Design for a Temporary Team

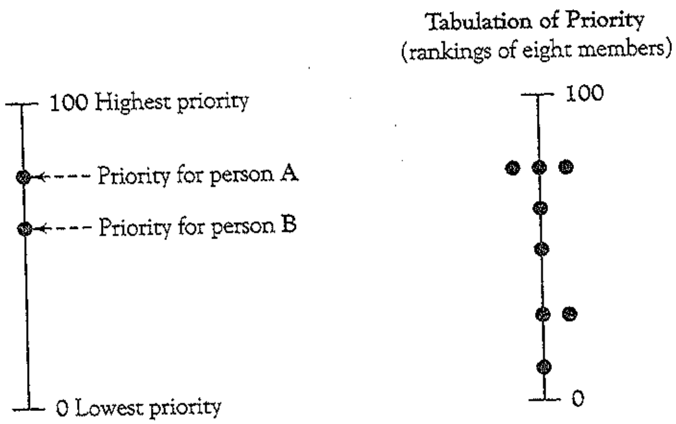
When a temporary team is being formed, team members must first meet long enough for people to get acquainted and to set guidelines and procedures for work. The design of a new temporary team consists of several distinct steps.

Step 1. Developing a Realistic Priority Level

Often people who are put together on a new team, frequently by assignment, have slightly different levels of priority or commitment to the work of the team. Some may see it as a highly significant assignment and worthy of a great deal of time and energy. Others may see it as important but lower on their personal priority list, and yet others may see it as low in both importance and priority. To come to grips with the priority issue, team members can do the following:

1. Using the scale shown in Figure 10.1, have each person draw a vertical line that represents his or her total work requirements and their priorities. Each person marks the point that represents where this team assignment ranks as a priority activity.
2. Next, have each person write down the amount of time he or she is willing to commit to the work of the team over a month's time.
3. Summarize the priority rankings (see Figure 10.1) and also the time commitments. Note the range of times and priorities and also the averages for the two dimensions.
4. In the group let each person who desires explain his or her priority and time rankings and then come to agreement as to a realistic amount of time and energy that can be expected of the team as a whole. Persons with a higher priority and team commitments may be allowed to accept heavier assignments. Making this decision openly reduces the resentment some have for doing more work and the guilt of others for letting them.

Figure 10.1. Priority Rankings.



Understanding the priority of time and commitment is especially important for a temporary team. This step may not be useful for a new team that will continue to stay together.

Step 2. Sharing Expectations

Give five minutes for each person to think about and get ready to respond to the following questions:

- What worries you most or is your biggest concern about working on this team?
- How would this team function if everything went just as you hoped?
- What do you expect to be the barriers to effective team functioning? What will likely prevent the team from achieving its goals?
- What actions do you think must be taken to ensure the positive outcomes?

Each person should be given an opportunity to share reactions, and everyone should respond to each question in turn. Try to identify the major concerns people have and list them on a blackboard

or newsprint. These concerns should become items on a planning agenda as conditions to take into consideration in order to ensure that positive things are achieved.

Step 3. Clarifying Goals

Having established priority and commitment levels and identified positive and negative expectations, the new team is ready to clarify its goals and objectives. The team should discuss and then write down what members agree is the team's *core mission*—a statement of the basic function or "reason for being" for that group, committee, or team. All plans and actions should be evaluated against the core mission. The question to ask continually is, "If we continue the activities already outlined, will we accomplish our core mission?" Extending from the core mission are the subgoals and specific objectives for a given period of time.

For example, the Edgemont Company formed a task force to review all training and development activities in the company and to make some recommendations for a coordinated training and development effort. The task force met and established its core mission: "The mission of this task force is to ensure that the Edgemont Company has appropriate and effective programs in management and organization development."

Subgoals were then identified. The team agreed to try to accomplish the core mission by (1) reviewing all ongoing training and development programs; (2) assessing the effectiveness of these programs; (3) determining if there were any overlaps or major gaps in training and development; (4) constructing a model of an effective program; (5) making recommendations to the executive committee as to the type of program needed; (6) assisting, if needed, in the implementation of the recommendations; and (7) assisting in evaluating the consequences or results of the implemented recommendations.

Once the core mission and specified subgoals have been set, the task force can make specific assignments to its members.

Step 4. Formulating Operating Guidelines

The new team needs to establish guidelines for how it will work. Provisions also need to be formulated for changing the guidelines if they prove to be dysfunctional or inappropriate as conditions change. The guidelines should clarify actions and roles and should reduce the ambiguity or mixed expectations of people as to how things ought to function, which is the basis of a great deal of conflict in a working group. The following questions indicate some of the areas for which guidelines may be useful.

How Will We Make Decisions? It is useful for the new team to talk about its decision-making procedures. Do members want to make all decisions by majority vote or team consensus, or do they want to leave some decisions to subgroups that are assigned to work?

