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The Team-Building Tool Kit

Tips and Tactics for Effective Workplace Teams

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

The Team-Building Tool Kit is the most trusted resource on team building. Packed with fast and ready-to-use tools and techniques, *The Team-Building Tool Kit* gives you all the information and strategies you need to get the most from your teams.

It includes critical information on team accountability, decision making, and problem solving. *The Team-Building Tool Kit* provides easy-to-understand guidance on how to have effective team meetings, assess team performance, resolve team conflicts, train for high performance, and much more.

Few organizations derive the full benefits that successful teams can provide, simply because their teams are not nurtured and managed correctly. Whether you read the entire summary or use it as a quick reference, *The Team-Building Tool Kit* is a crucial resource for anyone working with a team.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Tips to improve accountability for results and team-member behavior.
- A better method for effective team meetings.
- How to resolve team conflicts before they cause permanent damage.
- Techniques to design a plan for implementation.



by Deborah Mackin

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE TEAM-BUILDING TOOL KIT

by Deborah Mackin

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Getting Started

Team building begins with a clear decision by leadership to encourage, and even to require, employees to operate in teams. Leadership must recognize that teaming is a cultural change that will include

1. Developing awareness of teams both as a tool and a culture shift.
2. Acquiring knowledge and understanding about how teams function.
3. Learning skills to perform new teaming behaviors.
4. Internalizing attitudes and beliefs so that teaming becomes a way of life.

The role of leadership is critical through each of these steps. Lack of leadership support remains the number one cause of team failure.

Types of Teams

As an organization begins its team-building efforts, one of the first concerns it must resolve is what type of team to create. The green light for team building is typically a top-management decision. Some organizations begin with high-level policy-making teams charged with identifying broad concerns and setting goals, whereas others begin with small departmental teams. Whether the impetus comes from a company-wide policy review or from a departmental task force, teams should be formed only when an achievable common goal can be identified. The various types of teams are somewhat like the flowers in a garden: All serve a particular purpose and have their own characteristics and set of benefits:

Multifunctional Teams

- Identify major areas of organizational concern/opportunity; articulate organizational needs.

- Develop philosophy, strategy, policies and direction.
- Include members from various levels of the organization and across functional areas.
- Are sometimes called design teams or quality councils.

Task Force or Cross-Functional Teams

- Include between eight and 12 members; membership based on common purpose.
- Bring together individuals from multiple work areas at a similar level.
- Necessitate regular meetings over either a short or an extended period of time.
- Implement a strategic plan for addressing problems/concerns/opportunities; others may complete the implementation of the plan.
- Assume investigative, corrective, interactive function.
- Are sometimes called steering teams, process improvement teams, product launch teams or Kaizen teams.

Improvement Teams (Functional or Value Stream)

- Include members of one department or one value stream.
- Focus on problem solving; identifying solutions.
- Restrict scope of activity to within departmental or value stream boundaries.
- Hold regular meetings over a short period of time.
- Have a short life span.

Self-Directed Work Teams (Functional or Value Stream)

- Comprise an intact team of employees who work together on an ongoing, day-to-day basis without direct supervision and who are responsible for a “whole” work process or segment.



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- Assume “ownership” of product or service and are empowered to share various supervisory and leadership functions.
- Function semi-autonomously; are responsible for controlling the physical and functional boundaries of their work and for delivering a specified quantity and quality of a product or service within a specified time and at a defined cost.
- Are all cross-trained in a variety of work skills.
- Share and rotate leadership responsibilities; team members have equal input decisions.
- May prepare own budgets and coordinate work with other departments.

The Basics of Team Functioning

The first step in forming a team is to define the team’s goal on the basis of the purpose or problem to be examined. The founding person or body drafts the team’s preliminary charter, including the mission, team goals, expected outcomes, time requirements and authority level. In addition, the founding person or body is responsible for defining, communicating and negotiating the “what” (direction), “why” and “when” to the team. The team is then responsible for determining the “how” (the approach).

Determining Level of Authority and Responsibility. When a team is created, the coach or team sponsor must clearly define its level of responsibility and authority, setting the limits within which the team may act autonomously. Although it may be cumbersome, the most effective way to detail authority is to create a RACI chart:

- **“R” Responsible.** The “doer” of the task, responsible for completing the task or making the decision. Multiple people/teams may have responsibility for completing a task or making a decision.
- **“A” Accountable.** The person or team held accountable for ensuring that the task/decision is completed on time and meets expectations. This person does not have to do the task. However, in a team-based environment, the accountability should focus on the “doer” whenever possible.
- **“C” Consulted.** The person/team who will be consulted with by the responsible (“R”) person/team, before performing a task or making a decision.
- **“I” Informed.** The person/team who will be informed that a task or decision has been completed or made.

