

*Based on an article by Jon. R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, in Best of HBR, HBR, July-August, 2005, p.162-171*



***The Discipline of Teams: What makes the difference between a team that performs and one that doesn't?***



# Overview

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4. Disciplined Approach to Team Management
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# 1. Introduction



# Real Teams

- Perform
- Not just amorphous groups labelled as teams because it sounds motivating and energizing

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# Discipline in Teams

- Makes them work more effectively;
- Cannot be separated from good performance;
- There cannot be one without the other

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# Teams

- The term used so loosely that it stops learning and application of the discipline which leads to good performance
- For managers to make better decisions about whether, when or how to encourage and use teams, it is more important to be more precise about what it is and what isn't

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# Teamwork

- most managers advocate it
- represents a set of **values** that encourages listening and responding constructively to expressed by others;
- give others the benefit of the doubt;
- provide support; and
- recognize the interests and achievements of others

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# Team Values

- Help teams perform
- Promote individual and the performance of the whole organization
- Not enough to ensure team performance

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## **2. Building Team Performance**



# Focus on seven areas

1. Establish urgency, demanding performance standards, and direction
2. Select members for skill and skill potential, not personality
3. Pay particular attention to first meetings and actions
4. Set and seize upon a few immediate performance-oriented tasks and goals
5. Challenge the group regularly with fresh facts and information
6. Spends a lot of team together
7. Exploit the power of positive feedback, recognition, and reward

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## 1. Establish urgency, demanding performance standards, and direction

- Team members need to believe the team has urgent and worthwhile purpose
- They want to know what the expectations are
- Teams work best in a compelling context
- Organizations with strong performance ethics form teams readily

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## 2. Select members for skill and skill potential, not personality

- Teams need all the skills to meet its purpose and performance goals
- But most teams identify the skills needed only after they are formed
- Effective managers choose team members for their existing skills and their potential to improve existing skills and learn new ones

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### 3. Pay particular attention to first meetings and actions

- First impressions matter a great deal
- Everyone monitors the signals given by others to confirm, suspend, or dispel assumptions and concerns
- Particular attention is paid to those in authority – the team leader and any manager who set up, oversee, or otherwise influence the team
- What leaders do is more important than what they say
- If the leader leaves the team kick-off to take a phone call 10 minutes after the session has begun and never returns, members get the message

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## 4. Set and seize upon a few immediate performance-oriented tasks and goals

- Key performance-oriented events are critical for effective teams
- Can be set in motion by immediately establishing a few challenging goals that can be reached early on
- Cannot be a real team without performance results
- The sooner the results occur, the quicker the team congeals

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## 5. Challenge the group regularly with fresh facts and information

- New information help shape the team to shape a common purpose, set clear goals and improve its common approach
- New information causes a team to redefine and enrich its understanding of the performance challenges
- Teams made mistakes by assuming that all the information needed exist in the collective experience and knowledge of its members

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## 6. Spends a lot of team together

- Successful teams give themselves the time to learn to be a team
- Must spend a lot of time together, scheduled or unscheduled, especially in the beginning
- Through impromptu and casual interactions, creative insights and personal bonding can be achieved
- Busy leaders and managers too often intentionally minimize the time they spend together
- Time spend together can be physical as well as with other means, electronic, fax and phone time

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## 7. Exploit the power of positive feedback, recognition, and reward

- Positive recognition works well
- Giving out “gold stars” helps shape new behaviours critical to team performance
- In addition direct compensation to recognize and reward team performance, managers can speak directly to the team about the urgency of its mission, and awarding contributions
- In the end, the satisfaction by a team in its own performance is the most cherished reward

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### **3. Teams versus Working Groups**



- The distinction rests on performance results
- A working group's performance is a function of what its members do as individuals

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# Working Groups

- Committees, councils and task forces - not necessarily teams
- Do not become teams just because they are labelled as teams

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# Working Groups

- Both prevalent and effective in large organizations, where individual accountability is important
- Share information, perspectives, and insights
- Make decisions that help each person do his or her job better
- Reinforce individual performance standards
- Always focus on individual goals and accountabilities
- Members do not take responsibility for results other than their own
- Do not develop incremental performance contributions requiring the combined work of two or more members

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# Teams

- Require both individual and mutual accountability
- Rely on more than group discussion, debate and decision
- On more than sharing information and best-practice performance standards
- Produce discrete work products through the joint contributions of their members
- Makes possible performance levels greater than the sum of all the individual bests of team members
- More than the sum of its parts
- A team's performance includes both individual results and "collective work products"

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# “Collective Work Products”

- What two or more members must work on together
- Reflects the joint, real contribution of team members

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# Not All Groups Are Teams: *How to tell the difference*

| <b>Working Group</b>   | <b>Team</b>  |
|--|--|
| ➤ Strong, clearly focused leader   | ➤ Shared leadership roles  |
| ➤ Individual accountability  | ➤ Individual and mutual accountability                                 |
| ➤ Purpose is the same as the broader organizational mission  | ➤ Purpose that the team itself delivers                                |
| ➤ Individual work products   | ➤ Collective work products   |
| ➤ Runs efficient meetings  | ➤ Encourages open-ended discussion and active problem-solving meetings |
| ➤ Measures its effectiveness indirectly by its influence on others (such as financial performance) | ➤ Measures performance directly by assessing collective work products  |
| ➤ Discusses, decides and delegates   | ➤ Discusses, decides and does real work together                       |





## **4. Disciplined Approach to Team Management**



- Teams are discrete units of performance and not just positive sets of values
- A working definition or, better still, an essential discipline that real teams share
- ***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***

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# Common Commitment

- The Essence of Teams
- Without it, groups perform as individuals, with it they become a powerful unit of collective performance
- Requires a purpose in which team members can believe

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# Team Purpose

- Teams develop direction, momentum and commitment by shaping it
- Ownership and commitment to it is not incompatible with taking initial direction from outside the team
- Shaped in response to a demand or opportunity provided by higher management
- Management clarifies the charter, rationale and performance challenge for the team
- Management must also be flexible enough for the team to develop its own interpretation of the purpose, set specific goals, timing and approach



# “Purposing” Activity

- Best teams devote a lot of time and effort to explore, shape and agree on the purpose that belongs to them both collectively and individually
- Continues throughout the life of the team
- Failed teams rarely develop a common purpose and do not coalesce around a challenging aspiration

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# Performance goals

- Best teams translate their common purpose into specific performance goals
- Without them, teams get confused, pull apart and revert to mediocre performance
- They must be directly related to the team's overall purpose
- Purpose and performance goals must build upon one another, and in combination with team commitment becomes a powerful engine of performance

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# Importance of specific goals for teams

- Defines a set of work products that are different both from an organization-wide mission and from individual job objectives
- The specificity facilitates clear communication and constructive criticism
- Helps maintain their focus on getting results
- A levelling effect conducive to team behaviour
- Allow achievement of small wins as it pursues its broader objectives
- Compelling symbols of accomplishment that motivate and energize

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## **5. Team performance**





- Combination of purpose and specific goals
- Each depends on the other to remain relevant and vital
- Performance goals help teams keep track of progress and accountability
- Team's purpose provides meaning and emotional energy

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# Optimal size of teams

- Effective teams range from 2 and 25
- Small size is a pragmatic guide rather than absolute necessity
- Beyond 50, teams likely to break into sub teams
- Large groups face trouble interacting constructively, much less doing real work together
- 10 people far more likely than 50 to work through their individual, functional and hierarchical differences

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# Large Groups

- Face difficulties in finding enough physical space and time to meet
- Confront complex constraints like crowd or herd behaviour
- Prevents the intense sharing of viewpoints needed to build a team
- Usually produce superficial “missions” and well meaning intentions
- Meetings become a chore, with people unsure of why they have gathered
- Foster cynicism which gets in the way of future team efforts

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# Mix of skills in teams

- Must develop complementary skills necessary to do the team's job
- A common failing in potential teams
- Skill requirements fall into three categories
  1. Technical or functional expertise
  2. Problem-solving and decision-making skills
  3. Interpersonal skills

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# 1. Technical or functional expertise

- Doctors cannot be expected to litigate in a court of law
- Likewise, product development groups that includes only marketers or engineers are less likely to succeed than those with complementary skills of both

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## 2. Problem-solving and decision-making skills

- Identify the problems and the opportunities
- Evaluate the options
- Make necessary trade-offs and decisions
- Some members will have these skills to begin with
- Some will develop them on-the-job

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## 3. Interpersonal skills

- Effective communication
- Risk taking
- Helpful criticism
- Objectivity
- Active listening
- Giving the benefit of doubt
- Recognizing the interest and achievements of others

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# Minimum complement of skills

- Effective teams needs them especially technical and functional skills
- Many teams were established with members chosen on the basis of personal compatibility or formal position in the organization
- Skill mix of members must be considered

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# Skills in team selection

- Can be often overemphasized
- In all successful teams, no one had all the needed skills in the beginning
- Teams can lead to the development of skills needed to meet the team's performance challenge
- Should rely on skill potential as well as on proven skills

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## **6. Common approach for teams**



- How they will work together, who will do what, what individual skills are needed and how they will be integrated together, how continuing membership in the team is to be earned, how the team will make and modify decision
- Effective teams develop strong commitment to it
- Delegating all the real work to a few members and relying on reviews and meetings for is only “work together” aspects cannot sustain a real team

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# Emotional logic of teams

- Every member does equivalent amounts of real work
- All including the team leader contributes in concrete ways to the team's work product
- Each member has pre-existing job assignments, strengths and weaknesses, reflecting a variety of talents, backgrounds, personalities and prejudices
- Through mutual discovery and understanding, the team develops
- A critical element of a commitment-building process
- Establishes a social contract among members that relates to their purpose



# Mutual accountability

- No group ever becomes a team unless it hold itself accountable as a team
- Moving from “the boss holds me accountable” to “we hold ourselves accountable”
- An ingrained performance ethic that enables teams to form organically
- “Being in the boat together”
- Underpins two critical aspects of effective teams – commitment and trust
- Cannot be coerced
- Arises from and reinforced by the time, energy and action invested in determining what the team is trying to accomplish and how best to get it done
- Produces the rich rewards of mutual achievement which all members share
- Energizes and motivates members in ways their “normal” jobs could never match



## Setting appropriate performance goals

- Team members able to discuss the goals and the approaches
- Giving members a choice – they can either opt out or pitch in and become accountable

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## **7. Classification of teams**



1. Teams that recommend things
2. Teams that make or do things
3. Teams that run things

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# 1. Teams that recommend things

- Task forces, project groups, audit, quality or safety groups asked to study and solve particular problems
- Have predetermined completion dates
- Two unique critical issues:
  - a. Getting off to a fast and constructive start
  - b. Ultimate handoff to get recommendations implemented

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## a. Getting off to a fast and constructive start

- Key lies in the clarity of the team's charter and the composition of the team
- Teams want to know why and how their efforts are important and need a clear definition of whom management expects to participate and the time commitment required
- Management ensures that the team includes people with the skills and influence necessary for identifying practical recommendations; open doors and deal with political obstacles

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## **b. Ultimate handoff to get recommendations implemented**

- Top management must pay attention to the transfer of responsibility
- They cannot assume that it will “just happen”
- The more involvement the members have in implementing their responsibilities, the more likely they will be implemented
- It is important for people outside the task force to be involve in the process early and often, well before the recommendations are finalized
- Anyone responsible for the implementation should be briefed on the task force purpose, approach and objectives and regular review of progress

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## 2. Teams that make or do things

- Involved in manufacturing, development, operations, marketing, sales, service and other value-adding, on-going activities
- Have no set completion dates
- Top management must concentrate on the organization's "critical delivery points" – places where the cost and value of the organization's products and services are most directly determined

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## 3. Teams that run things

- From the top down through the divisional or functional level
- Oversees some business, on-going programme or significant functional activity
- Must determine whether a real team approach is the right one, i.e., whether the sum of individual best will be enough for the performance challenge or whether the group must deliver real joint work products
- Team option promises greater performance but also brings risks

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## The price of faking the team approach

- High
- Members get diverted from their individual goals, cost outweighs benefits and people resent the imposition on their time and priorities
- Serious animosities develop that undermines the personal bests of the working group approach

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# Team Option

- The smartest one if multiple skills, perspectives and judgements in real time are needed for performance at the critical delivery points
- Management must establish a carefully constructed and performance-focused set of processes to synchronize the teams
- There must be a relentless focus on performance and the link between teams and performance must be clearly established
- Management must pay attention both to the team basics performance results, focussing on specific teams and specific performance challenges

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# Working Groups

- Present fewer risks and more comfortable
- Less disruptive
- Need little time to shape their purpose
- Meetings are based on well-prioritized agenda
- Decisions are implemented through specific individual assignments and accountabilities
- If there is no performance need it is better to improve the working group rather than trying to become a team

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# Identifying specific purposes and goals

- Teams that run things must do this
- They should not confuse the broad mission of the total organization with the specific purpose of their small group
- For real teams to form, there must be a team purpose that is distinctive and specific to the small group

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## **8. Top Management Teams**



- The most powerful
- Complexities of long-term challenges, heavy demands on time, deep-seated individualism of senior people conspires against teams at the top
- The discipline for top management teams most difficult
- Still needlessly constrained themselves from achieving real team levels of performance

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# Assumptions that do not apply to top teams

- All direct reports must be on the team
- Goals must be identical to organization's goals
- Team members' position rather than skills determine their respective roles
- Must be team all the time
- Team leader is above doing real work

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## **9. Disciplined Teams**



- The primary unit of performance in high-performance organizations
- Will not crowd out individual opportunity or formal hierarchy and process
- Will enhance existing structures without replacing them
- Opportunity exists anywhere hierarchy or organizational boundaries inhibit the skills and perspectives

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# Teams

- The most practical and powerful vehicle for organizations facing specific performance challenges
- Top management must focus on the organization's performance and the kinds of teams that can deliver it
- They must recognize a team's unique potential to deliver results, deploy teams strategically when they are appropriate
- They must foster the basic discipline of teams to make them effective
- This way they create an environment that enables team as well as individual and organizational performance

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