

Takeaway 13.3

How Can Managers Create and Lead High-Performance Teams?

ANSWERS TO COME

- Team building can improve teamwork and performance.
- Teams benefit when they use the right decision methods.
- Teams suffer when groupthink leads to bad decisions.
- Teams benefit when conflicts are well managed.

THERE'S QUITE A BIT OF AGREEMENT ABOUT THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH-performance teams.⁴³ They have clear and elevating goals. They are results oriented, and their members are hard working. They have high standards of excellence in a collaborative team culture. They get solid external support and recognition for their accomplishments. And they have strong and principled leaders. It's a great list, isn't it? But how do we get and stay there?

Although we know that high-performance teams generally share the characteristics just noted, not all teams reach this level of excellence. Just as in the world of sports, there are many things that can go wrong and cause problems for teams in the workplace.

TEAM BUILDING CAN IMPROVE TEAMWORK AND PERFORMANCE.

One of the ways to grow capacity for long-term team effectiveness is a practice known as **team building**. This is a set of planned activities used to analyze the functioning of a team and then make changes to improve teamwork and performance.⁴⁴ Most systematic approaches to team building begin with awareness that a problem may exist or may develop within the team. The next step is for team members to work together to gather data and fully understand the problem. Action plans are then made, implemented, and evaluated by team members. As difficulties or new problems are discovered, the team-building process recycles.

There are many methods for gathering data on team functioning, including structured and unstructured interviews, questionnaires, team meetings, and reality experiences. Regardless of the method used, the basic principle of team building remains the same—a careful and collaborative assessment of data on team inputs, processes, and results. It works best when all members participate in data gathering and analysis and then collectively decide on actions to be taken.

Team building can be done with or without the help of outside consultants. It can also be done in the workplace or in off-site locations. It is increasingly popular, for example, to engage in outdoor activities—obstacle courses or special events like geocaching—to create enthusiasm for a team building experience. As one outdoor team-building expert points out, these outdoor team activities “focus on building trust, increasing productivity and emphasizing the importance of being a team player, as well as improving communication and listening skills while learning about group dynamics.”⁴⁵ It's quite a statement, but the power of team building cannot be denied.

TEAMS BENEFIT WHEN THEY USE THE RIGHT DECISION METHODS.

The best teams don't limit themselves to just one **decision-making** method. Edgar Schein, a respected scholar and consultant, describes six ways teams make decisions.⁴⁶ He and other scholars note that teams ideally choose and use methods that best fit the problems at hand.⁴⁷ But mistakes are often made.

In *decision by lack of response*, one idea after another is suggested without any discussion taking place. When the team finally accepts an idea, all alternatives have been bypassed and

Team building involves gathering and analyzing data, and making changes to improve teamwork and performance.

Decision making is the process of making choices among alternative courses of action.