

## WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL TEAM?

Anita L. Reichling

ITT Automotive - Electrical Systems North America



Anita L. Reichling is the Value Engineer for ITT Automotive Electrical Systems North America group, manufacturers of automotive systems utilizing fractional horsepower motors and actuators. She has degrees in Electrical Engineering and Engineering Management from GMI Engineering & Management Institute and the University of Dayton respectively. Anita first became interested in Value Management (VM) when she was a member of a product improvement VM team. She transferred to the VM department in 1992.

---

### ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the importance of team concepts to the VM process, and the steps which are necessary to ensure successful team development. Six steps integral to team development are outlined.

---

### Introduction

Team building is "a movement away from the traditional, top-down, boss-centered, decision-making culture to a bottom-up, employee-centered culture of true empowerment" (Stoner and Hartman, 1993). Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith, in their book, *The Wisdom of Teams (1993)*, define a team as "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable". Organizations that develop a team building process must have distinct objectives for the process to be a success.

The VM process has always worked on the premise that input from all of a project's stake holders is necessary for success. It has only been in the last 5 to 10 years that industry and government in the United States have embraced the team concept for daily use. VM is an obvious tool for a natural work group to use in their daily business. Applying VM to the

business of a team is an excellent way to either kick off a new team, or focus an existing team to solve a problem.

Team development is very applicable to VM. If the VM participants are part of a natural work group, they will come into the workshop with different perspectives and backgrounds than if they are not members of a natural work group. It is important that the facilitator understand the relationship of the workshop participants to best lead the workshop. The approach a team will take to deal with a problem will be determined by the type of team which exists. There are different types of teams based on different levels of team involvement and outcome goals. Four types can be easily identified. (1) The problem identification team brings collective issues of concern to management. (2) The participative team identifies problems and presents solutions to management. (3) The problem solving team extends the decision capacity of the team and empowers the team to make its own decisions and implement its own action in a specific problem area. (4) The self directed team is autonomous to carry out a range of work responsibilities. The VM process can be used successfully by all four types of teams.

Successful team building is a long-term process. It does not happen overnight. The formal team-building process may take 12 to 24 months for the members to become fully integrated and begin working at an optimum level. An effective team starts small and continually learns and adjusts to grow. The following six steps are needed to form a successful team: (1) selecting members, (2)

educating and training the members, (3) creating cooperation, (4) motivating the members, (5) communicating within the team, and (6) leadership.

### Selecting Members

The first step in forming a team is membership selection. Team members can range between 2 and 25 people; however, the ideal team size is between 7 and 10 members. Team members should have a variety of backgrounds, skills, areas of expertise, and perspectives. Personality tests like the Myers-Briggs can be used to help select team members. The information from the personality test will help management and members to better understand themselves and each other. VM can be used to define the goals, scope, and expectations of the team. With this knowledge, more effective team members can be selected who can work successfully together as a team. Variety is necessary in talents, perspectives, and expertise to ensure proper resources to define and understand the problems and make balanced decisions.

The ideal team member shows commitment, cooperates, communicates, and contributes. According to Gene Swindell, a trainer on team building, it usually takes 30 to 45 days to form a work team. After the team is formed, a trial period of at least three to four months is needed before the work group begins to integrate into an effective team.

### Educating and Training the Members

Team training is critical to create understanding in employees assigned in a variety of company departments. The team leader and the members must be trained so they understand their roles and responsibilities. Again this is an area where VM can be used. Using a VM workshop to kick off a new program is an excellent way to quickly bring all team members up to speed on the project. Training also involves educating members on interpersonal skills, problem-solving and decision-making skills, listening skills, conflict management, and assertiveness skills. In extreme situations when individuals are unable to serve as effective team members, they may have to be replaced. Team building helps individuals work together to accept and utilize conflict.

### Creating Cooperation

Cooperation begins by defining the team's mission, forming goals, defining a scope, and choosing a best decision-making style. All team members should be involved in each activity to discuss and reach agreement on appropriate approaches and roles. Bargaining between team members and management may be involved to resolve conflicts. Team members must learn to trust each other and constructively work out their conflicts.

