ODyssey

Civil Service College Singapore

Dear ODyssey,

We have recently formed a change team in our organisation. How can we make our team more effective?

Yours Sincerely,
Practitioner

Making change teams more effective

by The Institute of Leadership and Organisation Development

Dear Practitioner,

DO A TEAM LAUNCH

Merely including members with expertise is not enough to foster effective team performance.

For teams to be as effective, each member in the group needs to be aware of how everyone's abilities can work together as a dynamic whole. However, such conversations rarely take place spontaneously in teams.[1]

A team launch is the solution to this challenge. Not only does the activity help clarify each member's role, it also helps teams set norms about working together.

More importantly, the launch will also help to set clear boundary lines between members and non-members. Knowing who – and who does not – "officially" belong to the team reduces miscommunication and misunderstandings.

A team leader's behavior at the launch of the team is also crucial to a team's success. Good leadership actions, like welcoming people and putting emphasis on both the task as well as human dynamics, helps cultivate a positive collective mood among team members.[2]

One key decision to make at a team launch is how the team will make decisions. For example, does the team leader have the final say, or will your team go for consensus? How do decisions get made when some of the team members are not present? The team journey will be a lot smoother when these types of agreements are made early on in the process.

A team launch can be done in four easy steps (see page 2). Going through the team launch process helps the team get on a positive trajectory, which makes subsequent team improvement interventions (e.g. reviewing team strategy, processes, and extracting learning) immeasurably easier and more effective.

---

1   Hackman, J. R., & Wageman, R. (2005). A theory of team coaching. Academy of Management Review, 30, 269-287.

2   Barsade, S. (2002). The ripple effect: Emotional contagion and its influence on group behavior. Administrative Science Quarterly, 47, 644–675.

BE AWARE OF WHICH STAGE YOUR TEAM IS AT

Teams typically go through four main stages – form, storm, norm and perform. Knowing which stage your team is at helps frame the possible interventions that you can take to improve its effectiveness.

The forming stage is one where group members start to become oriented to the task and to one another. The group members begin by defining the task, and then deciding on necessary strategies to fulfill it.

In the storming stage, members start to become aware of individual differences in thinking or working styles, which may result in friction. Though not all teams go through conflict, how your team handles conflict is important. Healthy conflict can be defined as open and respectful communication where members work to understand and resolve their differences. However, unhealthy conflict can cause people to quietly withdraw or become openly aggressive with the rest.

During this period, your team should see if members have been abiding with the agreed-upon norms of conduct and if they truly understand each other's working styles. If the answer to both is 'no', there will be a need to re-visit or reinforce the team launch. Another option would be to conduct team assessment exercises, like personality profiling or measuring team effectiveness.

When groups progress into the norming stage, where they are cohesive, exhibit high levels of understanding, trust, and are able to work through differences in a synergistic way. In this stage, there is an open exchange of ideas, opinions and feelings. Members understand how to interact and work better with each other. The team moves from tolerating differences to accepting differences.

Some teams – not all - are able to make it to the performing stage, where they mature. At this stage, teams now know how to operate at their optimum, enabling them to successfully focus on its task. To get here, your team needs to be able to move past issues that surfaced in the previous stages.

MAINTAINING THE TEAM

As teams are not formed every other day, much of the real work in facilitating team effectiveness goes into maintaining the team.

Check-in at every meeting. Conducting a "check-in" at the start of each meeting invites each member to share what they hope to achieve from the get-together. Have each member share one short sentence during this period. Through this sharing, the stage for the meeting is set and expectations - or over-expectations – are clarified.

How to do a team launch in four easy steps

1. PURPOSE/GOALS: Establish clarity about the compelling purpose and goals of the project: for the stakeholders, the team, and the individuals.

2. ROLES: Have each person share the skills and experiences they bring to the team, what they want to learn from the process, and then determine roles.

3. NORMS: Now that the purpose and roles are clear, develop group norms to help achieve goals around communication, meetings, decision-making, etc.

4. STYLES: Talk with each other about working style preferences that would be helpful for each other to know.

Engage a process consultant. The role of the process consultant is to help team members see how work processes and human dynamics play a strong part in making teams work.

This consultant may not provide solutions or be a content expert, but instead, focuses on verbalising his or her observations about how the group functions. For example, they point out whether group members tend to interrupt each other or if one member is intimidated by another.

Coach your teams. Team coaching is simply the process of enabling a team function at more than the sum of its parts, by clarifying its mission - and improving its external and internal relationships This means that the team must also work on its relationships with stakeholders instead of just focusing on internal dynamics.

The focus of the coaching can be motivational (addressing effort and building shared commitment to the group); consultative (addressing performance strategy); or educational (addressing knowledge and skill of team members).

Debrief meetings. To support a team on the journey to high-performance, a few minutes can be spent at the end of each meeting talking about what went well and what can be improved in the meeting itself. As an alternative, the team can create a meeting assessment and complete it at the end of each meeting. Either way, the team becomes more aware of its own dynamics and how it can become even more effective.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

For teams to be effective:

Do a team launch.   1

Be aware of which stage
your team is at.   2

Maintain the team.   3

NOTES / THOUGHTS:

Contact us!
Have any burning questions or feedback about this article or any OD-related topics that you are interested in? Email us at cscollege_ILOD@cscollege.gov.sg.