Use of an Outside Facilitator or Consultant

Managers commonly ask, "Should I conduct the team-development effort on my own, or should I get an outside person to help us?" As we mentioned previously in the introduction, "outside person" could mean either a consultant from outside the organization or an internal consultant who is employed by the organization, often in human resources or organization development, with a background in team development.

Ultimately the manager should be responsible for the development of the team. The consultant's job is to get the process started. The use of a consultant is generally advisable if a manager is aware of problems, feels that he or she may be one of the problems facing the team, and is not sure exactly what to do or how to do it but feels strongly enough that some positive action is necessary to pull the work group together for more effective operation.

The Roles of the Manager and the Consultant

Ultimately the manager or team leader is responsible to develop a productive team and to develop processes that will allow the team to regularly stop and critique itself and plan for its improvement. It is the manager's responsibility to keep a finger on the pulse of his or her team and to plan appropriate actions if the team shows signs of stress, ineffectiveness, or operating difficulty.

Unfortunately many managers have not yet been trained to do the data gathering, diagnosis, and planning and to take the actions required to maintain and improve their teams. The role of the consultant is to work with the manager until the manager is capable of incorporating team-development activities as a regular part of managerial responsibilities. The manager and the consultant (whether external or internal) should form their own two-person team in working through the initial team-building program. In all cases the manager will be responsible for all team-building activities, although he or she may use the consultant as a resource. The end result of the consultant's work is to leave the manager capable of continuing

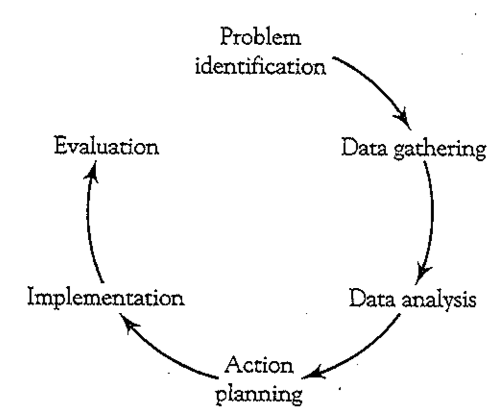
team development without the assistance of the consultar minimal help.

The Team-Building Cycle

Ordinarily a team-building program follows a cycle simil depicted in Figure 5.2. The program begins because som ognizes a problem or problems. Either before or during t building effort, data are gathered to determine the root cau problem. The data are then analyzed, and a diagnosis is what is wrong and what is causing the problem. After the sis, the team engages in appropriate planning and problen Actions are planned and assignments made. The plans are into action and the results honestly evaluated.

Sometimes there is no clear, obvious problem. The c then to *identify* or find the problems that are present but hi their underlying causes. One still gathers and analyzes identifies the problems and the causes, and then moves planning. The manager and the consultant work together ing out the program from the time the problem has been i through some form of evaluation.

Figure 5.2. The Team-Building Cycle.



Data Gathering

Because team building encourages a team to do its own problem solving and given that a critical condition for effective problem solving is accurate data, a major concern is to gather clear data on the causes behind the symptoms or problems originally identified. A consultant initially may assist in the data gathering, but eventually a team should develop the ability to collect its own data as a basis for working on its own problems. The following are some common data-gathering methods.

Surveys. One of the most common approaches to gathering data is to conduct a survey of all team members. Surveys are helpful in situations in which there are a relatively large number of team members or team members would be more open in responding to an anonymous survey. It also can be helpful to use a survey if you want to compare the issues and problems facing different teams in an organization. There are two general types of surveys—open- and closed-ended surveys. An *open-ended* survey would ask questions such as What do you like about your team? What problems does your team need to address? and What suggestions do you have to improve the team? Team members then can give their responses in writing. The team leader or consultant then takes these responses and summarizes them. This summary is presented to the team in a team-building session. It may be somewhat messy to summarize such raw data, but it often helps to read the actual views of the team members to better understand the issues and how they are feeling.

