

Team trouble-shooter

How to find and fix team problems

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PART 1 : IMPROVING INTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS.

1. Recognize problems within your team.

Teams can not be leaded as logical, predictable machines. Teams are composed of unpredictable, contradictory and sometimes uncooperative people, functioning under many pressures coming from outside the team (deadlines, productivity ...) as well as from inside the team (burnout, inability to go to common approach).

The main question is not whether members become entangled in conflicts but whether these conflicts are so pervasive and damaging to the long-term success of the team.

If you as a team leader want to resolve solely conflicts than you place yourself in a patronizing, parental position. This position encourages team members to renounce personal responsibility for resolving these conflicts.

The team must detect, avoid potential conflicts and manage the ones that cannot be prevented.

Symptoms to look for are:

- o Rapid escalation of minor conflicts: these can engulf quickly other team members.

- o Self-imposed isolation: this causes communication disconnects and bottlenecks.
- o Breakdown in communication and personal relationships: work processes will be interrupted and people will start to look out for personal interests.
- o Use of intimidation: results which look like agreement become manipulation and lead to withdrawal of support.
- o Formation of cliques

Methods for treating team conflict:

- o Develop and model guidelines:
 - o No personal attacks
 - o No heated outbursts
 - o No backbiting
 - o Never assuming hostile intent
- o Identify areas of possible conflict
- o Act immediately to control conflict: remind team members about the guidelines, meet with those involved in the conflict, caution the team against inflammatory e-mails.
- o Recognize agreement as it occurs: summarize agreements verbally.
- o Perform periodic check-ins

2. Managing the virtual team.

A lot of teams consists – at least partially – of virtual team members.

Signs of transition trouble are:

- o Communication problems: develop solid communication methods in order to avoid a spotty decision-making process.
- o Ineffective coordination of internal and external activities: build in effective check-and-control mechanisms.
- o Lack of core identity: cross-functionality with different management layers feeding into the team's decision making process, leads to confusion on who reports to who. This prevents the building of solidarity boundaries that reinforce the team's identity.

You can overcome these challenges:

- o Ask your team members to provide input on following communication issues:
 - o What communication means would work best for them?
 - o When are they available for regular scheduled e-mail or phone discussions?
 - o What are potential obstacles and challenges?
- o Develop ground rules for individual accountability:
 - o No team member should change milestone dates without consulting the team leader.
 - o Determine who will keep stakeholders updated on team activities.

- o Don't tolerate after-hour or weekend 'hit and run' e-mails.

- o Develop a core team identity

3. resolving conflicts between members and leaders.

Member-leader relationships are not just based on personal issues but also on issues such as :

- o How to balance member autonomy with leader control.
- o How to balance need for fast decision making with the desire to achieve team consensus.

But also other factors can cause deterioration in the relationships:

- o Inappropriate leadership style.
- o Limited accessibility.
- o Lack of internal alignment.

Signs that the team is headed for a conflict between its members and the leader:

- o Team leader practices micromanagement.
- o Team leader communicates poorly with the team (insufficient direction, vague instructions).
- o Team stress level rises.
- o Team members mistrust the leader: skepticism and suspicion.
- o "Us versus you" mentality.

Following steps can prevent a deteriorating relationship:

- o Recognize the needs of team members and your needs.
- o Resolve personal conflicts.
- o Identify communication hot spots.
- o Obtain feedback on your own leadership style.

PART 2 : STRENGTHENING TEAM FOCUS

1. Develop better foresight.

Teams run occasionally into unanticipated challenges, but when this happens repeatedly then there is a need for better foresight and planning.

We can categorize teams by their ability to anticipate change:

- o Entrenched teams: denial, ignoring major changes, convincing themselves that change is temporary.
- o Reactive teams: slow to respond, action only after the situation.
- o Proactive teams: get ahead of change.
- o Pre-emptive teams: have long-term vision, scanning for trends and changes.

Why teams become entrenched:

- o They fail to establish or utilizing a sensing array.
- o They have victims mentalities.
- o They resist new information.
- o Their planning is static.

A team can implement following strategies in order to improve foresight:

- o Create an early warning system.
- o Exposing the team to other points of view.
- o Implementing a thorough troubleshooting process.

2. Finding a sense of direction.

Teams have also to manage the context of fast-paced organizations that rapidly change their markets, services and structures. This difficult task can be

ameliorated when it has long-term goals and clear priorities.

Symptoms that indicate that your team is navigating with a broken compass:

- o Big-picture blur: unable to visualize a scenario for success.
- o Excessive dependence on the team leader.
- o High anxiety.
- o Conflicting priorities.

You can establish a clear direction by following action steps:

- o Create a blueprint. You have to get away from your daily routine, build a dialogue on the team's core mission and create a mission statement, a mission document, team objectives and criteria for sorting team priorities.
- o Audit performance criteria.
- o Create a scenario forecast. Think outside the box in order to anticipate large-scale changes.

How do you create a scenario forecast?

1. Identify influencing factors which shape your company's business environment.
2. Rate influencing factors.
3. Identify key influencing factors.
4. Create alternative scenarios.
5. Combine scenarios.
6. Describe each combined scenario.
7. Assess probability.
8. Assess the implications.

PART 3 : DEALING WITH THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE.

1. Keep your team from getting fragile.

Watch for following signs of inflexibility.

- o Anxiety about an unknown future.
- o Cognitive denial and self-imposed isolation.
- o Slow or poorly response to change.
- o Active resistance to change.

In order to remedy a fragile team, some suggestions :

- o Conduct frequent fire drills: develop preventive and corrective actions for highly probable events and threats or opportunities.
- o Avoid creating unnecessary stress.
- o Learn from others who have been there.
- o Overcome resistance to change by building ownership and support, lowering the risk level and choosing the right time and place for your battles.

2. Stuck in a track? Learn to foster innovation.

When your teams exhibits following behaviors, then it became overly complacent:

- o Loss of confidence when addressing new challenges.
- o Ignorance of cutting-edge technology and work methods.
- o Redundant actions and dull solutions to problems.
- o Missed opportunities for new business.
- o Defections from the team.

You have to foster a spirit of innovation in your team by:

- o Setting the stage for creative thinking.
- o Structured brainstorming.
- o Importing a fresh pair of eyes.
- o Reviewing best practices.
- o Asking for more than one solution.

PART 4 : MENDING EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS.

Senior management and customers are important for the team's success. Improve these relations by focusing on the unique needs of each group.

1. Senior Management.

Following approaches are powerful in building support from the senior management:

- o Identify senior-level stakeholders (direct responsible, greatest stake)
- o Keep your sponsors informed.

2. Customers.

Some of the many approaches to improve customer relationships are:

- o Create opportunities for customer feedback.
- o Put yourself in the customer's shoes.
- o Keep track of your customer's customers.
- o Audit your customer service regularly.