Getting Things Done While Building Strong Relationships: The Challenge for Team Development

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The push in corporate America for greater productivity, higher product and service quality, and better customer responsiveness has prompted a keen and growing interest in teamwork. Throughout manufacturing and service organizations, traditional, hierarchical work groups are being replaced by flexible, empowered teams of workers — teams combining salaried and hourly workers, union and management groups, cross-functional and interdepartmental representatives.

Professionals in the fields of organizational and human resource development are fueling this transition with

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studies of team function, of the skills required of team members and leaders, and of the team development process.

In the past decade, the teamwork literature has presented many different models documenting the developmental stages through which teams must progress if they are to become truly effective. As you will see, most of these models are amazingly congruent since they all describe a very similar team developmental progression: 1) Cautious Affiliation; 2) Competitiveness; 3) Harmonious Cohesiveness; and, finally, 4) Collaborative Teamwork. The implication is that all groups must develop through this predetermined sequence if they are to mature into fully effective teams. The further implication is that the forces at work dictate that teams and

their members go though a sometimes prolonged, and often painful, trial-and-error process as the teams attempt to achieve their task objectives while working through the inevitable relationship issues that naturally arise when people attempt to work together.

In examining the challenge for teamwork development, this article develops three themes. First, it examines the recent literature on the developmental stages of teamwork. We point out how the sequential team development models in the literature do describe the stages through which teams may progress — or stall in — when left to their own devices. But we argue that this type of trial-and-error, hit-or-miss approach is much too wasteful in terms of time, effort, and output. Second, we go to the

real world and present data which validates the categories of team development — but shows that the process of progressing through each stage, as described in the literature, is overly simplistic and imprecise. Finally, we discuss a behavioral teamwork model and developmental process tied to teamwork skills, which helps short-circuit the inefficient, unproductive, and relationship-straining stages of development — and enables teams to achieve a collaborative teamwork pattern more quickly and sustain it.

Developmental Stages of Teams and Teamwork

One of the teamwork issues addressed in recent literature is the developmental stages through which teams naturally evolve. It appears that teams develop according to an inherent plan, moving through a series of fairly predictable growth stages.

Exhibit 1 summarizes the strikingly similar phases of team development identified by a variety of authors. It includes descriptions of typical events, behaviors, attitudes, and emotions within each developmental phase.

Developmental Stage 1 — Cautious Affiliation.

As the descriptions in Exhibit 1 suggest, Stage 1 is an exploration period, laden with questions, but short on answers. In this early stage, members' attachment to the team is tentative. In fact, some members may even lobby behind the scenes — with their bosses, with the team leader — to be excused from participation.

Even those who want to stay are cautious and guarded. Most are anxious about what the team and they, as individual members, are supposed to do. They're concerned about their collective and individual ability to accomplish the tasks ahead, whatever those tasks might turn out to be.

Studying the designated team leader and others in the group, team members assess others' abilities and attitudes, trying to determine how and where they fit into the group. As they explore the boundaries of acceptable individual and team behavior, searching for norms and roles, they're generally vigilant for early signs of group problems; and they're worried about the team's ability to cope with such conflicts.

Little is accomplished during Stage 1. Productivity is low; and working relationships are guarded, cautious, and noncommittal.

Stage 2 — Competitiveness.

"Time's a wastin'" members seem to feel, as they first grow impatient with the team's lack of progress, then become overly zealous. Finally getting down to business, they realize that the team's job is different and more difficult that they initially imagined. This discrepancy between initial hopes and expectations and the reality of the situation leads to frustration and anger. Some even resist the goals and tasks as they now appear to be defined. Others question the wisdom of those who started the project in the first place and assigned members to the team.

Consequently, there's a lot of blaming, defensiveness, destructive disagreement, and testy confrontations — especially with the team leader or those vying for a dominant position. Subgroups may form and polarize, with the factions infighting and competing for influence — arguing even when they agree on essential issues.

At this stage, individual members are relying solely on their previous individual experiences, both personal and professional. Most are unaware — or perhaps simply inappreciative — of the unique and valuable talents of other group members. There's resistance to collaboration with other team members — except, perhaps, as allies aligned against an opposing faction.

Hitting the issues of mission, goals, tasks, roles, and responsibilities head on — and hitting them feverishly — the group makes some progress toward accomplishing its task. However, working relationships take a beating. Although members are learning more about one another, they're typically experiencing team members' worst sides.

Stage 3 — Harmonious Cohesiveness.