Closed-ended surveys force the person responding to choose a specific response. Most of the surveys in this book are closed-ended. Closed-ended surveys make tabulating the results easy and make statistical comparisons possible. However, they may miss some of the important dynamics and problems of a team. Closed-ended surveys are a useful starting point, however, to create awareness of the problems facing a team and to begin a discussion of how to solve those problems. We have found that the team-building checklist in

this chapter and the team maturity scale (Figure 4.2) are surveys to gather data about a team.

Interviews. At times a consultant can perform a useful ser interviewing the members of the team. While the manager (leader could conduct such interviews, in most cases team m will be more open in sharing data with someone from outs team. The consultant tries to determine the causes behind th lem(s) in order to pinpoint those conditions that may nee changed or improved. In these interviews the consultant oft the following questions:

1. Why is this team having the kinds of problems it has?
2. What keeps you personally from being as effective as you would like to be?
3. What things do you like best about the team?
4. What changes would make the team more effective?
5. How could this team begin to work more effectively toge

Following the interviews, the consultant frequently does a tent analysis of the interviews, identifies the major themes c gestions that emerge, and prepares a summary presentation. A team-building meeting the consultant presents the summar the team, under the manager's direction, analyzes the data and actions to deal with the major concerns.

Some consultants prefer not to conduct interviews prior t team-building meeting and do not want to present a data sum They have found that information shared in a private interview a consultant is not as readily discussed in the open, with all (team members present, especially if some of those members been the object of some of the interview information. Consul have painfully discovered that people often deny their own i views, fight the data, and refuse to use it as a basis for discus and planning. At times it may be appropriate for the consulta interview people privately to understand some of the deep-rooted issues but still have people present their own definitions of the problems in an open session.

One question often arises about interviewing: Should the interviews be kept anonymous so that no one will be identified? We have found that if data are gathered from a team and those data are then presented to that team, team members often can figure out who said what. Keeping sources anonymous is often difficult, if not impossible. Thus we typically say the following to a team member before starting an interview: "You will not be personally identified in the summary we present back to the team, but you must be aware that people might recognize you as the source of certain data. Thus you should respond to the questions with information that you'd be willing to discuss in the team and might possibly be identified with. However, if you have some information that is important for us to know, but you don't want it to be reported back, you can give such information 'off the record.' This won't be reported, but it might prove useful to us to better understand the team's problems." We have found this approach helpful in getting team members to open up and share information with us about the team. It also encourages team members to own their own feelings and be willing to discuss them in the team.

Team Data Gathering. An alternative to surveys and interviewing is open data sharing in a team setting. With this method each person in the team is asked to share data publicly with the other team members. The data shared may not be as inclusive as data revealed in an interview, but each person feels responsible to "own up" to the information he or she presents to the group and to deal with the issue raised. To prevent forced disclosure, one good ground rule is to tell people that they should raise only those issues they feel they can honestly discuss with the others. People generally will present only the information they feel comfortable discussing; thus the open sharing of data may result in less information but more willingness to "work the data." It may be helpful to systematically dis-

cuss barriers to effective team functioning that may exi
other three Cs: team context, team composition, or team
ship and task competencies.

The kinds of questions suggested for the interview forma
same ones that people share openly at the beginning of th
building session. Each presents his or her views on what k
team from being as effective as it could be or suggests reas
particular problem. Each person also describes the things h
likes about the team, those things that hinder personal effec
and the changes he or she feels would be helpful. All of the
compiled on a flip chart or whiteboard. (In another variati
for a large team could be gathered and shared in subgroups
the group moves on to the next stage of the team-building

Diagnosis and Analysis of Data

With all of the data now available, the manager and the co
must work with the team to summarize the data and put th
mation into a priority listing. The following summary ca
could be used:

A. Issues that we can work on in this meeting
B. Issues that someone else must work on (and identify wh
others would be)
C. Issues that apparently are not open to change; that is, t
we must learn to accept or live with

Category A items become the top agenda items for the
the team-building session. Category B items are those for
strategies must be developed for involving others. For cate
items the group must develop coping mechanisms. If the ma
prepared, he or she can handle the summary and sort the da
these three categories. If the manager feels uneasy about th
consultant may function as a role model to show how this is

The next important step is to review all of the data and to try to identify underlying factors that may be related to several problems. A careful analysis of the data may show that certain procedures, rules, or job assignments are causing several disruptive conditions.

