

A P P E N D I X **A**

Effective Teamwork

It's easy to get the players. Getting 'em to play together is the hard part.

—Casey Stengel

As soon as you begin to think about doing an improvement project, you need to think about who will be involved and how the work will get done. Working in teams is the most effective way to do such work, both in the classroom and in the business world. In class projects, teams bring different interests and skills to the problem, as well as reduce the amount of work to be done by students and instructors alike. Simply put, better projects are produced by teams. But as Casey Stengel (Hall of Fame manager of the New York Yankees) points out, it's not easy to get teams to work together.

People in any organization will be a part of many teams, both formal and informal, throughout their careers. It is rare that a piece of work is successfully completed by a single individual working alone and without interacting with anyone. When teams are appropriate, the work gets done more quickly with higher quality. This appendix provides general suggestions to increase the probability that teams will be successful. For more detailed information on effective teams, see the references at the end of this appendix.

BENEFITS OF USING TEAMS

Effective teamwork provides significant benefits to both the organization and the individual team members. The organization gets a complete entity that collectively has all the knowledge and skills needed to improve the process. Thus an effective team can often make fundamental, lasting process improvement, rather than just pushing the problem from one department to another—as often happens without effective teams. The individuals also benefit by learning from fellow team members about other aspects of the process or better

approaches to problem solving and process improvement. The pooling of information may eliminate long-standing headaches in organizational processes that individuals have been unable to solve on their own.

When forming a team, consider what each team member will get out of the project and how the organization will benefit. Team members may want to know “What’s in it for me?” In a healthy organization, however, problem solving and process improvement will be considered part of the job and not “extra work” (see Chapter 1). Teams are most productive when all team members get something significant out of the effort. New experiences, new skills, new acquaintances/friends, broader responsibility, and leadership experience—as well as financial rewards—are benefits that often accrue from working on teams.

WHEN TO USE A TEAM

Of course, forming a team is not always the best approach. Some activities, such as writing poetry or a novel, are best done by individuals. Rarely has a great work of art been produced by a team. A team should be used in any situation in which no single person has the collective knowledge, skills, and experience needed to get the job done effectively in the desired time frame. Following are key issues that identify when a team is needed.

When to Use a Team

- The task is complex.
- Creative ideas are needed.
- The problem crosses functions.
- Broad buy-in is needed.
- Implementation involves many people.
- The issue is controversial.
- The path forward is unclear.

A team should not be used when one person can do the job, unless the objective is to give employees new experiences. People may ask to be on a team if they feel that their views will not be adequately represented by the current members of the team. In other cases, everyone may wish to join the team working on a “hot” project. One company paid employees a bonus depending on how many teams they joined. Predictably, the result was a proliferation of large teams—which typically do not work well. Success results when the team is small and includes a mechanism to see that all relevant views are heard.

In major projects, such as building a new facility, a “core team” might oversee the entire project, while numerous other teams work on individual tasks associated with the project. The core team’s job is to ensure that each individual team is working toward the same common objective—that is, to ensure

overall “system optimization” versus functional suboptimization within each team (see Chapter 3). This tiered structure of teams allows major projects to be accomplished with fairly small teams.

FORMING A TEAM

Business process improvement is typically a team activity because different groups are involved and are affected, requiring different backgrounds and skills to make the needed improvements. Rarely is one person the expert on the entire business process. Student projects work best with two to four members; three is an ideal team size. Student teams that form naturally, such as among existing friends or those in the same department or housing, work well. When this is not possible, the instructor provides guidance on team formation as well as the topic on which the team should work. Topic selection is discussed in the next section.

In the business world, teams of four to six people work best. Teams that include more than six people often slow the improvement process: It becomes difficult to get the entire team together for meetings, and consensus is typically harder to achieve. Sometimes purely volunteer teams are used. In general, this is not a good practice because management support is required to get the needed personnel, time, and funds allocated. The makeup of the team should be based on the problem to be addressed and on the skills and knowledge that will be required to get the job done.

SELECTING TEAM PROJECTS

A team can be doomed to failure by selecting an inappropriate project. For example, often teams select a problem scope or objective that is much too large for them to actually accomplish in a reasonable amount of time. Such projects are often referred to sarcastically as trying to “solve world hunger” or “boil the ocean.” Careful thought needs to go into selection of the improvement project itself, to give the team a chance to succeed.¹

For student projects, where we may select the team prior to selecting the project, some key criteria for the project are:

- Topic is of interest to all team members.
- Situation can actually be affected by the team.
- Scope can be completed in allotted time.
- Data are available in allotted time.
- Issue is important—people who are *not* team members care about it.

