# Work Teams,

# Teamwork

# &

# Helping Teams Work Better

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## Teams for Peak Performance

The use of work teams is the most powerful organization concept since the Roman Legions. Teamwork provides superior motivation, enhanced coordination, improved problem solving, and better decision-making. Self Directed Work Teams (SDWT) motivate, coordinate, solve problems, and make decisions better than individuals.

This performance comes at a price: decisions are slow; work teams require extensive training and months to mature. However, the benefits far outweigh the difficulties and frustrations.

Work teams are an important component of Lean Manufacturing. They enhance the performance of workcells, conduct better setups and improve quality efforts.

Team building is not easy. Teams require training, compatible workflow, compatible organizations structures, understanding management, and great patience. Any particular team may require 6-18 months to reach peak performance and building the culture and architecture for teams may require years of effort.

Outstanding examples of work teams were the American bomber crews of World War II. A B-17 or B-24 carried ten men, each with a vital specialty. The team had an official mission each day they flew: bomb a specific target. They also had an unofficial goal: survive for 25 missions. These dual missions were powerful motivators.

Most bomber crews were heterogeneous with men from every part of the country, varied educational background, and different personality types. The common denominator was age: they were all very young.

The Army Air Force recognized the value of teamwork. Before combat, bomber teams trained together for more than a year. They lived together, ate together and worked together. Military formalities in the AAF were notoriously relaxed and egalitarian. While the pilot was officially in command, a wise pilot (and there were many young and wise pilots) listened to his crew.

The story of these bomber crews illustrates essential points about work teams: work teams need a Mission; work teams need personal bonding; work teams need time; work teams need training.

Work Teams are powerful motivators. The remarkable accomplishments of the Allied airmen testify to this. Your organization can also benefit from these phenomena. However, it takes effort, training, and patience.

## Why Teams Work Better

Problems in an organization are often complex and difficult. Root causes are hidden. Solutions are elusive and often ineffective. Trained, diverse, and mature work teams address these types of problems better than individuals. From training and experience, they dig deep for the root causes. Diversity brings logical, emotional, and intuitive intelligences to bear on an issue. Solutions are often simple, elegant, and effective. Competent work teams make better decisions for the same reasons.

Motivation is superior with teams, especially Self Directed Work Teams. Think of your feelings while on a winning sports team to appreciate this power. Teams appeal to the higher motivators. They satisfy cravings for social interaction, esteem, and self-actualization.

Excellent coordination is a hallmark in work teams. This is especially important where multiple, sequential tasks take place. The sports analogy applies here as well.

The power and effectiveness of work teams can be a strategic advantage in business. However, they are not for management that is impatient, arrogant, or unwilling to invest time, attention, and training. In the articles below, we explore the conditions for success.

## Types of Teams

Problem Solving and Self Directed Work Teams are the most common types of team in the workplace. Design teams can also be used. Team organization ranges from very casual to very formal, as does the degree of teamwork.

### Problem Solving

Problem-solving teams have members from different parts of an organization. The purpose is to solve a particular problem. They often disband at task completion, but problem-solving teams may also be ongoing and attack a series of problems or assignments. These are the original "Quality Circles" imported from Japan.

### Work Teams

Work Teams are ongoing. Their mission is to manage and coordinate daily work. They draw members from the same department or area. Ideally, they perform a series of sequential tasks that result in a finished product. Work teams may switch to the problem-solving mode to deal with an impediment. Most of the discussion in this article focuses on work teams and, in particular, Self Directed Work Teams (SDWT).

### Design Teams

These are teams brought together for a particular design project. They operate much like problem-solving teams and usually disband at task completion.

## What Teams Need

Self Directed Work Teams (SDWT) bring many benefits. However, throwing a group of people together and anointing them, as a team rarely brings good results.

### Team-Oriented Work Structures

A Self Directed Work Team requires a compatible work structure. This means that the team members work together to produce each product. To do so, their workstations should, ideally, be in the same location and they must report, as a team, to the same supervisor or team coach.

It is also desirable that the work area for the team be small enough that members can see each other and converse with each other. Focusing the team's work on a single product or a narrow range of similar products is also desirable.

Workcells provide an ideal structure for such SDWTs. The close proximity of processes and close coordination of work promotes teamwork among the members. A well-designed workcell can help an effective team form even without benefit of team training.

### Team Process Training

Team process refers to the activities and relationships within the team. It involves communication, conflict resolution, time management and other activities. Team process also refers to the gradual establishments of behavioral norms, team objectives and bonding.

Members do not possess instinctive knowledge of team processes and they are unlikely to learn effective team processes from their cultural environment. Training can help and we recommend at least a full day of training on team process.

