



## About teams

### Leadership Dimensions

### Engaging the team

The purpose of team building exercises is to help teams become cohesive units of individuals that can work together effectively to complete tasks.

Different teams have different functions and require different contributions by team members. You want individuals to excel but not at the expense of the team so it is useful to tune your management style to the type of team you lead and the roles that team requires.

### When to use this resource

Use this resource to understand what makes a team and seven common team types and clarify the type of team you need to build.

- Intact self-directed work teams
- Improvement teams
- Project teams
- Multifunctional teams
- Cross-functional teams
- Empowered teams
- Virtual teams

### Note

The type of team you need to build may not be as distinct as the following definitions suggest. Some may include elements of one or some of the team types described.

### What makes a team?

- “A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.”

Katzenbach J.R & Smith D.M. (March-April 1993). “The Discipline of Teams”, *Harvard Business Review*)

- The best teams invest a tremendous amount of time exploring, shaping and **agreeing on a purpose** that belongs to them collectively and individually.
- The best teams **translate a common purpose into specific performance goals**...without these team members become confused, pull apart or revert to mediocre performance.
- Effective teams develop a strong **commitment to a common approach**, that is how they will work together to accomplish their performance.
- When a team shares a common purpose, goals and approach, **mutual accountability** grows as a natural counterpart.”

## Intact self-directed work teams

### For example, self-managed teams and semi-autonomous work groups

Self-managed teams are 'empowered' by management with the authority to 'own' the decision-making and responsibility for a given task or process outcome.

- comprise intact team of employees who work together on a continuous basis
- usually formed without a supervisor or a single person responsible for the operations or complete activities of the team
- generally, these teams are formed from 5 to 18 members who have all management and leadership roles allocated to individual members within the team
- usually limited to one work area
- usually functionally semi-autonomous and responsible for controlling physical, resource and functional boundaries of their work
- requires strong collaboration and sense of purpose within all team members
- assumes control over problem solving and responsibility for task completion
- authority may shift between team members
- used as a means to organise work and to achieve improved competitiveness (in terms of cost, timeliness, customer satisfaction, overall quality)
- processes established to monitor and control overall process and team member performance

## Improvement teams

### For example, quality improvement teams and best practice teams

Improvement teams or quality teams tend to be formed around individuals from the same work area or value chain that deal with the issues at hand on a continuous basis.

- deal with problems that impact the work area
- formed from members of one department or one discipline focus on resolving problems or identifying solutions
- usually conduct regular meetings and document outcomes
- usually strong accountability to senior management or agreed objectives that are measured
- may include quality improvement teams
- may be chartered by senior management to deal with systems improvements
- life span may be short to medium term

## Project teams

Project Teams are formed from individuals (drawn from inside or outside the organisation) required to complete a specific outcome to the agreed milestones and plan.

Project teams may typically:

- be formed by the organisation for a definite period to deal with special technical projects (e.g. build a facility, or investigate the cause of a problem),
- resolve special organisational issues (e.g. health and safety concerns or establishing a new service)
- responsible for a project from start to finish, using a disciplined development approach
- have a sense of shared responsibility and personal accountability for a stage or set of outcomes in the project
- clear sense of time, budget, resources, planning and control systems
- usually roles vested with strong sense of role and authority to undertake certain actions
- requirement for all members to understand their role and responsibilities
- usually formed and managed on strongly rational and quantitative processes
- strong emphasis on planning and responsiveness to change or contingencies that emerge
- usually strong accountability to senior management for agreed objectives that are measured
- life span may be short to long term

## Multifunctional teams

These types of teams are drawn together from across major functions/ disciplines within an organisation. Typically they:

- develop a strong sense of share purpose
- are problem based or have a defined charter relating to a policy, strategy, business opportunity or strategic direction
- include members form various levels in the organisational hierarchy
- draw on a balance of expertise related to the team's core purpose
- undertake regular meetings
- have strong monitoring and reporting mechanisms in place
- life span may be medium to long term
- may directly relate to improvement team activities or be a form of improvement team that span beyond a process or value chain to cover multiple functional areas

## Cross-Functional teams

The title 'cross-functional teams' confirms how and why these teams are formed.

These teams typically:

- draw members from across functions
- usually focus on actions related to investigative and analytical, corrective, or coordination of implementation
- focus scope of activity on problems/issues/opportunities that directly affect a number of functional areas or business divisions
- contain members from multiple work levels and functional areas that can contribute expert knowledge to the matter being dealt with
- are kept small and agile with team size usually restricted to about 6-12 members
- life span is usually short term until a plan of attack or solution is identified and a process for coordinated and integrated implementation across functions is delivered
- may include teams such as task forces, investigative teams; improvement teams, and such like

## Empowered Teams

While closely aligned to self-managed teams, the empowerment approach has been adopted to ensure team members have clear authority to meet allocated goals, while also shaping the processes and resource structures required to complete their work.

Today empowered teams are often the most 'bastardised' typology used by organisations. The title is often used without regard for the characteristics that denote this type of team.

Characteristics for empowered teams typically include:

- vesting the authority and responsibility for specified outcomes with all team members
- removing the authority and responsibility from one manager for the function and operation of the team (often called depowering management)
- reinforcing (in some contemporary approaches) the role of managers and leaders to coach, monitor and mentor but not to interfere or direct how team members set operational and performance goals
- ensuring the teams can manage their own task completion
- delegating not just authority to complete tasks but also the authority and accountability to expend resources and seize opportunities
- promoting high levels of individual involvement and participation
- involving employees in decision-making and continuous improvement activities such as suggestion systems, operating cells, Lean teams, continuous improvement meetings/events, and corrective action processes
- establishing the formal role the team has in influencing and shaping strategic plans and decisions through participation in performance and planning processes

## Virtual Teams

As the way we work changes radically, the evolution of teams is also undertaking a radical leap.

The virtual team is the current reality in the emergence of new team structures. With the event of the World Wide Web and emergence more recently of interactive satellite networks, the virtual team has taken on many shapes.

Like conventional teams, this form of team exists to serve a real purpose. The reason for their existence can abound. Some of the core reasons for virtual teams include:

- team members are global or geographically spread
- operations make it impossible for team members to meet in a physical sense
- the people involved are no longer co-located, or necessarily operating in the same time or in the same function, such as teleworkers, collaborative teams or job sharing team members.
- imperative is so immediate and short term team members need to meet and interact in the fastest possible manner
- teams involve members from multiple organisations as organisations increasingly work outside their own operational boundaries
- skills, knowledge, expertise or 'corporate memory' resides in team members that are not co-located with others in the team
- reliable information and communication technology exists to facilitate member interactions
- virtual meetings have evolved in a manner whereby team members can operate more effectively using this medium
- time pressures on team members suggest the right people can be sourced when they are available, wherever they are located using virtual technologies
- the dynamic nature of the marketplace and rapid nature of the variables affecting team actions argue for more rapid information flow and use of virtual technologies
- team members are most comfortable communicating using technology mediated communication
- As with all the different team structures, virtual teams require different leadership, and planning to ensure they are effective and achieve their purpose.