In short, good projects are important, doable, and relatable in that they have significant benefit to other than the team members, can be completed in the allotted time, and their significance can be understood by others.

A written proposal for the project should be submitted to the instructor for approval prior to beginning the project. In the business world, projects are generally selected first, and then team members identified. It is hard to pick the right team if we don't know what problem we are addressing. Projects that can be completed in 3 to 6 months work best. Longer projects often drag on too long, with little tangible benefit to show management given the staff hours used. It is important to attach a financial value to the project at an early stage so that management can determine whether the predicted benefits of the project are worth the cost of doing the project.

INGREDIENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TEAM

Scholtes, Joiner, and Streibel discuss the ingredients of a successful team. An adaptation of their model is shown below.²

Ingredients of a Successful Team

- Clear goals
- Clear roles
- Project plan
- Use of scientific methods including data
- Well-defined decision procedures
- Knowledge of the process being improved
- Problem-solving skills
- Productive team dynamics
- Clear communication
- Balanced participation
- Follow ground rules
- Group process awareness

Paying attention to these ingredients increases the probability that the team will be successful. All of these elements need to be present for success. Ignoring even one or two can greatly affect the team's success. For example, if everyone does not have the same goals, then hidden agendas, politics, and conflict are likely to result.

STAGES OF TEAM GROWTH

Teams typically go through four generic stages of growth: forming, storming, norming, and performing. The team must first form and begin to function as a team. It may take a while before team members feel comfortable

working together. As the team begins to operate together, it will likely have numerous issues to resolve (or “storm”): dominant personalities, lack of understanding of team processes, disagreement over the best approaches to use for the project, and so on. In the norming phase, the team works through these issues and starts to function effectively. By the time it has reached the performing phase, the team is functioning like a well-oiled machine. Much of the frequent resentment over working on committees and participating in team projects is due to teams that never get out of the storming phase. This is more likely if the team does not consciously focus on each of the elements of a successful team listed above. Scholtes, Joiner, and Streibel used a swimming metaphor to summarize the characteristics of each stage of team growth.³

Stages of Team Growth

- Forming
 - Hesitant swimmers
 - Standing beside the pool
 - Sticking toes in the water
 - Thinking about getting involved
- Storming
 - In the water thrashing about
 - Overwhelmed by the amount of work
 - Little time to do the work
 - Doing project work in addition to regular duties
 - Panic can set in
- Norming
 - Team members get used to working together.
 - Team members start helping each other.
 - Common spirit and goals develop.
 - Team believes that they can be successful.
- Performing
 - Team members become comfortable with each other.
 - Everyone works in concert.
 - The team becomes an effective unit.
 - They understand each other’s strengths and weaknesses.
 - There is a close attachment to the team.
 - They’re satisfied with their accomplishments.

Assessing the stage of growth that a team is in can greatly help one understand the behavior the team is exhibiting and identify ways to get the team back on the road to success. Teamwork is a process that can be studied and improved. Don’t expect your process to start out functioning perfectly.

RUNNING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

People generally dislike meetings because they take too much time and accomplish too little. These problems can be avoided, however, with appropriate meeting management techniques. Effective meetings are well designed with a purpose, set of desired outcomes, agenda, and well-defined roles, listed below:

Roles for Running Effective Meetings

- Meeting Leader
 - Is a fully participating team member
 - Sets the agenda, with input
 - Leads team through meeting agenda
 - Opens meeting
 - Opens discussion of each agenda item
 - Closes meeting
 - Is accountable for the meeting “results”
- Facilitator
 - Facilitates (means “to make easier”)
 - Is neutral—does not participate in meeting “content”
 - Helps team come to closure on each agenda item
 - Helps team choose appropriate decision methods
 - Keeps discussion focused
 - Keeps team on the agenda
 - Owns the meeting “process”
- Scribe (may also be the Note Taker)
 - Records key points and ideas on flipchart to keep discussion focused
 - Is a fully participating team member
 - Writes large and legibly
 - Is brief, using fewest words possible
 - Uses words of the speaker whenever possible (no editing)
 - Documents agreements
 - Updates action list and “parking lot” as needed
- Note Taker/Recorder
 - Is a fully participating team member
 - Keeps records of key occurrences and commitments
 - Works with team leader to develop and distribute minutes
- Timekeeper
 - Is a fully participating team member
 - Makes sure team keeps to its agenda
 - Has a clock or watch available

- Notifies meeting leader 5 to 10 minutes before a specific agenda item is due to end
- Notifies meeting leader when time has run out so team can reach consensus to adjust agenda if necessary

In small meetings these roles are sometimes combined, with the meeting leader acting as the scribe, note taker, and/or timekeeper (although taking on too many roles can result in this person dominating the meeting). The scribe sometimes also serves as the note taker/reporter. When an organization becomes more familiar with using these meeting roles, the meeting participants will often volunteer for the needed roles. A neutral facilitator is often needed to help the team get through the storming stage. Once it reaches the performing stage, this role is often dropped.