Even in traditional management structures, decision-making authority is often not clear. In the excitement of getting started, teams often give themselves much more authority than they truly have or should have based on their development. When the presumed authority is

clarified later on, the team often experiences considerable disappointment. It is wise to place clear limits on the team at the beginning and grow the level of authority as the team demonstrates maturity and focus.

Key Components in High-Performance Teams

High-performance teams display the following characteristics:

- Team goals are considered to be as important as individual goals; members are able to recognize when a personal agenda is interfering with the team’s direction.
- The team is able to focus on both task completion and process maintenance.
- The team understands the goals and is committed to achieving them; everyone is willing to shift responsibilities to meet demands.
- The team climate is comfortable and informal; members feel empowered and understand that individual competitiveness is inappropriate.
- Respect, open-mindedness and collaboration are high; members seek win/win solutions and build on each other’s ideas.
- The team continually works on improving itself by examining its charter, protocols, procedures and practices, and experimenting with change.
- Team responsibilities become integrated with job responsibilities.

Closing Out a Team

When a team has completed its purpose, it is important to provide closure for the members. This is often a time to reflect on progress and to celebrate the team’s accomplishments. However, teams tend to construe closure with failure. Many are concerned that closure will bring about the end to comfortable relationships with team members, and they fear that their accomplishments will get lost. Consider this sample process for making the closure effective:

1. Empower the team by asking its members how they would like to bring closure to the project or merger with another team.
2. Schedule a meeting to present the team’s findings and recommendations; invite anyone affected by the team’s recommendations.
3. Decide on a review procedure and a completion date for assessing the team’s recommendations.
4. Recognize and reward the team’s accomplishments in some formal manner.
5. Identify any other areas of the organization that could benefit from the team’s ideas or skills.

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6. Encourage the team's members to develop "lessons learned," both as individuals and as a team, that they are willing to share with other teams.
7. Discuss any transition issues for the team, such as team files/records and transfer of information to a follow-up team. ●

Let's Meet: Team Meetings

The team meeting is the team's "playing field," where the processes of initiating, planning, executing, following through and controlling all take place. However, a meeting whose only purpose is information sharing will never be effective for a team. The team's meeting must focus on important team activities such as planning, problem solving and decision making, with as little time spent on information sharing as possible. With email, voice mail and memos, all the information the team needs can be shared outside the meeting. Then, at the meeting team members can bring their questions, concerns and actions required based on the information shared earlier. There's no more coming to meetings without knowing what's going to happen, because team members have completed their pre-reads and expect to participate and work hard together.

Typical Meeting Problems

Although meetings are vital for the team's health, they can also be a source of considerable wasted time. Here are some of the problems often encountered in poorly run meetings:

- Meeting roles are poorly performed by team members, resulting in other members taking over. This is especially true of the facilitator's role.
- The team jumps into discussing agenda topics before planning the work: agreeing on the goal of the discussion and structuring the approach the team will use.
- Members' silence is treated as if it means agreement, when often it doesn't.
- The team relies on the coach or sponsor to generate ideas.
- No outcomes are identified for agenda items, and the meeting goal is not clear.
- No agenda exists, the agenda is not distributed in advance or the agenda is too "lightweight" in terms of topics.
- The facilitator is not prepared or monopolizes the discussion.

Facilitating Team Meetings

The role of the facilitator is critical to the success of a meeting. A skilled facilitator has the ability to ask just

the right question to open discussion and keep the team moving. It is critical for the balance of power that the role of facilitator be rotated among team members. Here are some general pointers to keep in mind when you facilitate team meetings:

- Remember that every agenda must have a desired outcome identified, and these outcomes must focus on planning, problem solving and decision making.
- Remember that the tentative agenda requires the consensus of the team before proceeding. Change the agenda only when the entire team agrees, not when only one person suggests a revision.
- In tense situations or when solutions are difficult to reach, remember the value of small-team discussion, humor, quick games for energy, affirmation and silence.
- End the meeting with a sense of gathering together and a summary. ●

Team Behavior

Effective teamwork is not just about getting a set of tasks done. It also requires the ability to manage the process of working together: listening to each other, communicating openly, surfacing feelings, exploring different approaches and reaching decisions. These behaviors are often not taught in our early educational experiences, and many people have achieved success as managers and supervisors without needing these behaviors. It's only when we need to work together — as a team — that these behaviors are crucial.