### Coaching

Training is not enough, however. Most team members have difficulty when they first attempt to apply the principles they learn in the classroom. Coaching bridges this gap. An effective coach helps the team to see where principles and techniques can apply. Much of the learning of team process can only be gained through experience. An effective coach can guide the team through their early experiences and accelerate this learning.

### Task Training

When team members lack the skills to accomplish their tasks, the team experiences frustration and conflict. Adequate task training can reduce this source of frustration in the critical early days. Teams also need considerable cross training. Cross training helps the team function if a member is temporarily absent. It also gives each member a better appreciation for the difficulties other members may face. In many workcells, cross training is essential for workers to balance their workload.

### Time

The new and unfamiliar skills required of the team require time to develop. Establishing behavioral norms and team bonding requires time. During this time, production may lag below targets and quality problems may surface. Patience on the part of management is crucial. While some results develop sooner, it usually takes 18-24 months for a team to reach full potential.

### Member Selection

Experts have differing opinions on the benefits of member selection. Some advocate a selection that gives the team consistency while others believe that diversity is more valuable.

Consistency in cultural background, and personality type gets the team off to a quick start. It reduces the possibility of conflict from differing ideas, approaches or attitudes. However, this can also lead to "Groupthink" where the entire team falls into similar thinking patterns and inhibits new and original ideas.

Diversity of personalities and cultural backgrounds is more difficult to manage. The team will require more time in the Storming and Norming stages. It will require more skills from the team coach and more patience from management. However, in the end, diversity is more likely to develop better performance, more innovation and closer bonding.

### Rewards

Reward systems should be geared to the team rather than individuals. If bonuses and incentives are part of the reward system, they should be given for the team's performance and not individual performance. Intrinsic rewards such as recognition, or feelings of accomplishment have more power than monetary rewards. Time

### A Team Culture

Managers and specialists who operate outside the work teams must also understand them. Teams can be destroyed by inappropriate personnel policies, pay systems, supervision, or a few destructive comments from managers and staff.

## Team Leadership

Leadership in work teams takes a wide range of forms. At one extreme is the Self Directed team that has no formal leadership. At the other end of the spectrum teams may have an appointed formal supervisor who gives the group discretion in management and responsibility. In between there might be arrangements with rotating leaders or elected leaders.

Participative leadership is vitally important for team functioning and morale. This requires different skills and attitudes than may be found among the usual cadre of supervisors. If supervisors become team leaders, they also require training and coaching.

## Stages of Team Development

Self-Directed Work Teams develop in four stages: Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. It is management's task to provide training, coaching, and an environment that promotes progression through these stages.

### Forming

This beginning stage lasts a few days or weeks. People think about their new tasks and new environment. They plan their work and their new roles. Their emotions are usually positive.

The work team should be learning about team processes in preparation for rough times ahead. They need learn the rudiments of conflict resolution, communication, time management, and group decision-making. However, management may not be aware of these needs and, therefore, not provide such training.

### Storming

The anticipation and enthusiasm of the forming stage quickly falls away as the team faces a myriad of technical, interpersonal and social problems. They fight and argue. People feel frustration, resentment, and anger as problems fester and work goes undone.

Managers also experience frustration and are tempted to intervene. Members are on an emotional roller coaster from elation to depression and back again. The situation seems bleak. With proper training and support, the Storming period may last 1-2 months. Without training and support, the team may not progress.

Conflict has a bad reputation. Nevertheless, conflict is normal, natural, and even necessary. Handled well it builds skill and confidence as the team enters the Norming Stage.

### Norming

Here, the team works through individual and social issues. They establish their own norms of behavior. Members begin to trust each other.

As the team develops interpersonal skills, it also hones other skills. Members become increasingly adept at problem solving. They cross-train and learn new job skills. They manage their time and their quality with growing competence, confidence, and independence. The Norming stage usually is 4-12 months.

### Performing

Now things begin to click. Members help each other, conflict is de-personalized, problems are solved and successive goals achieved and exceeded. Satisfaction and pride become the dominant emotions. The team takes pride in their work, pride in their accomplishments, and pride in their team. Individuals take pride in their membership.

## Team Conflict

Resolving conflict constructively is the most critical of team skills. Without this ability, the team cannot develop the trust and bonding that allows moving from the Storming stage into peak performance. Conflict resolution is not a stand-alone skill. There are specific techniques and attitudes that are helpful, but conflict resolution interrelates with other skills. An absence of overt conflict is often mistaken for teamwork. However, conflict is natural, even desirable.
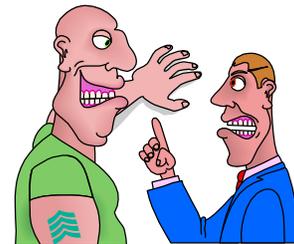
Effective teams gain power from divergent thinking, attitudes and experience. Without this variety, conflict is lessened but the results are less effective. Teams that suppress conflict also lose effectiveness and the conflict eventually erupts in destructive ways.