During meetings, it is helpful to have an “action list” posted to capture assignments, including action items, responsible person, and time for completion or next report. This ensures that something tangible comes out of the meeting. The next meeting typically begins with a review of the status of the action items from the last meeting. A “parking lot” is a way to capture important ideas that are off the agenda, but are nonetheless worthy of the team’s attention. The parking lot items are usually addressed at the end of the meeting. Paying attention to these roles usually results in very productive meetings and in willing participation by team members because so much useful work is accomplished. A more detailed discussion of how to run effective meetings can be found in *The Team Memory Jogger*⁴ or Doyle and Straus.⁵

DEALING WITH CONFLICT

Conflict often occurs among team members, especially in the storming stage. Some ways for dealing with conflict—from *The Team Memory Jogger*—are:⁶

Dealing with Conflict

- Avoid Conflict by Being Objective
 - Stay focused on the subject, not the people involved.
 - Try to understand the other person’s point of view.
 - Avoid judgmental and inflammatory language.
- Handling Disagreements
 - Decisions are built on a series of small agreements.
 - Work to find areas of agreement.
 - Build on areas of agreement.
 - Identify areas of agreement and disagreement.
 - Listen carefully and check for understanding.

- Dealing with Feuds
 - Keep the meeting focused on the work of the team, not the feud.
 - Recognize that a feud may have started long ago.
 - Help the team move forward in spite of the feud.
 - Work to keep the feuding parties from dominating the meeting.
 - Ensure that the feud is handled outside the meeting.

The key to avoiding conflict is to stay focused on the work of the team, listen and identify areas of agreement, and avoid personal issues—stay objective. Build on the areas of agreement, however small, that help the team be successful. Decisions are usually built on such small agreements.

Of course, people will often have differences of opinion, even if the team follows all this good advice. After all, diversity of opinion and knowledge was one of the reasons we formed a team in the first place. However, one can disagree without being disagreeable. This avoids feuds between members that become distractions to the team. Often if two knowledgeable, intelligent people disagree, different assumptions or beliefs are at the root of their disagreement. Probing for these fundamental differences may help focus the disagreement and allow the team to either make an objective decision or decide to obtain more data to resolve the assumptions.

WHY PROJECT TEAMS FAIL

The reasons for project team failure (identified by Snee, Kelleher, and Reynard from a study of more than 70 projects) are summarized below.⁷ Note that the majority of the reasons identified are management related.

Reasons for Team Failure

- Team is not supported by management.
- No champion identified.
- Champion does not meet with team.
- Project scope is too large.
- Project objectives are not significant.
- No clear measure of success is identified.
- Team is not given enough time to work on project.
- Team is too large.
- Team members have multiple agendas.
- Team is not trained.
- Data are not readily available.

Attention to these items increases the probability that your project will be successful. The ability to use teams to manage and improve an organization is

a skill that must be developed by both managers and employees. Teams require guidance, coaching, counseling, training, recognition, and reinforcement. However, successful teamwork can radically improve organizational performance and employee growth, so the effort required is well worth making.

NOTES

1. R. D. Snee, "Dealing with the Achilles Heel of Six Sigma—Project Selection Is the Key to Success," *Quality Progress* (March 2001), 66–72.
2. P. R. Scholtes, B. L. Joiner, and B. J. Streibel, *The Team Handbook*, 3rd ed. (Madison, WI: Joiner Associates, 2003).
3. Ibid.
4. GOAL/QPC & Joiner Associates, *The Team Memory Jogger* (Madison, WI: 1996).
5. M. Doyle and D. Straus, *How to Make Meetings Work* (New York: Jove Books, 1982).
6. GOAL/QPC & Joiner Associates, *The Team Memory Jogger*.
7. R. D. Snee, K. H. Kelleher, and S. Reynard, "Improving Team Effectiveness," *Quality Progress* (May 1998), 43–48.