Behavior Changes

Teamwork becomes particularly difficult when members recognize that they will each have to change some parts of their behavior. Making excuses, procrastinating, blaming and feigning ignorance are just a few of the stall tactics members will use. Here are important behavior changes for employees, supervisors and managers:

Critical Behavior Changes for Employees

- Learning to speak up in groups.
- Taking responsibility for one's own thoughts/actions.
- Learning to state an opinion and offer a proposal.
- Receiving and expressing positive and negative feelings.
- Saying no.
- Responding to criticism.
- Making requests of authorities.
- Negotiating for something desired.

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Critical Behavior Changes for Supervisors

- Being willing to share power and responsibility.
- Proposing ideas for discussion.
- Asking questions instead of making statements.
- Listening to others.
- Remaining open-minded.

Critical Behavior Changes for Managers

- Having the courage to resist recommendations that are not beneficial.
- Accepting decentralized decision making.
- Believing that everyone has good ideas.
- Being willing to implement team suggestions whenever possible.
- Recognizing team accomplishments.
- Seeing teams as a long-term effort.
- Thinking “yes” before saying “no.” ●

Team Accountability and Decision Making

Some teams think that as soon as they're called a team, they have the right to make all the decisions without any involvement of others, including their coach or sponsor. That is not the case. The transfer of authority and accountability is a gradual process that occurs as the team develops and matures. Similarly, decision making begins with small decisions, such as when to have meetings and how to rotate team responsibilities, before the team tackles larger and riskier decisions.

Accountability: An “I” Experience

Even though we think of teaming as a “we” experience, the act of assuming accountability is actually an “I” experience. As a result, we try to identify all the opportunities for individuals to be specifically assigned tasks to build their accountability to the team's results. Here are a few examples:

- The requirement of rotating team meeting roles throughout the entire team.
- The scribe recording action items with specific names of team members who assume responsibility for getting tasks done with definite deadline dates.
- The maintenance of an open action items list with names and deadlines assigned. Teams have found it helpful to cross out missed deadlines but not remove them from the list, to illustrate how many weeks something has not been completed. This action drives accountability in the team member assigned to the task.

- The assignment of “buddy” roles, in which each team member has a buddy who is responsible for performing the meeting role, collecting materials and updating the member when he or she is absent.
- The assignment of subject matter experts (SMEs) within the team who have specialized capabilities in certain skill areas.
- The requirement in the conflict resolution protocol that team members go “one-on-one” first when a conflict occurs, before going to a coach.
- The individual assessment by team members of how the team is doing and reporting of the results to the team.

Team Decision Making

Team decision making and accountability go hand in hand in the teaming process. This stems from a fundamental belief that “we” are smarter together than any of us alone. Although most teams use the consensus process for making their decisions, a team truly has a range of decision-making options it can use. For example, the team can decide by consensus to authorize a team member to make an autocratic decision, such as what item to buy when talking to a vendor. The team can authorize minority rule by having a few members make the decision in a subgroup. In an impasse, the team can decide by consensus to use majority rule (voting) to help break the stalemate. However, although all of these options are available to the team, the members must decide by consensus to exercise any of them.

Best Team Decision-Making Behaviors

There are six behaviors that the best teams use when making decisions:

- 1. Ask many questions and avoid positioning.** Team members must ask positive, provocative questions rather than take sides or defend a position.
- 2. Develop multiple alternatives.** Team members need to develop at least three options for the team to explore. That way if the option chosen doesn't work, the team can go back to earlier options to get started again.
- 3. Test all assumptive statements.** Team members need to become adept at distinguishing between things people say that are actually true facts and things they say as if they were facts but are actually assumptions. Those assumptions should be tested by having a team member say, “How do we know that? Where are the facts?”
- 4. Identify well-defined criteria.** Prior to making any decision, the team must develop the criteria it will use to determine whether a choice is a good one. A

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decision matrix is an effective tool for doing this. This tool allows the team to score each decision option according to predetermined criteria.

- 5. Encourage challenge and debate.** Early in the team process, it helps to identify one or two members to play the role of “challenger” so that healthy debate exists for all the options.
- 6. Use a fair process.** When people don’t feel a process is fair and the decision has already been made, they begin to “vote with their feet” and miss team meetings. Research shows that when members feel the decision process is fair — even if their preferred choice is not selected — they will support it. ●

Team Problem-Solving Process and Tools

Successful teams work three components of teaming simultaneously:

- 1. Task.** Getting tasks done and producing results through goals, work plans and timelines.
- 2. Process.** Managing processes such as meetings, information sharing, problem solving and decision making.
- 3. People.** Blending the skills and knowledge of members to create something that is better than any individual could create alone.

