Team Member Effectiveness Makes the Team Work (1,018 words)

Sometimes I think people create teams simply because they are tired of working independently and feel kind of lonely. They form a team and have a meeting so they can see people, feel important, and eat donuts. They form a team and have meetings as an alternative to work. Creating a team is not supposed to be the alternative to work, it's supposed to be the advancement and application of work. For a team to be effective, we must provide proper orientation, discuss the value of conflict, prescribe a decision-making model, and reinforce agreements at the end of the meetings.

Provide Proper Orientation: When creating a team, it is a good idea to provide a full orientation concerning the team, the issues they will be resolving, and the problems they will be solving. This very first stage is often referred to as forming.

Provide low-risk activities and discussions that give people a chance to get to know each other. Invest some time for people to get comfortable with the setting. Talk in general terms about the problems the team will be addressing and also provide insight to definitions and appropriate evaluation criteria. Facilitate an informal discussion about the team's resources and limitations. Ask members about their particular strengths and weaknesses in relation to the team's future interactions and success. This forming stage is also when you ask for volunteers to temporarily take on various roles such as time keeper, scribe, creative thinker, critical thinker, flip chart recorder, minutes taker, or facilitator.

When forming a team, consider the issues that will need to be addressed, carefully select the participants that can meet those objectives, give the team a little time to get used to each others' style, and ease them into the discussions. Relational success will provide outstanding results.

Promote the Value of Conflict: Inform team members, that shortly after forming a team, people will become more comfortable and confident engaging in conflict. When people become more familiar with each other, they start to feel more willing to take risks and openly discuss concerns. Many experts on small group communication call this stage storming.

Conflict is a healthy sign for a team. Conflict demonstrates that team members trust each other and are willing to discuss different viewpoints. This storming stage includes the generation and evaluation of ideas. Team members consider the positive and negative aspects of all ideas. Members speak up about concerns, reservations, and hesitations. It might be a good idea to rotate the critical thinker role a couple of times during the discussion. This will relieve tension and will be a friendly reminder that the critical thinker role is just a tool for creating lively discussion and is not a personal attack. This also is a good time to re-visit and re-examine the team's goals, evaluation criteria, and key objectives. It is important to keep the team on track.

When teams are in the storming stage and engaging in conflict discussions, reassure members that better decisions are generally made when there are disagreements. Openly discuss how veiled discussions and guarded comments have no value. The way to get commitment from individual team members is by having passionate and open debate.

Describe a Decision-Making Model: Roberts Rules of Order is the formal method used to discuss topics and reach decisions. Parliamentary procedures are still used at annual meetings and board meetings. Now discussions and decision-making interactions in meetings are much more informal. I miss parliamentary procedures. Today this more informal approach is called norming. Communication experts define norms as informal rules of conduct. Norms are shared values, beliefs, behaviors, and procedures.

Provide some guidance concerning how to make decisions. Encourage members to brainstorm all of the possible problems, circumstances, causes, symptoms, and every possible issue. Review the long list of possibilities and determine whether each is an inference, an assumption, or a fact. Now decide the one problem you will solve that will make most, if not all, of the symptoms disappear. Brainstorm 20-50 ideas that could solve the problem. One idea might emerge as the best one or the team might combine the best parts of several suggestions into a new solution. Members may need to compromise, merge ideas, to arrive at few alternative solutions. Next, the team applies objective decision-making criteria to determine what is reasonable, feasible, practical, and financially affordable. Then the decisions are reached.

Sometimes it is necessary to employ structured discussion methods like parliamentary procedures. But with most teams, as long as they use an objective decision-making model, they can rely on informal rules or norms of the organization's values, beliefs, and appropriate behaviors, to reach decisions.

Reinforce Agreements and Actions: When the team has made a decision, it is important that you support completely and participate fully. This reinforcement stage, often called the performing stage, supports the team's efforts in putting the decision into action. At this performing stage, not only do members accept the team's decision, they endorse it.

Make sure there is a restatement of the group's goal and the group's consensus. The final decision is brought forth and announced. At this point, people affirm their support of the final decision. There is an unspoken drive toward consensus and harmony, even if members disagree with the outcome, they no longer voice their concerns. Team members now focus on working cooperatively to reach the team's goal. Work is assigned and accepted concerning who is going to do what, when and how. There is a description of expectations, time-lines and progress reports. Everyone accepts the responsibility to help the team succeed and to hold each other accountable for the desired results.

When a team is built on a foundation of trust, participants will fully engage in conflict to reach the best decision possible. Since all opinions have been heard, there should be buy-in and commitment. When committed to a plan of action, accountability is guaranteed.

Finally, when members put the team's success above their own, results can be remarkable.

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