

Working in Teams

Overview

Purpose

The purpose of this module is to present key principles of effective teamwork and an opportunity for participants to experience the benefits and challenges of teamwork.

Objectives

At the end of this module participants will be able to:

- Discuss the characteristics of an effective team and factors influencing team effectiveness.
- Describe the stages of team development.
- Recognize what stage a team is in.
- Discuss the importance of team building.
- Discuss the benefits and challenges of working in teams.

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Why Work in Teams?

A team is “a high-performing task group whose members are interdependent and share a common performance objective.” (Francis and Young, 1992)

A group of people becomes a “team” when there is a performance objective or challenge that is meaningful to those involved.

Types of Teams

Teams may be classified based on their performance objective. There are:

- teams who recommend things
- teams who make or do things

- teams who oversee or manage things

Each type of team may be **ad hoc** (or temporary), and formed to accomplish a specific set of objectives, or **ongoing** (or permanent), taking on different tasks as time goes on.

Benefits

Today's health professionals face increasingly complex problems.. To solve these problems, divergent points of view must be integrated, and individuals must collaborate effectively. Effective teams promote integration and collaboration, provide other benefits such as:

- A more complete working knowledge of the process because of having multiple points of view represented.
- A more open atmosphere with less blaming of others for problems.
- A greater number of ideas to resolve problems.
- Greater acceptance and a higher implementation rate of solutions.
- Ability to tackle larger issues than an individual working alone.
- Immediate access to the technical skills and knowledge of all the team members.
- Mutual support and cooperation that occurs between team members as they work on a project.

Teamwork also provides some benefits to the individual team members. These include:

- The opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the issues and concerns that have an impact on their work.
- The opportunity to share their ideas and be creative.
- The opportunity to develop stronger working relationships with many different associates.
- The opportunity to learn new skills.
- The satisfaction of knowing they are part of the solution.

Characteristics of Effective Teams

There are several characteristics of effective teams that develop over time.

- **Clear goal and role definition.** Team members know what their goals are and what they are supposed to do. Roles are balanced and shared to facilitate both the accomplishment of tasks and feelings of team cohesion and morale. Formal roles (team leader, coach, time keeper, recorder) are rotated as appropriate so all members become effective in each role.
- **Sensitivity to each other's needs and expressions.** Effective team members listen to each other and have respect for each other's opinions. This characteristic is evidenced by members showing an interest in what others say and feel, and clarifying what is being said. Differences of opinion are encouraged and respected. Team

members feel free to express their individual, and perhaps changing, needs and the rest of the team responds.

- **Clear expectations and preparation.** Task assignments are clearly specified, including a date for completion, so team members know what is expected and can properly prepare. Effective team members prepare materials in advance and have them available for distribution.
- **A high level of interest and commitment.** The team members share a sense of purpose or common goals; each team member is committed to work toward achieving these goals.
- **Interruptions and distractions are avoided or kept to a minimum.** The team focuses on its work and does not allow itself to be distracted by unresolved interpersonal issues or unproductive competitive struggles.
- **Careful time control.** Team meetings start and end on time and follow an agenda with enough time allotted to get the work done. Little time is wasted on extraneous matters during team meetings.
- **Record keeping.** An effective team keeps track of decisions that were made and actions taken. These records are available for the team and outsiders to review.
- **Constructive team self-assessment.** Periodically, an effective team will take time to assess its own performance. The team is interested in knowing its own processes and examining its norms. The team is willing to identify, resolve, or manage conflict in a way that allows its productivity to continue. Needed improvements are worked out.
- **Individual recognition and appreciation.** Team members recognize each others' resources and use them. The team willingly accepts the influence and leadership of members whose strengths are relevant to the immediate task.
- **Organizational acceptance.** The organization in which the team operates values and implements its work.
- **Positive and trusting team climate.** Perhaps the most crucial characteristic of effective team, mutual trust is necessary for achieving each of the characteristics described above. Team members express their thoughts, maintain confidentiality, and support each other in accomplishing the work of the team. They are willing to take risks and be creative since mistakes are treated as sources of learning rather than reasons for punishment.

Team Roles

Roles in the team clarify what behaviors are expected from each member, and from the members as a group. All team members have some common roles and responsibilities. In addition, team members may play special individual roles that keep a team on task, such as team leader, recorder, and

time keeper. When available, improvement coaches take on the roles of facilitator and trainer, at least initially, until individual team members have acquired those skills.

Each of these roles will be discussed in detail in this module, beginning with the role of the team leader and the common roles and responsibilities of all team members. The role of team leader is usually assigned. Other roles of facilitator, trainer, timekeeper and recorder may be assigned, or may be alternated among the members.

