



The Stages of Team Performance

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The Four Stages of Team Performance and the
Four Leadership Styles

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Teams—Today's Reality

Now, more than ever before, organizations are creating teams—cross-functional teams, virtual teams, self-directed teams, process-improvement teams, project teams, and numerous ad-hoc, hybrid teams to implement their business strategy, conduct day-to-day operations, and manage their relationships.

Team Performance—Today's Challenge

However, creating and assembling a team is only the beginning. Just as with any building project, teams need plans and blueprints, processes and tools, and the necessary competencies, attitudes, and leadership to perform effectively. The challenge is to develop the needed team-building knowledge, skills, and training that drive team effectiveness. Unfortunately, and quite frequently, teams are left to fend on their own with few resources and little support to help them reach effective levels of performance.

What Is a Team?

“A team is a group of individuals who must work interdependently in order to attain their individual and organizational objectives,” (Reilly & Jones, 1974).

Team

A team is a number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, approach, and set performance goals for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.

The essence of a team is common commitment. Without it, the members of the group perform as individuals; with it, they become a powerful unit of collective performance.

According to Katzenbach and Smith (1993, p. 45), “There are four essential elements to a team:

1. The group must have a charter or reason for working together.
2. Members of the group must be interdependent—they need each other’s experience, ability, and commitment in order to arrive at mutual goals.
3. Group members must be committed to the idea that working together as a group leads to more effective decisions than working in isolation.
4. The group must be accountable as a functioning unit within a larger organization context.”

When the team’s performance or accomplishments surpass the capabilities of the individual group members, synergy occurs. The team’s unique combination of talents, knowledge, and experience is greater than the aggregation of the individual contributions. The ideas of one member can often trigger a response from another member in a way that they never would have thought of independently. The energy of one individual can spur others on when their own vitality diminishes.

In his article “Social Facilitation,” Zajonc (1963, pp. 269-274) says, “Synergy can take either physical or cognitive forms. The physical presence of others is often affecting, so more work is accomplished. Even ants work harder when there is more than one of them on the job.” In the cognitive sense, synergy emerges when a type of collective intelligence and shared memory begins to develop as the group matures. Also, synergy can play an important role for those team members who are energized through interaction with others.

The Benefits of Teams

How Teams Benefit Organizations

Teaming promotes knowledge sharing and generates a variety of approaches and possible solutions. The age-old cliché, “two heads are better than one,” reflects the belief that when individuals unite, they consistently produce solutions to problems that are more creative and make better decisions than individuals working on their own.

An example could be a talent acquisition team that is responsible for staffing the organization with the best match of skills and cultural fit. The team’s makeup typically includes recruiters, human resources, compensation and benefits, diversity, planners, and operations. The team’s challenge is to interpret the company’s requirements and synchronize them with

market realities. Each team member plays a vital role in the process. A role that is uniquely performed in a team setting.

“In the ideal team, each member performs his or her function in such a way that it dovetails with that of other team members to enable the team to achieve its goals. By this collaboration, the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts” (Pell, 1999, p. 4).

How Teams Benefit Individuals

Working on a team can challenge its members to go beyond normative behaviors and achieve their maximum potential. Being part of a team provides opportunities to broaden an individual's perspective, widen and deepen people's knowledge, and master new skills in ways that might not be available to individual contributors. Working collectively to set goals and solve problems, brainstorming to generate creative ideas and options, and sharing responsibilities are some of the many benefits of the team experience.

A satisfying team experience creates a sense of belonging. Studies show that many people learn better through interacting with one another than by working alone.

Since a significant portion of a professional's job is relationship-oriented, an individual's “teamability” is critical to his or her long-term career success. No matter how competent or ambitious people are, if they want to be successful as team leaders or players, they must be able to establish and maintain productive relationships with others.

A high-performing team reflects favorably on the individual team members and increases their visibility in the organization.

Organizations depend on a matrix of interlocking skills and capabilities: both individually and collectively. Today, interdependence is a business reality. For your team to be successful requires both team and individual accountability. Accountability drives team performance levels higher than individuals can achieve themselves, even when performing at their personal best.

Team Building—A Continuing Process

Team building is not a one-time event. It is a continuing process that begins by introducing and then reinforcing both team-tasking skills and interpersonal behavioral skills as the team develops and matures. “The process of team building is critical to the development of successful teams and accomplishment of team goals” (Kormanski & Mozenter, 1987, p. 255).

Although team building demands attention and hard work, there are significant benefits for developing teaming skills and serious consequences for not doing so. Those benefits and consequences are summarized in the following table.

Team Building—The Business Case	
Positive Outcomes When Team Building Takes Place	Negative Consequences of Not Doing or Delaying Team Building
Team goals are understood in the context of organizational goals.	Performance and quality suffer due to unclear goals and direction.
Techniques to improve team performance are learned and adopted.	Bad habits and disruptive behaviors go unchecked.
Improved understanding and communication among members is evident.	Differences are not reconciled and conflicts are not resolved.
Roles and responsibilities are clarified and aligned.	There is an overlap of responsibilities or a few members do most of the work.
Information is shared and exchanged among members.	Information hoarding negatively affects problem solving and decision making.
Common commitment and increased loyalty begin to bond the team together.	Members become complacent and lack commitment to the team.
Stretch assignments drive stretch accomplishments.	Status quo and stagnation become modus operandi.
Boost in synergy, enthusiasm, and esprit de corps.	Loss of creativity, respect, trust, and motivation demoralizes the team.
A shared purpose and mutual accountability; a “we” versus “me” environment.	Members prioritize personal objectives at the expense of the success of the team.

From extensive research in group dynamics and the process of team building (Francis & Young, 1979; Solomon, 1977), a great deal is known about how teams perform. Numerous studies on group behavior are available and provide a strong foundation of knowledge about the team experience. (Shultz, 1958). Theory on team development, particularly as it relates to performance, proposes that teams, as individuals, pass through predictable stages over time (Tuckman, 1965, 1977). In the next section we will discuss the stages of team performance in conjunction with their appropriate leadership styles.