Action Planning

After the agenda has been developed out of the data, the roles of the manager and the consultant diverge. The manager should move directly into the customary managerial role of group leader. The issues identified should become problems to solve, and plans for action should be developed.

While the manager is conducting the meeting, the consultant functions as a group observer and facilitator. Schein has referred to this activity as "process consulting," a function that others in the group also can learn to perform.[1] In this role the consultant helps the group look at its problem-solving and work processes. He or she may stop the group if certain task functions or relationship functions are missing or being performed poorly. If the group gets bogged down or "steamrolled" into uncommitted decisions, the consultant helps look at these processes, why they occur, and how they can be avoided in the future. In this role the consultant trains the group to develop more group problem-solving skills.

Implementation and Evaluation

If the actions planned at the team-building session are to make any difference, they must be put into practice. Ensuring that plans are implemented has always been a major function of management. The manager must be committed to the team plans; without commitment, it is unlikely that a manager can effectively hold people responsible for assignments agreed on in the team-building meeting.

The consultant's role is to observe the degree of action during the implementation phase and to be particularly active during the evaluation period. Another data-gathering process now begins, for

that is the basis of evaluation. It is important to see if the a planned or the goals developed during the team-building se have been achieved. This again ultimately should be the res bility of the manager, but the consultant can help train the m to carry out good program evaluation.

The manager and the consultant should work closely to in any team-development effort. It is ineffective for the mana turn the whole effort over to the consultant with the plea, " the expert. Why don't you do it for me?" Such action leac great deal of dependence on the consultant, and, if the cons is highly effective, it can cause the manager to feel inadequ even more dependent. If the consultant is ineffective, the ma can then reject the plans developed as being unworkable or u and the failure of the team-building program is blamed on th sultant. Managers must take responsibility for the team-bu program, and consultants must work with managers to help plan and take action in unfamiliar areas in which the manage need to develop the skills required to be successful.

The consultant must be honest, aggressively forthright, ar sitive. He or she must be able to help the manager look at his own style and impact in either facilitating or hindering team tiveness. The consultant needs to help group members get i tant data out in the open and keep them from feeling threater sharing with others. The consultant's role involves helpi group develop skills in group problem solving and planning. this the consultant must have a good feel for group processes able to help the group look at its own dynamics. Finally, th sultant must feel a sense of pride and accomplishment wh manager and the team demonstrate their ability to solve pro independently and thus no longer need a consultant's servic

In summary, the ability of a team to diagnose its own pro and initiate change is perhaps the distinguishing feature of performing teams. In this chapter, we have suggested that m ing effective change in teams requires the following:

- The team must be able to accurately diagnose its problems and the underlying causes to those problems. The team-building checklist in Figure 5.1 can be used to do such an assessment.
- The team leader must recognize whether he or she can manage the "team-building cycle" (Figure 5.2) alone or will need the assistance of a consultant.
- The manager (and the consultant if needed) should determine the most effective way to gather data about the team, whether through surveys, interviews, or open data sharing. The method used is often determined by the size of the team, the level of trust in the team, and what kinds of information are needed.
- Teams must have the ability to generate useful data with regard to team skills, processes, and performance, to determine what the data mean for the team, and to identify and prioritize the issues and problems that need to be addressed.
- Teams also must be able to develop and implement their action plans as well as evaluate the results. A process for assigning accountability and following through is important as well.