Team members also act based on their personalities, and support the team by taking on roles based on their inherent interaction styles, such as harmonizer, critic, or promoter. These team support roles are discussed in Module 6: Clarifying Team Roles and Responsibilities.

It must be noted that people tend to shine in certain areas, because of different talents or inclinations. Likewise, people are imperfect in different ways. In a team, one person's weakness can be counterbalanced by another's strength. Teams have a range of resources not available to people who are working alone on a project.

Team Leader

The team leader is the person who manages the team: calling and guiding meetings, handling or assigning administrative details, orchestrating all team activities, and overseeing preparations for reports and presentations.

The team leader should be interested in solving the problems that prompted the project, and be reasonably good at working with individuals and groups. Ultimately, it is the leader's responsibility to create and maintain communication channels and work processes that enable team members to do their work.

Formal leaders are people who are assigned to a leadership position. They have clear authority and accountability to make decisions, and are responsible for subordinates' work.

Informal leaders are people who, though not assigned as leader, have strong influence and responsibility. They may naturally take over a leadership role, which may be either beneficial or harmful in any given situation.

During a team's work, informal leaders may emerge – people who by their nature can influence and direct the work of the team. They can be very helpful to the formal leader if they are given appropriate responsibilities in their team. They may be delegated some of the leader's tasks, in order to reduce the work of the formal leader. This shared leadership is ideal for improvement work, as it recognizes the abilities that members bring to the team and

help to share the work within the team.

In permanent teams, the leader is often a formal leader. He or she may be the manager (for example, a department head) who is responsible for the work the team addresses. This leader often delegates tasks of organizing and running the meeting, but retains responsibility for accomplishing work.

The leader's role is not to make all the decisions but simply to lead the team through its work, ensuring that the team meets its goals.

The most important factor in determining the quality of a team's work is the way in which its leader operates. Leadership, like virtue, is hard to identify and, paradoxically, it is most clearly recognized in its absence. A leader who is unwilling to use a team approach, or who lacks the skills to develop a team-based style of management, will thwart team-building initiatives.

Effective team leaders:

- Communicate effectively.
- Are open, honest, and fair.
- Listen to feedback and ask questions.
- Give praise and recognition.
- Criticize constructively and address problems.
- Demonstrate assertiveness.
- Make decisions with input from others.
- Act consistently.
- Give team members information they need to do their jobs.
- Develop plans.
- Share their mission and goals.
- Set team goals collaboratively, and emphasize them.
- Keep focused through follow-up.
- Show loyalty to the organization and to the team members.
- Create an atmosphere of growth.
- Have wide visibility.
- Display tolerance and flexibility.
- Exhibit a willingness to change.
- Treat team members with respect.
- Make themselves available and accessible.
- Want to take charge.
- Accept ownership for team decisions.
- Set guidelines for how team members are to treat one another.
- Represent the team and defend their actions when appropriate.

Team Members

The nature of the project dictates team membership. In ad hoc teams, members are people who work closely with some aspect of the process

under study, often representing different stages of the process and groups likely to be affected by the project. They can be of various ranks, professions, classifications, shifts, or work areas.

In permanent teams, members are the people who own the process, such as all the MCH staff in a facility, or all the subordinates who report to the same manager.

Team members are responsible for contributing fully to the project, sharing their knowledge and expertise, and participating in all meetings and discussions. They are responsible for carrying out their assignments on time and applying the steps of the chosen quality assurance intervention.

Each team member is expected to:

- Attend and participate in all team meetings.
- Help build the agenda.
- Help evaluate and improve the meeting process.
- Share experience and knowledge.
- Participate in team activities.
- Complete assignments on time.
- Apply the steps of selected quality assurance intervention.
- Encourage other team members to participate.

Effective team members:

- Support the team leader.
- Help the team and team leader to succeed.
- Ensure that all viewpoints are explored.
- Express opinions, both “for” and “against.”
- Provide open, honest, and accurate information.
- Act in a positive and constructive manner.
- Provide appropriate feedback.
- Understand personal and team roles.
- Bring problems to the team (upward feedback).
- Accept ownership for team decisions.
- Recognize that each serves as a leader in the team.
- Balance appropriate levels of participation.
- Participate voluntarily.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Show loyalty to the organization, the team leader, and the team.
- View criticism as an opportunity to learn.
- State problems, along with alternative solutions/options.
- Give praise and recognition when warranted.

Team Recorder

The recorder maintains the team’s minutes / proceedings and agendas, as well as coordinates the preparation of reports, documents, and other items

such as storybooks and storyboards. Many times the recorder for a meeting rotates among the members.

