

## CHALLENGES FOR BUILDING EFFECTIVE TEAMS

In the preceding chapters, we have described what can be done to make teams more effective. We have placed a particular emphasis on the ability of teams to change (engage in team building), which we have described as a meta-competency that is crucial for changing team context, composition, or competencies when necessary to improve team performance. In this final chapter we summarize what we believe are the important issues for managers, team leaders, and consultants as they attempt to help teams they work with be more effective. We also will discuss the challenges that all of us will likely face in the future as organizations and their environments become more complex, while the need for teamwork remains high.

### **Implementing the Four Cs—The Key to Success**

We have found that the key to the development of effective teams is successfully managing the Four Cs that we discussed in Part One. Leaders of organizations must be willing to create “team friendly” environments for teams to function effectively. This means that they must do the following:

1. Identify the kinds of work activities for which teamwork is likely to prove essential to accomplish the task. Tasks that require reciprocal interdependence between team members typically need strong, well-functioning teams.
2. Use the structure of the organization to reinforce team membership in accomplishing the organization’s goals. This means

organizing tasks by teams when teamwork is necessary and assigning accountability to those teams.

3. Select team members on the basis of clear criteria for team membership. We recommend that potential team members be considered based on their technical expertise, interpersonal skills, and motivation to help a team function effectively to achieve its goals. Remember that teams need people to play both task roles and relationship roles for the team to function effectively over time.
4. Train managers and team members on the dynamics of effective teams and team leadership. Too many managers assume that if we just put people together on a team that they will know how to function effectively. The information on effective team dynamics found in Chapter Four should be presented to team members and discussed as to how they might apply to their specific team needs and goals. Assigning a team a task to perform without providing sufficient training is much like putting an athletic team out on the field to play the game without ever practicing.
5. Reward team members for team performance. Much like Bain & Company, organizations need to highlight and reward successful teams to create a culture that encourages teamwork. Team progress should be monitored and feedback obtained from team members to track not only team performance but their feelings about participation on the team. A part of an individual's compensation or performance review needs to be tied to his or her performance on the team.
6. Set aside time for teams to be involved in regular team-building activities. Like the credit union we discussed in Chapter Three, organizations need to be willing to set aside time for team development and be willing to pay for it.
7. Help teams develop a competency at team building. Learn to diagnose problems in team functioning as they arise and engage in team-building activities as needed to solve those

problems. A variety of problems afflict teams, including personal conflict, the Abilene Paradox, and role conflict. Consequently, team members need to be able to diagnose such problems and have the ability to identify the appropriate team-building activities that can be used to solve those problems and improve team performance.

8. Use appropriate technologies, particularly in the case of teams, to communicate, solve problems, and make decisions. Periodically review team performance, even if there are apparent problems. We suggest the regular use (generally a year) of the surveys found in this book—the Team Composition Scale (Figure 3.2), the Team Competence and Composition Scale (Figure 4.2), the Team-Building Checklist (Figure 4.2), the Team-Building Checklist (Figure 4.2), and Measuring Alliance Health (Figure 12.1). If these instruments indicate problems, then the team can engage in a type of team-building activity to solve the problems and improve performance. We have found that *role clarification* is a particularly useful exercise as a periodic check to see if team members feel about their roles and what might be in the team to help each other function more effectively.
10. Provide support to help managers and team leaders improve performance. This means that providing access to internal or external consultants or other resources can help a manager guide the team through the team-building cycles discussed in Chapter Five.

We believe that if organizations, team consultants, and leaders take these ten suggestions seriously, we would see improved performance and higher satisfaction for those who work in the environment.

### Challenges Facing Organizations of the Future

In the future we see certain trends that will challenge organizations. They will try to make their teams more effective. These challenges include:

- The lack of teamwork skills in tomorrow's workforce
- The increasing need for teams to work together in virtual workplaces and across organizational boundaries
- The increasing need for team leaders who can manage team diversity inherent in a global economy

We will briefly discuss each of these in turn.

### **Finding and Developing Employees with Team Skills**

One of the challenges facing leaders of organizations is to find employees who have the ability to work effectively in a team environment. They typically rely on our educational institutions to provide their prospective recruits with the skills needed to carry out their work. However, in our experience, few educators train students to be effective team players.

Our experience in working in academia for several decades is that most education systems undermine the development of team skills in their students. Students are encouraged to work independently and not collaborate with one another. Grades (performance) are explicitly tied to individual performance. This creates an emphasis in self-interest—rather than an orientation to collaborate with others—that can work against the kinds of behaviors needed for successfully teamwork. Jerry Harvey, in a rather controversial chapter titled “Encouraging Future Managers to Cheat,” argues that the emphasis on “doing one’s own work” has a negative impact on the cooperative spirit needed in today’s modern organizations.<sup>1</sup> Harvey argues that “cheating” is often defined as helping someone else with an assignment or doing their work for them. Thus the only “good” student is one who works alone without collaboration or help. Moreover, grades typically are based on individual and not group performance, and thus group-oriented work is not rewarded. And even when group assignments are given by an instructor, often there is little or no training on the part of the instructor to help the

students understand how to function effectively as a group in doing out the assignment. Thus, in our experience, due to the thought, preparation, and training for group work, most student groups function rather poorly, and many students see group work as “dragging them down” and hurting their grade-point average. Rather than a positive or even neutral view of teams, student graduates with a rather negative view about the role of team achieving goals.