"We're in this together, like it or not," might be the dominant attitude as Stage 3 begins. But by the end of this stage, members have discovered that they, in fact, "like it." They like the team as an entity, the members as individuals, their increasingly social encounters, and the sense of belonging.

With the urgent Stage 2 questions of mission, goals, tasks, roles, and standards at least partially resolved, members become less dissatisfied. Predictably, there's significantly decreased animosity toward the leader and other team members. Previously warring factions mellow into normal, healthy, interpersonal patterns.

As a result of their ongoing contact, members have finally begun to understand each other, accept others' individuality — and appreciate and respect the different abilities of other members. Previously competitive relationships become cooperative, close, and mutually supportive. As communication channels open and feelings of mutual trust deepen, members may even confide in each other as friends, sharing personal problems. During this developmental stage, individuals discover that they're proud to be associated with the team.

Celebrating this new-found "we-ness," the team shifts its focus from its work to maintaining good working order, protecting camaraderie, and avoiding any conflict that might endanger the

Source	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
D. Francis & D. Young[1]	Testing	Infighting	Getting Organized	Mature Closeness
J.D. Jones & W.L. Bearley[2]	Immature Group	Fractionated Group	Sharing Group	Effective Team
J. Moosbruker[3]	Orientation to Group and Task	Conflict Over Control	Group Formation and Solidarity	Differentiation and Productivity
S.D. Orsburn, L. Moran, E. Musselwhite, & J.H. Zenger[4]	State of Confusion	Leader-Centered	Tightly Formed	Self-Directed
B.W. Tuckman[5] J.D. Palmer[6]	Forming	Storming	Norming	Performing
G.H. Varney[7]	Formation	Building	Working	Maturity
M. Woodcock & D. Francis[8]	Ritual Sniffing	Infighting	Experimentation	Effectiveness and Maturity

Exhibit 1. Models of Team Development

team's treasured cohesiveness. The emphasis is on harmony and conformity.

As positive feelings among members grow and self-esteem flourishes, team effort is reinforced. As individual and communal skills develop, there are slow increases in the quantity and quality of work. In general, though, the zeal for tangible results which characterized Stage 2 is lost, as members bask in the honeymoon-like happiness of their new, harmonious team relationships.

Stage 4 — Collaborative Teamwork. By now, there's general agreement among the members about who they are, what they're doing, and where they're going. During Stage 2, they began to clarify performance expectations and organize to accomplish team goals. During Stage 3, they strengthened interpersonal relationships. Now, during Stage 4, the group jells as a truly collaborative team.

Structured processes and procedures emerge to allocate resources, resolve interpersonal conflict, deal with the larger organization, give warranted positive feedback, and discipline members for unacceptable behavior. Now that members possess some insight into individual and group processes and behavior, they begin to define high standards for evaluating team and individual performance.

The team makes decisions about task and process, diagnosing and solving (or anticipating and preventing) problems, choosing and implementing actions and changes. And, in the process, team members communicate candidly and constructively, without fear of rejection. Viewpoints and information are freely shared and pooled to make sound decisions. Realistic, constructive conflict is welcomed as a springboard to more creative solutions to problems.

Leadership is now participative and involving, with members neither deferring to the designated leader (as happened in Stage 1) nor resisting (the tendency in Stage 2). During Stage 4, the team acts autonomously, sharing power among the membership. Team members are motivated by pride in their accomplishments and a sense of ownership and belonging. Individual and co-ordinated task expertise leads to peak performance levels.

The Real World of Teamwork

Occasionally, through trial and error, a team eventually evolves to the productive, efficient, effective state of affairs described in Stage 4. Such teams objectively satisfy the definition of True Teamwork: "...managed, planned, systematic coordination of effort to achieve common goals in the most productive manner."[9]

Many so-called teams in the real world, however, never achieve the optimal performance level implicit in this definition. Many stall and lose their way. Some regress to an earlier stage. In fact, some groups that call themselves teams are little more than loose collections of individuals with nothing more in common than employment by the same company, their names on a team roster, and a few identical appointments on their calendars.

The few teams that do reach Stage 4 do so only after many painful months or years of hit-or-miss struggle and fluctuation between attending to business at the expense of relationships or focusing on relationships while compromising production. Some teams arrive at Stage 4 only more or less — with fairly harmonious member relations and the team accomplishing barely acceptable levels of productivity. These "also ran" teams could be considerably more effective if guided to the one (or two or three) facets of team function which they have overlooked or slighted.