Effective problem solving tests all three of these capabilities on the team. When the team is clear about the problem to be solved, has process skills to implement an effective approach and draws on the talents of members, the probability of effective problem solving increases dramatically. However, most team members dread the idea of trying to solve problems as a whole team. They anticipate that a few people will dominate and argue, that the problem will never be clearly defined and that the solution chosen will be the one that’s easiest to implement. Yet one of the true benefits of teaming is the synergy created when talented minds create an idea or approach that no one person would have suggested alone.

A Simple Problem-Solving Approach

Most teams need to have a common problem-solving approach that they can use over and over to the point that it becomes automatic for them:

- 1. Find the problem to work on.**
 - Brainstorm a list of problems to work on, select one by agreed prioritization criteria and draft a clear statement about that problem.

- Identify the impact of the problem in terms of failure costs: How much is this problem costing us in terms of delays, rework and upset customers?
- Draft a statement of the SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound) goal to be achieved when the problem is fixed.

2. Analyze the problem.

- Identify the assumptions being made about the problem. A useful tool for this is Chris Argyris’ Ladder of Inference that begins with a small piece of data, to which the team adds meaning, expands that meaning to an assumption, forms a conclusion and develops a belief. Based on that belief, the team takes action that often perpetuates the original problem. Requiring the team to list its assumptions about the problem is a very enlightening experience.
- Identify the data needed to test whether the assumptions are true.
- Identify any other data needed to understand the problem more fully.
- After the data are collected, synthesize the data into a clear understanding of the root causes of the problem. Tools such as Fishbone diagrams and/or interrelationship diagramming are useful at this point.

3. Develop and select a best solution.

- Identify the criteria to be used for selecting a solution, and weight the criteria and what an acceptable score would be. For example, if the team uses five criteria and a five-point scoring scale, the top score would be 25. The team should identify how low a top idea can score as well.
- Generate at least three solution ideas.
- Give voice to both pro and con arguments for each idea to avoid the groupthink effect.
- Score each idea against the team’s criteria to surface the top idea.
- Reach consensus to go forward with the top idea.

4. Execute the solution to solve the problem.

- Define a specific goal for problem resolution, including a deadline.
- Create a work breakdown that spells out the milestones, or “buckets of work,” that must be accomplished to solve the problem. Identify an owner/champion for each bucket and specific time frames for completion.
- Capture all deadlines on future team agendas to discuss progress and difficulties.
- Complete a RACI chart showing responsibility and accountability for solution implementation.

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- Use a tool such as a Gantt chart to track all tasks associated with the solution plan.
- Assign subteams to complete specific buckets of work if needed.
- Develop a method to monitor and measure whether the solution is working.
- Establish a corrective action plan if the solution idea is not effective. ●

Team Scoreboards and Performance Assessments

The quality-control maxim “what gets measured gets done” is equally valid for a team-based organization. The team will need to design two processes: one to track its performance and one to determine how it is functioning as a team.

Team Measurement Systems

As soon as possible, the coach or sponsor will want to help the team determine what results to measure on an ongoing basis. The team might measure the amount of work produced; the number of error-free days, customer complaints or delinquent action items; and improvements in cycle times, downtime and safety audits. Usually the team identifies four or five measures that it will track and discuss. This process of measuring results helps to build a sense of ownership and responsibility among team members.

To prevent a team from becoming too insular, it is helpful to include some measures that require the team to work closely with other teams or to be sensitive to the organization as a whole. However, it's important that the measures represent items that the team can control or influence through its own results. The goal is to get the team to own its measures, rather than management. That means the team must determine what it will measure, how it will measure, and how it will analyze results and discuss when things are going right or need improvement.

Special Tips on Team Assessments. Assessing a team's performance is not designed to put the team on the spot and show weaknesses. It is designed to help the team grow and develop, learning from its strengths and weaknesses. Along the way, certain points have proven to be important:

- The assessment system must reinforce and support the beliefs, attitudes and behavior required in a team-based organization.
- The team assessment process must begin early in the team's development and not be aligned initially with

compensation or tangible rewards. Members should not be looking for a reward for standard performance required of all team members.

