couple of hours. Ideally, the members of the work group should plan to meet for at least one full day, and preferably two days, for the initial program. A common format is to meet for dinner, have an evening session, and then meet all the next day or for whatever length of time has been set aside.

Most team-building facilitators prefer to have a longer block of time (up to three days) to begin a team-development program. This may not be practical in some situations, and modifications must be made. Since we are thinking of team development as an ongoing process, it is possible to start with shorter amounts of time regularly scheduled over a period of several weeks. Some teams have successfully conducted a program that opened with an evening meeting followed by a two- to four-hour meeting each week for the next several weeks. Commitment to the process, regular attendance, high involvement, and good use of time are all more important than length of time.

It is customary to hold the initial team-development program away from the worksite. The argument for this is that if people meet at the work location, they will find it difficult to "turn off" their day-to-day concerns in order to concentrate fully on the goals of the program. This argument is compelling, even though there is little research evidence about the effect of the location on learning and change. Most practitioners do prefer to have development programs at a location where they can have people's full time and attention.

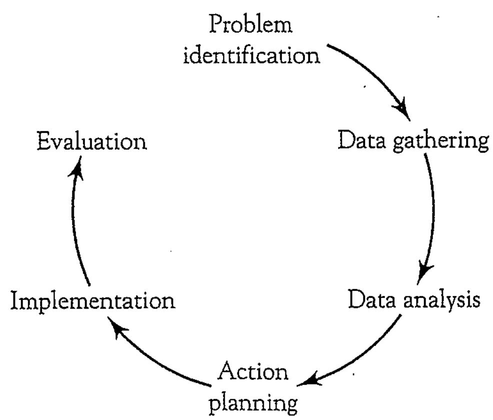
team development without the assistance of the consultant or with minimal help.

The Team-Building Cycle

Ordinarily a team-building program follows a cycle similar to that depicted in Figure 5.2. The program begins because someone recognizes a problem or problems. Either before or during the team-building effort, data are gathered to determine the root causes of the problem. The data are then analyzed, and a diagnosis is made of what is wrong and what is causing the problem. After the diagnosis, the team engages in appropriate planning and problem solving. Actions are planned and assignments made. The plans are then put into action and the results honestly evaluated.

Sometimes there is no clear, obvious problem. The concern is then to *identify* or find the problems that are present but hidden and their underlying causes. One still gathers and analyzes the data, identifies the problems and the causes, and then moves to action planning. The manager and the consultant work together in carrying out the program from the time the problem has been identified through some form of evaluation.

Figure 5.2. The Team-Building Cycle.



this chapter and the team maturity scale (Figure 4.2) are helpful surveys to gather data about a team.

Interviews. At times a consultant can perform a useful service by interviewing the members of the team. While the manager or team leader could conduct such interviews, in most cases team members will be more open in sharing data with someone from outside the team. The consultant tries to determine the causes behind the problem(s) in order to pinpoint those conditions that may need to be changed or improved. In these interviews the consultant often asks the following questions:

1. Why is this team having the kinds of problems it has?
2. What keeps you personally from being as effective as you would like to be?
3. What things do you like best about the team?
4. What changes would make the team more effective?
5. How could this team begin to work more effectively together?

Following the interviews, the consultant frequently does a content analysis of the interviews, identifies the major themes or suggestions that emerge, and prepares a summary presentation. At the team-building meeting the consultant presents the summary, and the team, under the manager's direction, analyzes the data and plans actions to deal with the major concerns.

Some consultants prefer not to conduct interviews prior to the team-building meeting and do not want to present a data summary. They have found that information shared in a private interview with a consultant is not as readily discussed in the open, with all other team members present, especially if some of those members have been the object of some of the interview information. Consultants have painfully discovered that people often deny their own interviews, fight the data, and refuse to use it as a basis for discussion and planning. At times it may be appropriate for the consultant to cuss barriers to effective team functioning that may exist in the other three Cs: team context, team composition, or team relationship and task competencies.

The kinds of questions suggested for the interview format are the same ones that people share openly at the beginning of the team-building session. Each presents his or her views on what keeps the team from being as effective as it could be or suggests reasons for a particular problem. Each person also describes the things he or she likes about the team, those things that hinder personal effectiveness, and the changes he or she feels would be helpful. All of the data are compiled on a flip chart or whiteboard. (In another variation, data for a large team could be gathered and shared in subgroups.) Then the group moves on to the next stage of the team-building cycle.

Diagnosis and Analysis of Data

With all of the data now available, the manager and the consultant must work with the team to summarize the data and put the information into a priority listing. The following summary categories could be used:

A. Issues that we can work on in this meeting
B. Issues that someone else must work on (and identify who the others would be)
C. Issues that apparently are not open to change; that is, things we must learn to accept or live with

Category A items become the top agenda items for the rest of the team-building session. Category B items are those for which strategies must be developed for involving others. For category C items the group must develop coping mechanisms. If the manager is prepared, he or she can handle the summary and sort the data into these three categories. If the manager feels uneasy about this, the consultant may function as a role model to show how this is done.

that is the basis of evaluation. It is important to see if the actions planned or the goals developed during the team-building sessions have been achieved. This again ultimately should be the responsibility of the manager, but the consultant can help train the manager to carry out good program evaluation.

The manager and the consultant should work closely together in any team-development effort. It is ineffective for the manager to turn the whole effort over to the consultant with the plea, "You're the expert. Why don't you do it for me?" Such action leads to a great deal of dependence on the consultant, and, if the consultant is highly effective, it can cause the manager to feel inadequate or even more dependent. If the consultant is ineffective, the manager can then reject the plans developed as being unworkable or useless, and the failure of the team-building program is blamed on the consultant. Managers must take responsibility for the team-building program, and consultants must work with managers to help them plan and take action in unfamiliar areas in which the manager may need to develop the skills required to be successful.

The consultant must be honest, aggressively forthright, and sensitive. He or she must be able to help the manager look at his or her own style and impact in either facilitating or hindering team effectiveness. The consultant needs to help group members get important data out in the open and keep them from feeling threatened for sharing with others. The consultant's role involves helping the group develop skills in group problem solving and planning. To do this the consultant must have a good feel for group processes and be able to help the group look at its own dynamics. Finally, the consultant must feel a sense of pride and accomplishment when the manager and the team demonstrate their ability to solve problems independently and thus no longer need a consultant's services.

In summary, the ability of a team to diagnose its own problems and initiate change is perhaps the distinguishing feature of high-performing teams. In this chapter, we have suggested that managing effective change in teams requires the following: