

Teams, Friend or Foe

When teams are new, they are as cute and entertaining as a young lion cub. But as they get older, watch out... they can devour your children! As consultants with the ability to help companies build team-oriented organizations, you would think we'd be worried about admitting that to prospective clients. However, many organizations are jumping into teams for the wrong reasons and doing it the wrong way.

We hope this article provides you with some helpful insights... before you take the plunge!

Why Teams?

Why are companies interested in implementing teams, particularly when studies of companies who have implemented them suggest that 50% of the efforts to build a team-oriented organization fizzle and die. If done the wrong way, teams can bog work down, waste an incredible amount of time and increase operating costs significantly. The old adage about "management by committee" belongs to teams that have gone awry.

The Wrong Reasons

- Common "wrong" reasons for trying a team approach include:
- A belief that teams will produce better results automatically.
- It's "the popular thing to do."
- "We've downsized and have fewer managers, so 'let's do teams.'"
- "We've downsized and have fewer employees, so 'let's do teams.'"

The Right Reason

When done correctly, teams can dramatically improve the performance of the organization. So what are the "right reasons" for using teams?

- Your belief in making it possible for people to give their best. Teams have the unique power to make that happen.

- The employee base is largely competent / proficient in what they do.
- Your organization needs to be able to respond to changing demands of its customers and marketplace – organizational flexibility is a requirement. Teams that are cross-trained and capable of performing many functions, that are proficient in quickly redesigning work processes and whose measures are directly tied to the requirements of the customer and to the business strategy, allow for greater organizational flexibility than traditional structures.
- Your organization structure is already suited to a team approach. Teams do better work when they are structured around work processes and are responsible for insuring those processes meet the requirements of the external customers. This fosters loyalty to the customer and to the objectives of the business vs. loyalty to the function or department.
- A naturally participative leadership style and organization culture already exists. Since teams live within the broader culture of the organization, that culture can determine whether a team lives or dies.
- Senior management sees a team-oriented organization as a means to achieving the vision, mission and strategy of the business. In organizations where senior management not only supports teams, but requires them, the success of teams soars.

We're a Team: Fact or Fiction?

"Putting your dog in the garage overnight doesn't turn it into a car!" And calling a team a team doesn't automatically make it so! The biggest mistake we see companies making with teams is announcing that teams are a new way of doing business, appointing team members, then encouraging them to work together to make the team approach a success. This

is what we call the “Good luck, Charlie” method. Now you’re a team, good luck! The truth is, turning a group of people who work together into a real team takes know-how and a lot of hard work. Luck rarely has much to do with it.

Types of Team Approaches

There are many different varieties and uses of teams. Most of them fall into one of the following two categories:

| PERFORMANCE TEAMS | PROBLEM-SOLVING TEAMS |
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| Structured around work processes. | Structured around expertise in the problem area. |
| Members are employees who have been hired to do the work. | Members are hand-selected for their expertise in the problem area. |
| Permanent structure. Operates on a daily basis. Is the way we conduct our business. | Temporary structure. Solves the problem and disbands. |
| Is part of our job. | Represents “extra work” for those assigned. |
| Participation is mandatory. | Participation is voluntary. |
| Team establishes their mission, values for working together, identifies key performance indicators, measures and monitors their own performance, solves problems, removes barriers to their performance, and holds themselves accountable for high levels of performance. | Team is provided a “mandate” outlining the problem to be solved. Team uses a systematic approach to problem solving. |
| Team is empowered to change work processes. Has decision-making authority boundaries. | Team makes recommendations for change. Has no decision-making authority. |
| Requires training in identifying work output/requirements, performance measurement, work process evaluation, team meeting leadership and participation, problem solving, team dynamics and team coaching. | Requires training in complex problem solving. |

Problem-solving teams are easier to implement and can have dramatic impact on identifying and resolving organizational problems. However, once the initial excitement has worn off, it is difficult to maintain momentum for problem-solving teams. Accountability is usually weak, demands of the “real work” pull at

team members, and management support usually shifts to the more pressing issues of the day.

Performance teams, on the other hand, have more “staying power” since they focus on day-to-day performance (i.e., the “real business.”) They have a much higher chance of becoming a way of doing business. Still, it often takes three to five years of diligent effort and support before performance teams are self-managing or self-sustaining.

Building a Team Culture

Transforming a group of people working together into a team calls for a culture where:

- Managers value individual initiative and high levels of employee participation vs. maintaining the “status quo.”
- People are eager to learn and welcome training.
- People have a “we can solve anything we have to” attitude.
- Accountability is placed on process as well as results (i.e., what we do and how we do it is important).
- Performance management systems are aligned with and support teams (e.g., accountability systems, performance appraisal systems, compensation systems, etc).
- Management (at all levels) is willing to talk the talk (i.e., held accountable for providing the model for the rest of the organization).
- Strong team values are established.

One of the most important things a team can do is establish a set of values for working together.

Sample Team Values

- We will perform our work with enthusiasm,
- We will willingly share our time, resources and ideas with each other and other teams.
- We will consult together to achieve unity of thought and action.
- We will listen to each other, encourage, clarify points of view, ask questions and support other people’s opinions.
- We will strive for continuous improvement in our work and in our own learning.

- We will do things right the first time!
- We will not initiate or receive backbiting or gossip.
- If someone has a problem with another team member, the problem member should be the first to know, not the last to know.
- We will use appropriate channels to express disagreement / concern.
- We will work through problems and look for “win-win” solutions.
- We will be tough on problems, easy on people.

Common Team Problems ... and What to Do About Them

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| Too much time spent in meetings | One hour a week should do it. |
| Teams have lots of responsibility, little authority. | Make sure the team is clear on their boundaries and on their level of authority. |
| Lack of direction/foundation (i.e., “we’ve built a great sailboat but we’re about to dash against the rocks.”) | Management has to help set the course (i.e., ensure the team has the right performance measures, clear purpose, clear authority, clear boundaries). |
| Over or under empowerment. | Empowerment has to be tied to the competency of the team. The coach has to be the boundary manager. |
| Unclear purpose. | Team needs a clear mission statement, clear performance objectives tied to the business plan and needs to know the role it plays in meeting the requirements of the external customers. |
| Lack of training. | Ongoing training for teams, team leaders and coaches need to be provided. |
| Withdrawal of support as executives go on to the next project/program. | Have to build a team architecture that sustains itself (i.e., is self-managing). |



How to Do Teams Right – a.k.a. Helpful Hints from Those Who Have “Been There and Done That”

- All teams struggle. Building a team culture has its own maddening pace.
- Teams have to be productive. They have to be measured relative to the business strategy.
- Teams need coaching. It’s like riding a bicycle. Teams will have lots of bumps and bruises.
- Make sure that new managers that are hired support teams (i.e., have a history of high-participation management style, if not previous positive experience with teams).
- Make sure that all new employees hired understand and are excited about being a part of a high-performing team.
- Start in the best places first. Success breeds success – others will jump on the bandwagon.
- Go slow, take baby steps. Do it right the first time!
- Systems, policies and management practices have to be aligned with a team approach. It all doesn’t have to be in place at the beginning, but will need to be addressed if teams are going to keep developing.
- Management has to continue to provide direction and leadership. Teams should not be left to decide what’s important – they don’t have the bigger picture. They need help staying focused and strategically oriented.
- The role of senior management is critical. They can require it, support it, accept it, ignore it or discourage it. The first two options are the only ones that offer any opportunity for teams to have a lasting impact on the organization.

Prediction for the Future

Futurists predict that employees and managers will have difficulty finding employment if they do not have experience working in a team-based organization. Many other futurists agree. Will you, your employees and your organization be ready?

How Dechert-Hampe can Help

Dechert-Hampe has developed a variety of tools to assist organizations in implementing teams:

Team Readiness Assessment: This assessment helps organizations determine their “readiness” for implementing teams. The study includes an assessment of organization objectives/business strategy, organization culture, management practices, employee attitudes, key performance indicators, performance measurement systems, organization structure and performance management systems. Study findings are reported along with a custom designed plan for implementing teams in your organization.

Team Effectiveness Assessment: This tool helps functional or cross-functional work groups assess their current level of functioning, target areas for improvement, and develop action plans for improving their team performance.

Team Training: Dechert-Hampe offers a comprehensive training curriculum for teams, team leaders, team coaches and internal team consultants.

On-Site Implementation Consulting: Dechert-Hampe's team consultants work with your company to design, implement and sustain a team-based organization.

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