- It is best to assess total team performance before having members conduct peer reviews.
- Avoid linking other personnel decisions such as promotions, demotions and compensation to the feedback process, especially if negative feedback is likely.
- Individual peer reviews are best conducted when a team has reached an advanced stage of team building.
- When team members openly discuss problems they are having with other team members, they may exaggerate and generalize about the problems to gain team support. Members must actively work to avoid the bandwagon effect and maintain a level of open-mindedness.
- Plan to implement the individual team member review system along with the compensation system as the last areas in the team sequence. ●

The Teaming Road Map

How do you put all the pieces together and transform a workplace into a high-performance, team-based culture? To be successful, there are a number of pieces that have to be strategically placed to bring about the change. Unfortunately, some organizations use teams just to involve people (get their opinion and insights) but not engage them in the decision-making process. Others, in vastly reduced numbers, empower employees to run their piece of the organization's real estate — to own it like a home or small business. The teaming road map is designed to help the latter type of organizations initiate, plan, execute and control the teaming process.

Too often organizations launch pilot teams as their first steps, even though they are often clueless about what to do and how the teams will interact with the existing operational structure. The teaming road map provides the transitional structure to lead the organization from where it is to where it needs to go. The road map uses an inclusive, dynamic approach that must be customized along the way to the organization's unique requirements: There is no cookie-cutter approach to teaming. However, there are specific strategies that have proven to be successful when supported and encouraged by management.

Creating a Design Team

Managing the organizational upheaval that comes with converting to a team-based organization requires the formation of a design team — a multifunctional represen-

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tation of the organization charged with recommending the new organizational structure to leadership. The job of the design team is to

- Design a natural value stream, or virtual work team structure, for the organization that supports productivity, safety and quality goals.
- Determine the launch sequence for all pilot and regular teams, including self-directed, cross-functional, multifunctional and even cross-cultural teams.
- Implement the team structure in a planned, effective fashion.
- Initiate other change support teams, including the communication team and the in-house training team.
- Develop and implement systems to monitor and evaluate the progress of the teams.
- Champion the continual improvement of the team structure for the long-term benefit of the organization.

Launching Work Teams

If the organization intends to launch multiple workforce teams within a short period of time, the design team provides the ideal mechanism to organize and orchestrate the rollout. The design team must consider the readiness of the areas where teams will be launched, the rollout schedule for new team coaches, the organization's critical areas in terms of workload and schedule and the feasibility of getting the teams trained. The design team creates the master rollout schedule, notifies the coaches and teams and oversees the process, troubleshooting as any problems arise.

Virtual Teams

Not only does the design team need to address the local transition but also the effect on virtual teams in the organization. Virtual teams are defined as teaming networks, or virtual communities, that exist outside geographical boundaries yet are committed to common goals and approaches, similar to co-located teams. To succeed, virtual teams must follow these guidelines:

- Team members must regard communication as part of the work of the team, not as support for work or adjacent to work, but designed as an intentional action with firm rules.
- Logging on is a signal of the team member's arrival in the electronic workplace. Skills in working with electronic tools and virtual operations are required of all team members. Team members must agree on standard technology common to all.
- Team members must believe that virtual members want the same results as they do even though they all work independently. Face-to-face time in the

beginning of the team's formation is critical to forming this belief.

- Team members must proactively seek out the information needed rather than wait for it to come from others.
- Coaches must understand that leadership in a virtual team requires the ability to keep the team focused on its overall mission and goals, manage a complex network of dependencies, create and sustain virtual communication and relationships, and present technologies in ways that team members will utilize and embrace.
- Team members must visualize themselves in a teaming community, establishing regular times for team interactions, including informal chitchat, socializing and celebration.
- Team members must learn to test assumptions as a regular part of communicating and give and receive feedback, especially with team members who are communicating poorly. Team members must be reminded that the written word can be viewed as much more harsh than the spoken word.
- Although the team's meeting room is a virtual setting via the Internet, e-room, website or electronic bulletin board, team members must understand that all the roles and meeting protocol requirements are the same as for co-located teams.

Individual Team Road Map

Typically, most teams find themselves between various phases of team development. The teaming road map provides a structure for the teams to use that identifies the competencies needed at each phase of teaming and a mechanism for assessing whether they are being demonstrated. As teams accomplish each phase of the road map, they can elect various rewards and/or recognition to motivate their advancement. Simultaneously, as the coach increases the level of the team's accountability, the coach is also assessed on his or her skill and development. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Team-Building Tool Kit*, you'll also like:

1. ***Team Genius* by Rich Karlgaard and Michael S. Malone.** The authors focus on the critical role of informal teams within the core of successful companies.
2. ***A Team of Leaders* by Stewart Liff and Paul Gustavson.** With emphasis on the design of a team, this summary offers a new way to energize groups of employees and improve performance.
3. ***The Synergist* by Les McKeown.** Most teams operate with members playing one of three roles. McKeown introduces The Synergist, the essential fourth role that makes any team a success.