Before a team can successfully work together, the members must develop into a cohesive group. This development progresses along a well defined path. COG's Ladder illustrates this progression in five steps. (1) *Polite Stage* - members are getting acquainted and sharing values during this stage. Hidden agendas are kept secret. (2) *Why Are We Here? Stage* - the group defines objectives and sets specific and general goals. At this time a leader is chosen and the meeting is called to order. (3) *Bid for Power Stage* - attempts are made to influence group thought and conflict is unresolved. Cliques are formed and very little active listening occurs. (4) *Constructive Stage* - attitudes change among members and the opinions of others are openly considered. Trust is finally building between members and conflicts are resolved on a win/win basis. Goals are met. (5) *Esprit de Corps Stage* - team shows high unity and high spirits. The team achieves more than expected. At this stage there is total acceptance of members and group identity is very important.

The following three guidelines will help foster cooperation amongst team members. (1) The role the team wants to address should be clearly described. (2) The team members must describe their perception of the effect the given role has on the team and its efforts. (3) Individual members must reinforce and support other members' roles. It is important that individual members work in the best interest of the team instead of in the interest of their own goals and egos.

### Motivating the Members

One key to forming a successful team is to motivate the members to work hard and to

enjoy the work. A basis for motivation is to reward the team members for their contribution to the organization. The rewards may be money, publicity, time off, flex time, or recognition.

Project deadlines can also motivate teams. The project should be broken down into specific steps and deadlines assigned. These steps will lead the team from the beginning of the project to a successful completion. The specifically defined steps make the project manageable and the deadlines ensure productivity. One other advantage to breaking the project into steps is that the progress of the program can be evaluated at each step and corrections in direction can be made.

### Communication

Information exchange is important to the team building process. Ideas, news, feedback, and obstacles should be shared between team members and management. Members must be aware of what is expected of them in terms of work quality, deliverables, and hours of work effort. Members must also know the specific procedures for initiating contacts, documenting information exchanges, and reporting progress. It is necessary for all members to participate in meetings where project ideas are discussed and tasks are assigned.

Because team members come from different areas of the company and are possibly based at different locations, face to face team interaction becomes more difficult to coordinate. Alternatives exist that permit interaction, debate, and consensus without arranging a meeting. Technologically enhanced communication makes this possible through teleconferencing, faxing, electronic mail, etc. Although daily face to face meetings do not have to take place, direct team contact should occur regularly. When team members are brought together for a meeting, the meeting must have an agenda and defined time limits to proceed in a constructive manner.

### Leadership

A team leader who can communicate and coordinate action in a coherent way is needed to have an effective team. Teams that do not have a strong leader will lose sight of their objectives. An effective team leader is an individual that has a vision, clear goals, willingness to work

horizontally, a good sense of the marketplace, the ability to adapt to variables, and good communication skills. The team leader must also have a long term commitment to the success of the team. A successful team leader will make an effort to build leadership skills in others within the group and share leadership responsibilities among members.

### Summary

Team building is an ongoing, developmental process that requires input from a variety of people. It begins with a distinct objective. This is where VM is valuable in either setting up a project team or defining the frame work which the team will work within. Once an objective is clearly defined, the six steps of team building can be used to develop a successful team. They include (1) Selecting members that have a variety of backgrounds. (2) Educating and training the members to understand their roles and responsibilities. (3) Creating cooperation by involving all members in the decision making process. (4) Motivating the members through rewards. (5) Communication within the team by making sure information is shared and each member knows what is expected individually and as a team. Finally, (6) a strong and sharing leadership among the members is necessary to have an effective, long term team. A productive team strives to maximize its potential and requires much work. A successful team combines the strengths and experiences of each member to produce a stronger whole.

### References

- Braham, James, "Building a Winning Team," *Machine Design*. 12/10/93. pp. 74-80.
- Davidson, J.P., "A Task-Focused Approach to Team Building," *Personnel*. 3/85. pp. 16-18.
- Eckerson, Wayne, "Training in Team Building Critical to Complex Projects," *Network World*. 10/90. pp. 23-24.
- Flores, Fernando, "Team Building and Leadership," *Supervisory Management*. 4/92. pp. 8.

Hall, Stephen, "Building a Team for Design Projects," *Chemical Engineering*. 9/90 pp. 189-196.

Hughes, Keith, "A Manager's Guide to the Art of Team Building," *Security Management*. 11/93. pp. 20-21.

Hartman, Richard and Charles Stoner, "Team Building: Answering the Tough Questions," *Business Horizons*. 9/93. pp. 70-78.

Kazemek, Edward, "Ten Criteria for Effective Team Building," *Healthier Financial Management*. 9/91. pp. 15.