If the group opts to make decisions by consensus, all should realize that this does not mean unanimity (everyone thinking alike). A consensus is a decision hammered out by permitting everyone to have a say. Consensus is reached after discussion, give-and-take, and compromise—when people can honestly say, "This is a sound decision—one that I am willing *to support and implement*. It is not exactly what I personally want, but given the range of opinions, the time factor, and the kinds of personalities involved, it is a good working decision."

Unless *everyone* can take that position, a consensus has not been reached. Discussion would need to continue, and adjustments or compromises or new alternatives would have to be explored until a solution is found that results in team consensus.

What Will Be Our Basic Method for Work? The team should decide what it feels will be the most efficient way to get work done. Should the total group consider all items? Should people do individual work that is then submitted to the group? Or should subcommittees do the initial work? All of these methods may be used, depending on the nature of the work to be done. However, the method of work should be decided at the outset.

How Do We Make Sure That Everyone Gets a Chance to Discuss Issues or Raise Concerns? If a team is to be effective, members need to feel that they can discuss and have considered issues or concerns they deem important. How will the team ensure this condition? It may be agreed that any members can put any item of concern on the agenda for the next meeting. An "open" meeting might be scheduled periodically to allow discussion of any topic or issue. Time could be reserved at the end of certain meetings for an open discussion. Members could be asked to distribute a memo identifying the issue they want discussed.

How Will We Resolve Differences? Any working group will have times when individuals or subgroups disagree. If not handled or managed, disagreements can, at the least, waste time and may even split the group into warring factions. A guideline for dealing with differences can be useful. If two people or subgroups disagree, it may be more useful to have a guideline stating that they get together (sometimes with a mediator) outside of the meeting of the whole group to work out their differences rather than holding up the actions of the entire team. A third person or subunit could be appointed to listen to both sides of the issues and then recommend possible compromises or new alternatives. Time limits for the open discussion of differences might expedite reaching a conclusion (or might be a frustrating hindrance). A majority voting procedure might be appropriate if the group can honestly adopt a "loyal opposition" position that allows the people the right to disagree or vote differently but still implement actions. Whatever the method for discussing, understanding, and resolving issues, a guideline will provide a beginning for coping with the sensitive problem of differences that may occur.

How Will We Ensure the Completion of Work? One of the major problems in working in groups (particularly of a committee or a task force) is the frustrating experience of some people coming unprepared or failing to complete assignments. How can the team face that issue constructively? The guidelines may state that no one will be given or will accept an assignment if the person honestly knows that he or she will not invest an appropriate amount of energy in its preparation. This means that there must be a realistic level of pri- ority building and a climate of trust so that people will feel free to state their honest preferences and reactions to assignments. This guideline may outline a procedure for having the chairperson or other designated leader remind everyone with an assignment at a suitable time prior to the next meeting. An action summary of every meeting will clearly identify all assignments and dates for report and completion, as illustrated in Figure 10.2.

The action summary can be used in place of or in addition to regular narrative minutes, but it should clearly pinpoint assign- ments and times for completion. The guideline may suggest an appropriate action, such as a personal visit by the chairperson, a report and explanation to the committee, or some other review mechanism, if a person fails to complete an assignment.

How Will We Change Things That Are Not Producing Results? There should be some guidelines for reviewing the way the com- mittee or team has been working and a method for making changes

Figure 10.2. Tracking Assignments.

Action Summary (Sample)

Decision	*Who Is to Do What*	*Date for Completion*	*Date to Report Progress*
1. A training seminar for all supervisors will be held on June 15.	1. John Hicks will make all physical arrangements.	June 10	Next meeting–May 20
	2. Ann Stewart will contact the three possible resource people.	May 24	Next meeting–May 20

when guidelines or procedures or even people in certain positio are no longer achieving results. This guideline may suggest a per odic evaluation session at which the team honestly looks at its ow work, reviews its successes and failures, and asks, "What chang would make the team more effective?" If team guidelines have bee operating effectively, many issues will have been covered, but th team may need to agree on a periodic review and evaluation mee ing or that any person may call for such a meeting when he or sh feels that conditions warrant it.

Again, the success of such a meeting depends on people feelin free to express their honest views about the team's effectiveness an to make recommendations for improvement. A fearful, defensive group will find it difficult to plan useful changes. Temporary team that are functioning poorly may also decide to engage in more extensive team-building activities by using one of the designs outlined in Chapter Six.

How Can We Keep Key Stakeholders Informed? The temporary team should generate a list of key stakeholders—senior managers, department heads, clients, and so on—who will pass judgment on the team's final product. Next to each name on the list, the team should note when the stakeholder needs to be informed of a team decision or activity, or whether the stakeholder must actually approve of the decision or activity. In this way, as the team sets out a timetable for its work, it can identify when to get stakeholders involved at appropriate milestones to ensure their support and avoid an unpleasant surprise like the one experienced by the college curriculum committee described earlier.

In summary, managing a temporary team creates certain challenges for such a team given the short time frame in which it has to do its work. Up-front planning and sharing of expectations is often the key to successful temporary teams. The team also needs to set clear priorities and goals, and set up operating guidelines for how to make decisions, keep the work on schedule, solve problems, and keep key stakeholders informed.