Furthermore, the key interpersonal skills needed to function in groups, such as communication, problem solving, and conflict management, are also not part of the curriculum. Therefore students while often well-prepared for the technical aspects of a team assignment, are ill-prepared to work through the difficult interpersonal issues that must be managed in any team. Uncooperative team members are avoided rather than confronted, social loafing is allowed to take place, and conflicts are swept under the rug or are allowed to remain unresolved. Students know that the semester will soon end, so they can “sweat it out” until the end of the semester, class will end, and then they won’t have to deal with group members any more.

We believe that educators need to be more skilled in teaching learning and development and need to provide meaningful assignments that allow students to develop team skills and have positive team experiences. This may be particularly important in the future because many students will not have had the experience of positive team experiences in their first learning environment—the home given that about 50 percent of all marriages end in divorce as many families these days are rife with conflict. In such cases, students’ “team of origin” will not have provided them with a positive view of being dependent on others, since those others (family members) may have let them down or even inflicted harm. Given their first experience and view of what a “team” is comes from our experience in our families, one must wonder how effectively the families of the future will be preparing children to live in a world that requires teamwork. Such a condition makes it imperative that

educators strive to help students develop a positive attitude toward group work and the development of skills that will allow them to function effectively in groups. Unfortunately, it's not likely that many families or educators will prepare future generations to work effectively in teams. Hence, it will likely be up to organizations themselves to develop training programs to orient employees to teamwork and provide them with the skills they will need to succeed in a team environment.

### Teams Without Clear Boundaries

In Chapters Eleven and Twelve we discussed the important role that virtual teams and alliance teams are playing in today's world. We believe that there will be a continued trend for the use of these types of teams in the future. Organizations will find it increasingly important for individuals to work together who are not in the same physical space. Hence, they will have to learn to function effectively as virtual teams. Furthermore, joint ventures and strategic alliances will continue to be important features of the strategies of many firms. The creation of effective alliance teams to manage their shared interests will be critical for the success of such ventures. As we have noted, building trust, developing effective means of communicating and problem solving, and creating common incentives for group members to work together are all key aspects of developing successful virtual or alliance teams. Technology will likely continue to advance and will speed and improve communications, whether it's through handheld video communication, teleconferencing, or more effective e-mail systems, allowing people to effectively coordinate their work. The ability of organizations to use communication technologies to coordinate effectively will likely be a source of team success and hence may give a competitive advantage in the future. Moreover, when the boundaries of the team are more ambiguous the need for monitoring team performance and engaging in team-building activities likely will become even more important.

### Globalization and Teamwork

The globalization of industry also will make teamwork more challenging in the future. Teams of the future will be composed and more of team members who have dissimilar languages, cultures, values, and approaches to solving problems. In Chapter Eleven noted the cultural differences in how people view relationships, power, uncertainty, and other factors that are important for individuals to communicate and coordinate their efforts effectively to the extent that we find more multicultural teams in the future, building will become more important. Creating a context that provides incentives for team members to work together will be important for success, as will creating a common understanding among members of what effective team dynamics are and of how they should function effectively as a team. Moreover, developing a "common language" whereby team members can understand one another and communicate effectively will be crucial. Thus, building exercises such as role clarification likely will provide important activities for such teams to succeed, given that different cultural values and language may foster misunderstandings by team members, making effective performance difficult. Thus, that the nature of work in the twenty-first century and increasing globalization will continue to make team-building activities a priority for managers in the future. Without such an emphasis on teams, the likelihood of success on the part of global organizations will be reduced.

### Conclusion

Throughout the chapters in this book, we have described what can be done to improve the effectiveness of teams. In our experience, much of our own personal success, satisfaction, and also frustration has come from working on teams. Teams that work well generate energy, motivation, and a sense of accomplishment. Those that function poorly leave us feeling frustrated and unwilling to exert our best efforts to see the team succeed. To make a team suc-

requires not only the knowledge that we have presented in this book, but also a commitment on the part of individual team members to take the initiative to make their team function more effectively. One of our father Bill Dyer's favorite, yet sad, lines in literature comes from *Walden*, when Thoreau writes, "The mass of men [and women] lead lives of quiet desperation."<sup>2</sup> To avoid such feelings of desperation, Bill's vision of a better world was to help family, church, and work teams function in such a way that members of those teams felt the rewards and satisfaction of collaborating with and supporting others to achieve meaningful goals. For those of you who are working on an ineffective team, we encourage you to change your team for the better by speaking up to encourage the team to develop new ways of functioning that will help improve its performance. It takes courage to say, "I don't think our team is functioning as well as it could. What can we do to make our team function more effectively so we can have a more positive team experience?" The ideas presented in this book have proven effective in improving team performance; we believe they will prove helpful to you as you encourage your team to diagnose its problems and develop plans to improve its effectiveness. Our hope is that this book will provide you with both the motivation and the information you will need to improve your team's performance.

## Notes

### Introduction

1. S. Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: HarperCollins, 1974); and D. McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960).
2. J. Campbell and M. Dunnette, "Effectiveness of T-Group Experiences in Managerial Training and Development," *Psychology Bulletin*, 1968, 70, 73-103.
3. W. G. Dyer, *Team Building: Issues and Alternatives* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1977), p. 23.

### Chapter One

1. J. Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).
2. For an in-depth description of how Toyota shares knowledge across interorganizational boundaries to improve performance see Jeffrey H. Dyer and Nile Hatch, "Using Supplier Networks to Learn Faster," *Sloan Management Review*, Spring 2004, pp. 57-63.

### Chapter Two

1. J. D. Thompson, *Organizations in Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).
2. R. W. Scott, *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems* 2nd Ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1981), pp. 212-213.