Teams in-name-only abound in corporate America — even at the highest executive levels. Psychological Associates made this discovery in a two-year survey of teamwork patterns displayed by 32 teams consisting of top-level executives from *Fortune* 500 companies.[10] All of the survey participants were members of executive-level teams, consisting of a chief executive officer and the CEO's staff.

TEAMWORK PATTERNS

	Stage 2 *Quadrant 1* AUTHORITARIAN Getting things done no matter whose toes are stepped on	**Stage 4** *Quadrant 4* TRUE TEAMWORK Getting things done by working collaboratively with others
	Stage 1 *Quadrant 2* REACTIVE Not acting unless forced to	**Stage 3** *Quadrant 3* CASUAL Seeking to maintain a friendly, social atmosphere

Getting Things Done (high ↑, low)
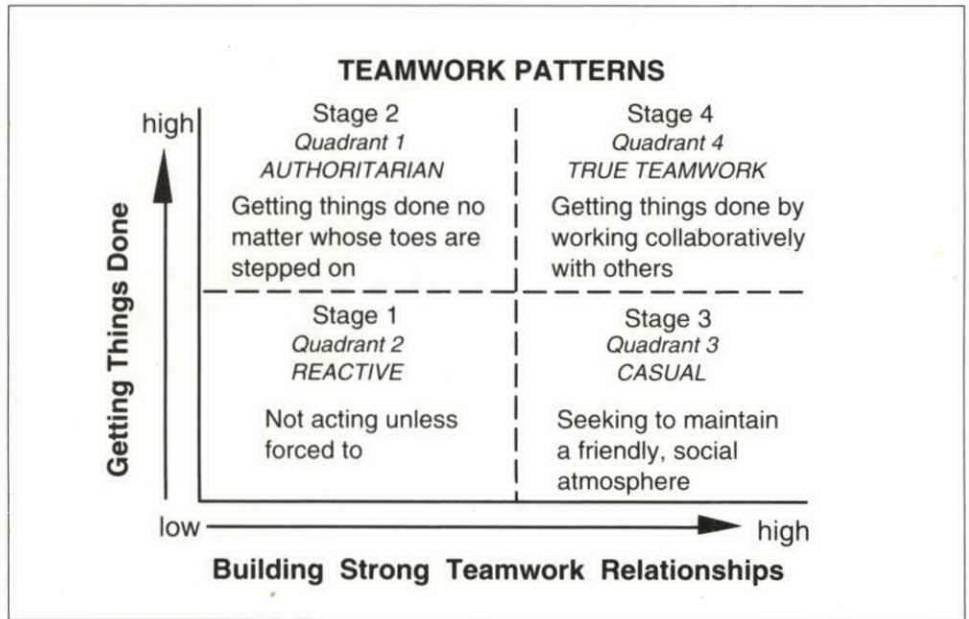Building Strong Teamwork Relationships (low → high)

Exhibit 2. Dimensional Model of Teamwork Patterns

Team members discussed specific examples of effective and ineffective team behavior — and reached a numerical consensus on how the team was operating. The 32 teams described only 39% of their behavior as typifying Stage 4 — True Collaborative Teamwork.

Roughly 19% of the behavior displayed by the teams was characteristic of Stage 1 — Cautious Affiliation. One respondent described the lack of involvement typical of Stage 1 teams this way: "How can there be conflicts when we're all busy keeping our distance from one another? We just don't interact enough to generate conflict."

Stage 1 teams tend to go through the motions, all the while maintaining the status quo. As one participant reported: "Our meetings give new meaning to the word 'dull.' The boss makes a few pronouncements; then the rest of us make a few announcements; then we adjourn. Usually, it could be done just as well by memo."

A full third of the team behavior described by survey participants was entrenched in Stage 2 — Competitive; and some teams seemed unlikely to move past it. One participant explained: "Our problem is we don't want to resolve our conflicts. We enjoy them too much. We thrive on them. It may be counterproductive, but conflict's a way of life with us."

Implicit in most of the Stage 2 behavior was the fact that the struggle for dominance (assuming there had been one) was clearly settled. A team member participating in the survey said: "With us, decision making is a one-man show. The boss makes the decisions, period. We endorse them. It's a very neat division of labor."

The remaining team behavior described by survey participants (19%) was clearly Stage 3 — Harmonious Cohesiveness, typified by this response: "We stay in close touch. I'm not sure you'd call it coordination, though. It's just that we're a close group, and we enjoy keeping one another posted."