Time Keeper

In meetings, the time keeper watches the time and reminds the team of how much time remains for a particular agenda item as well as how much time remains in the meeting. If discussion is taking more time than anticipated these reminders will prompt the team to adjust the agenda accordingly, if necessary. This role often rotates, too.

Facilitator

A facilitator observes team processes and gives both supportive and constructive feedback to the team about the way they interact and the way work gets done. Often this person is the improvement coach, but in the absence of a coach the team leader may facilitate. In a mature team, any member with the skills to do so may facilitate the meeting.

Trainer

A trainer imparts knowledge and builds skills among individual team members and with the team as a whole. This person may not be a permanent team member. When clinical or job specific training is needed, a trainer with knowledge about those topics would be called upon. When training addresses improvement topics, the use of improvement tools and techniques, group process skills, and team building, often the trainer is the improvement coach.

The focus of this training program is the role of the improvement coach as facilitator and trainer. These roles and responsibilities, as well as skill development in facilitation and training are fully addressed in the remaining modules.

Stages of Team Development

As a team develops, it goes through fairly predictable stages. These stages were first identified by Tuckman and labeled:

- Forming
- Storming
- Norming
- Performing

Ad hoc groups, such as problem-solving teams, have an additional stage, called “Closing.”

This model of team development provides a convenient way to analyze a team and to identify and resolve common group process problems.

Each team develops in its own way. A team may reach the Performing stage by going through all the stages sequentially; others may develop

erratically – skipping some aspects of a stage, and then returning to it later. Changes in the membership or leadership of a team, or in goals or tasks, will tend to pull the team back toward Stage 1 (forming). Using a new improvement tool for the first time or difficulties with data collection may have similar effects. On the other hand, a particularly helpful intervention by the coach or a team member in conflict management, for example, may help the group move forward dramatically.

In general, when the team is moving toward its goals, progress is developmental. When the group gets stuck, or its organization is disrupted, its developmental progress tends to revert to an earlier stage.

Coach's role: For team building to occur, members need to learn to identify the feelings and behaviors they experience in each of the stages. The coach can facilitate this process by stating his or her observations and asking members how they can contribute to the team to help it move on. The coach also may provide specific training in group process and communication.

Stage 1: Forming

When a team is forming, members cautiously explore acceptable group behavior. People's roles change from "individual" to "member." They may challenge the authority of the leader and the coach, but they also tend to be dependent on them for orientation and direction.

When a team is being formed, members generally have these feelings:

- Excitement, anticipation, optimism.
- Pride in being chosen for the project.
- Tentative initial attachment to the team.
- Anxiety, fears, or even suspicions about the job ahead.

... and demonstrate these behaviors:

- Polite, fairly formal interactions with other members.
- Attempts to define the task and decide how it will be accomplished.
- Attempts to figure out what is acceptable group behavior and how to deal with group problems.
- Decisions about what information needs to be gathered.
- Discussion of abstract concepts and issues.
- Discussion of topics not relevant to the task; difficulty in identifying relevant problems.
- Complaints about the organization and barriers to the task.

Useful activities or tools that help groups in the Forming stage are:

- Conducting introduction/inclusion activities.
- Clarifying the mission/project.

- Establishing ground rules for team behavior.
- Providing needed training.

Stage 2: Storming

The Storming stage is critical to effective group development, but may be experienced as a difficult time for the team. In this stage, the task seems harder than they expected. Some team members become impatient and argumentative. Others may resist collaborating with each other.

If the team is committed to its task and purpose, this stage provides the opportunity for individuals to establish their own expertise within the group. They will forge ways of working with one another, and come to respect one another's point of view.

At the Storming stage, members generally have these feelings:

- Resistance to the task and to quality assurance approaches with which they are unfamiliar.
- Vacillating (positive and negative, though often negative) feelings about the team, the team members, and the project's chance of success.

... and demonstrate these behaviors:

- Arguing among members, even when they agree on the real issues.
- Defensiveness, competition, jealousy or withdrawal.
- Questioning the purpose of the project.
- Setting unrealistic goals; being concerned about excessive work.

If the team “gets stuck” in this stage and does not resolve its interpersonal and role issues, it will never reach optimal performance and the achievement of the team's objectives may be in jeopardy.

Useful activities/tools the coach may use in the Storming phase are:

- Conflict management techniques.
- Clarification/teaching of improvement concepts, tools, team dynamics, meeting methods, and roles.

