

Teams – Who Needs Them Anyway?

Much time and money are spent trying to develop “high performing teams”. Some questions rarely asked, that should be asked are: “Do we really need to be a team?” “If we do need to be a team, what kind of team do we need to be?” Let’s explore the answers to these questions.

We all come to an organization with different expectations of teams, usually based on our past experiences. One person is expecting regular contact, ongoing communication and much consultation before a decision is made. The next person is hoping she can just “get on with the job”, and others are probably somewhere in between. Working in a team is challenging – working with people is challenging! How many times have you heard: “If I could just do my work and didn’t have to deal with my colleagues, things would be a lot easier?”

One of my favourite definitions of a team is “ A group which succeeds in getting something done only when it consists of three members, one of whom happens to be sick and the other absent.” (*author unknown*) Now, don’t get me wrong, teams can produce a synergy and get results better than any individual, but certain factors have to in place – in fact, five factors need to be clarified to have a high performing team.

1. **Goals** – need to be clear, understood and agreed upon by all.
2. **Roles** – everyone needs to know their own key areas of responsibility as well as the responsibilities of others
3. **Processes** – communication, decision-making, conflict management, meetings and style of leadership must be effective.
4. **Relationships** – good interpersonal relationships will facilitate teamwork
5. **Environmental factors** - policies, procedures, structure and outside demands must be reviewed to evaluate their impact on the team

A key component to answer the question in the title of this article, is in roles – who does what, how much interaction is required, how much information needs to be shared? When I worked in a consulting firm, we tried hard to be a highly communicative, interactive team. After much time (and money spent on consultants!) we realized that all we needed were individuals committed to the organizational goals and their individual goals, with a process for reporting and sharing information as a team 4 times per year! On the other hand, another organization I worked with, decided they needed regular ongoing communication and information sharing throughout the organization and needed to develop processes to ensure it happened.

The question of what kind of team we need is one groups have grappled with and come to different conclusions about, based on the needs of their particular organization.

Some questions to consider are:

1. Do I need to interact with others to effectively do my work?
2. Who do I need to interact with?
3. What is the frequency of interaction?
 - i) several times throughout the day
 - ii) daily
 - iii) weekly
 - iv) less often
4. Is it an intact group that needs to interact or is interaction necessary between teams throughout the organization?
5. Based on the above, what “teams” need to be in place?
6. What mechanisms for communication need to be established?
7. To what extent do we need to work on the ‘5 factors of an effective team’ outlined above? Evaluate each item based on: 1= low need, 3=moderate need, 5=high need

Summer is an ideal time to reflect on teams in preparation for the busy fall. So get a group together and begin the process! And, by the way, have fun!!