### Communication Skills

Good communication skills prevent conflict or destructive escalation. Many of us do not communicate well. Sometimes our body language does not fit our verbal messages creating a cognitive dissonance in the listener. We may personalize issues. We may criticize people rather than actions, behaviors, or situations.

Listening effectively is the other half of good communication. The most common deficiency is letting our mind race ahead of the speaker's voice. We may use this speed difference to formulate responses or defenses. Or we may allow our mind to wander on other subjects and miss part of what is said. This is, at best, frustrating for the speaker. It also leads to misunderstandings. Team members must train their minds to focus on words and message until the speaker finishes. Only then, should they analyze and formulate a response.

### Problem Solving

Problem solving skills define a problem, gather information, analyze the information, synthesize solutions, select the best solution, and implement it. These activities occur in distinct steps and in an orderly and structured way.

Without good problem solving skills, people jump to conclusions. The conclusions that various people jump to are often wildly different. Without a factual basis, the discussion turns to who is "wrong" and who is "right" with an undertone of who is "OK" or "Not OK." Problem solving avoids conflict with structure and consensus. Teams can also bring problem solving directly to bear on a conflict. They treat the conflict as a problem, gather information, analyze, search for solutions, and implement.

### Conflict Resolution Skills

Intervention occurs when parties to a conflict are confronted. In the mildest form, a team member quietly and separately points out the situation to one or more of the individuals involved. In the strongest intervention, the entire team confronts the conflicted parties much as friends and relatives might confront an addict.

Feedback is an effective conflict resolution technique. In feedback, one individual confronts another in a structured setting with a carefully crafted statement. A feedback statement goes like this:

"When you…(Describe The Behavior)""I feel….(Describe Your Emotion)""Because…(Describe The Reason For the Emotion)""What do you think?" (Wait For Response)

An example would be: "Jim, when you are late for meetings it makes me angry because your tardiness wastes everyone's time and prevents our team from conducting its business. What do you think?"

The addressee of the feedback statement must then respond in a structured way. A facilitator governs and controls the process. Feedback is powerful. It defuses anger and brings rationality to a discussion. Feedback and Intervention are only two of many conflict resolution techniques.

### Other Skills That Prevent Conflict

Other team skills have a collateral effect of avoiding or mitigating conflict. Time management prevents arguments about who does what and when. Cross training prevents boredom and prevents conflict over workloads. Facilitation controls meetings and reduces frustration over wasted time.

## Teams In Lean Manufacturing

Teams are an integral part of Lean Manufacturing. Lean Manufacturing systems have many interrelated causes and effects that occur over time. They are dynamic and "Systems Thinking" can help our understanding.

Teams are especially important for workcells. The work team may not have enough people to assign one skill set to each person. Workloads are often unbalanced. If trouble develops on a particular operation, the team needs to quickly shift members and relieve the problem. For these and other reasons, teams perform better with cross training.

## The Virtuous Circle of Teamwork

We all know about "Vicious Circles." Teams form a "Virtuous Circle" in which actions trigger effects in a cycle that reinforces the original action. We can trace a virtuous or vicious circle from anywhere on the loop. Let us arbitrarily start at "Training." Training for Lean Manufacturing teams should cover many areas. Among these are Statistical Process Control, Root Cause Analysis, Team Building, and job skills. Because of training and application, teams and individuals are more competent.
They work better together in many ways.

Destructive, emotional conflict evolves to constructive discussion and rational problem solving. As a result:

- Decisions get made quickly and with consensus
- Meetings become timely and produce results.
- People help one another.
- The work is done.

Increasing competence engenders pride for both teams and individuals: Pride in their work, skills, and accomplishments. Pride and competence bring high performance: the "Can Do" and "Will Do."

High performance leads to more training as management sees the benefits. Teams work within their groups to cross-train and assist one another. This renewed training results in higher competence and the Virtuous circle repeats and reinforces. Perceptive managers recognize and utilize this effect as part of their Lean Manufacturing Strategy.

### Summary

Self Directed Work Teams are a powerful means to increase productivity, quality, and customer response. They make work more fun. While these improvements are often-order-of magnitude rather than a few percentage points, they require changes in both management and individual thinkinga paradigm shift. Teams also require time, effort and tolerance.

Notes:

This series of articles originally appeared in The Kansas City Business Journal. It is about Teams, Teamwork and Team Building in the workplace.

If you found this article interesting, you will like our video, "Life In A Workcell." In this unique video, members of a work team describe how they designed and built their own workcell, how it brought their team closer together, why the cell works, and how it has improved their work life. You can order this video by calling 816-931-1414. The price is $125.00, including shipping and handling.