Stage 3: Norming

During this stage, members begin to accept the team, their roles on the team, and the individuality of fellow members. Conflict is minimal as members are cooperative, realize their common goals, and get to know each other better. However, effectiveness may be reduced in this stage due to members' new desire to please one another. A desire not to cause conflict can result in bad decisions, as all aspects of an issue may not be fully explored.

At the Norming stage, members generally have these feelings:

- Acceptance of membership in the team.
- Relief that everything is going to work out.

... and exhibit these behaviors:

- Commitment to working out differences.
- Giving and receiving feedback constructively.
- More expression of feelings.
- “Playful” interactions.
- Establishment of team ground rules and boundaries (the “norms”).

Useful activities/tools the coach may use in the Norming phase are:

- Continue the fostering of shared responsibility.
- Establishing group norms.
- Refocus on the agenda or purpose (when necessary).
- Test consensus by asking for differing opinions, or by posing as “a devil’s advocate” – taking an opposing side for the sake of stimulating divergent thinking
- Provide training in improvement tools or group processes as needed.

Stage 4: Performing

At this stage, the team starts diagnosing and solving problems, and choosing and implementing changes. Members accept each other’s strengths and weaknesses, and know their own roles. They gain insight into personal and group processes. The coach helps the team to perform more self-evaluation and accept leadership, facilitation, and training responsibilities.

During the Performing stage, group members generally have these feelings:

- Satisfaction with the team’s progress.
- Trust in one another.

... and exhibit these behaviors:

- An ability to anticipate and prevent problems or work through them constructively.
- Risk-taking, creativity, and learning of new skills/roles.
- Commitment to process and goals.

Useful activities/tools the coach may use in the Performing phase are:

- Training in improvement tools or concepts as needed.
- Team and individual self-evaluation.

- Sharing leadership responsibilities.

Special Stage: Closing

The work of a problem-solving or quality improvement team is intended to end when process improvements are in place. The team must deal with either the success or failure of their efforts and the disbanding of the team. The team should identify lessons learned and plan how they will be communicated. The leader and team celebrate their successes and provide support if the project has not been successful.

During the Closing stage, members generally have these feelings:

- If successful: joy, pride, elation, loss (due to the dissolution of the team).
- If unsuccessful: frustration or anger.

... and demonstrate these behaviors:

- If successful: expression of appreciation, avoidance of the final close-out activities.
- If unsuccessful: denial, blame, disassociation.

Useful activities/tools the coach may use in the Closing phase are:

- Discussion of feelings/next steps.
- Evaluation of “what worked/didn’t work.”
- Assisting the team to prepare presentations to management, if necessary.

Team Building

What Is Team Building?

The process of deliberately helping a group develop into a cohesive and effective unit is called team building.

A team is more than a group of individuals working together. According to our definition of a team, members are “actively interdependent,” and, they “share common performance objectives,” suggesting that team members work in a collaborative fashion, rather than an individualistic manner. In addition, “high-performing” suggests a very high expectation for the work to be accomplished. It is unrealistic to assume that individuals naturally know how to function together in this way.

Learning is generally thought of as an individual accomplishment, yet teams also learn. Note the distinction between the individual knowledge and skills needed to become a surgeon and the group skills required by an operating room team. . Expertise in problem solving comes in very handy. This elusive but crucial type of collective learning is the core of team

building.

Team building activities should be suited to the type of team that has been formed, the strengths of individual team members, as well as to the stages of team development.

For example:

- Teams that make or do things and have very specialized skills may need to develop new skills for managing themselves, such as record keeping and communication within the team.
- Teams that recommend things may get along well with each other, but find their biggest challenge is communicating with others in the organization and specifically to those who must implement their findings.
- Teams who run or manage things may consist of members with great individual leadership abilities. They may have to learn how to work together as peers or colleagues to avoid interpersonal conflicts.
- A newly appointed ad hoc team may want to achieve rapid progress and may need help to take the time to discuss its mission or to get to know each other.
- An ongoing team may lack enthusiasm for routine work. This team needs the rededication and commitment of all those involved to handle ongoing and newly assigned tasks.

Team building is a *process*, not an *event*, and requires many experiences over time. Initially most teams require facilitation and training to reach their full potential. In most cases, the improvement coach fills this role, but the team leader or an outside facilitator may be used. Over time, the team will become experienced enough to take on team-building tasks independently.

A coach may contribute to team building by using his or her facilitation skills, providing training, and/or conducting specific team building activities. In the latter case, there are many different team-building activities that teams can use; coaches can help to determine which are appropriate. Several will be presented in this course, such as analyzing team needs, studying team roles, and doing exercises to build trust and creativity. However, a team-building activity should be used only after all members of the team have agreed.

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and
Recommended
Readings**

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