



Teams #1

The Value of Teams

The benefits of teams:

There are many different ways to organize a group of people to accomplish results. The interest in the particular group structure called a “team” has intensified as demands for exceptional organizational performance have increased. Some of the reasons organizations are interested in teams include:

- Teams typically outperform individuals or groups acting independently.
- Teams are particularly good in situations in which the result requires a breakthrough and creativity, in which the method for producing the result is not clear, and/or in which it is not clear how to divide the work into independent units.
- Team members report a greater sense of satisfaction.
- Team members report having more fun.
- Teams and team members are more persistent and therefore more successful in overcoming obstacles.
- Teams are generally willing to take bigger risks and therefore are more likely to produce needed breakthroughs.
- Teams are typically able to respond faster and more flexibly to changing circumstances.
- Needed behavioral changes tend to occur more rapidly and readily.
- Teams have resilience, e.g., they are typically not so vulnerable to one person’s absence or failures, and can maintain themselves over long-term projects.
- Teams are natural learning organizations. Teams are particularly good when the entire plan of how to produce the result cannot be laid out in advance.
- Independent groups and individuals tend to optimize locally; a team can optimize globally.
- Teams are beneficial when local but globally consistent action is needed and global communication may be unreliable.
- With a team, integration into the whole of the subparts produced by team members tends to occur naturally over the entire project duration rather than all at one time at the end, thus lessening last minute assembly and interface problems.



Questions about teams:

However, in many cases the performance from teams has not been as excellent as expected. This has led to many questions concerning forming and leading teams, such as:

- What distinguishes teams from other types of groups?
- Many teams perform at an extraordinary level. Yet the result produced by other teams is worse than if the work was just parceled out to independent individuals. What is the reason for this inconsistency in team results?
- Forming and maintaining a team requires significant overhead costs. When is a team called for? When is a different group structure more appropriate?
- How can team members and leaders evaluate what is missing for a group to be a team? How can they provide what is missing?
- What are the best ways to form a team with a large number of people and/or where there is geographic dispersion, where the difficulties of communication often seem to get in the way?
- What are the best ways to form a team when it is composed of people from different organizations or organizational units?
- What are specific, operational steps for reliably forming and maintaining teams, including the “fuzzy” aspects such as building trust and team spirit?
- What is the best role for team-building exercises?
- How can team members effectively know how each other is doing and how to effectively intervene?

This series of articles will explore these and other questions concerning how to optimize the performance of a group of people.