Lending credence to the forecast that many teams may never attain True Team-

Q1 — Authoritarian (Stage 2)
- High structure and direction — Low involvement
- Gets things done without regard for the needs of team members
- Dominated by one or two team members
- Over-structured with tight control
- Impatient with lack of progress
- Overly competitive and confrontative
- Self-serving — "Look out for yourself."
- One way communications
- People become testy, blameful, overzealous
- Frustration, anger or resistance to goals
- Defensiveness, competition, choosing sides
- Subgroup polarization and infighting

Q4 — True Teamwork (Stage 4)
- High structure and direction — High involvement
- Gets things done by working collaboratively with each other
- Agreement on who we are, what we're doing and where we are going
- Team has clarified relationships and performance expectations
- Participation by all team members in achieving challenging goals
- Cooperative and productive climate
- Open, direct, relevant, businesslike, communications
- Ability to prevent or work through team issues

Q2 — Reactive (Stage 1)
- Low structure — Low involvement
- Doesn't act unless forced to
- Impersonal, watchful, guarded, cautious
- Tentative attachment to the team
- Members cautiously explore boundaries of acceptable individual and team behavior
- Tendency to avoid others — be "loners"
- Very little real communication
- Suspicion, fear, anxiety about the task ahead
- Some anxiety about why they are there, why others are there, who'll lead the group, and what they'll do

Q3 — Casual (Stage 3)
- Low structure — High involvement
- Seeks to build a friendly, social, team climate
- High concern for the needs of team members
- Unfocused, irrelevant, overly friendly communications
- Informal information exchanges and social encounters
- Feelings of mutual trust, respect, and harmony
- Avoidance of conflict
- Focus on harmony and conformity
- Competitive relationships become cooperative
- Sense of team cohesion and close attachment to the team

Exhibit 3. Correspondence Between Team Development Behavior and the Dimensional Model

work, another Stage 3 team member confided: "It's been years since I last attended a brisk, businesslike meeting. When we meet, we spin our wheels on small talk, war stories, and inside gossip. It's fun — but what do we accomplish?"

A New Behavioral Model of Teamwork and Team Development

Based on our research, Psychological Associates developed a behavioral model consisting of two dimensions — Getting Things Done and Building Strong Relationships — reflecting the

two general kinds of behaviors commonly exhibited by teams.[11] Teams set direction, plan, organize, and structure their activities to Get Things Done. Teams work to Build Strong Relationships by fostering open communications — and by getting involvement and commitment — no matter whether they're making decisions, conducting meetings, or resolving conflicts.

This model, shown in Exhibit 2, further defines four distinct patterns (quadrants) of teamwork, which correspond to the stages of team development: Quadrant 2, Reactive (Stage 1); Quadrant 1, Authoritarian (Stage 2); Quadrant 3,

Casual (Stage 3); and Quadrant 4, True Teamwork (Stage 4). Research confirmed the validity of this model; every team behavior described by teams fell neatly into one of the four patterns, based on its position along the two behavioral dimensions.

Moreover, the fact that these four teamwork patterns correspond to the four stages of team development further supports the validity of the model. When the literature bearing on the stages of team development was reviewed, behaviors describing each stage fit nicely into one of the four patterns. Exhibit 3 shows the four patterns with representa-

tive behaviors from the literature on team development sorted into each quadrant.

Left to its own devices, without guidance or direction, a naturally evolving team would zig-zag back and forth between the four quadrants before ever reaching Stage 4 and the True Teamwork pattern. This is illustrated in Exhibit 4.

Challenged by the practical implications of this discovery, it seemed logical to pursue a direct pathway to optimal team performance. The resulting plan for quick, but complete, team development is illustrated in Exhibit 5.

This direct pathway to True Teamwork respects the natural evolutionary inclination of most teams by first addressing issues related to task accomplishment and Getting Things Done — issues of setting direction, providing structure, and organizing to get results. But — and here's the critical difference between free-form team development and the guided developmental process mapped out in Exhibit 5 — while addressing these purely task-oriented issues, teams are simultaneously developing communication, involvement, and commitment. When team members Get Things Done *while* Building Strong Relationships (in meetings, while making decisions, as conflict is confronted), they merge Stage 2 and Stage 3 lessons — and consequently reach Stage 4 more efficiently. In short, everything a team does must be directed simultaneously at the twin goals of Getting Things Done *and* Building Strong Teamwork Relationships.

A Micro View of Teamwork Patterns and Team Dynamics

The question remains: What happens after a team reaches Stage 4? Or, does a team ever fully develop to Stage 4, displaying True Teamwork patterns in every aspect of team functioning?
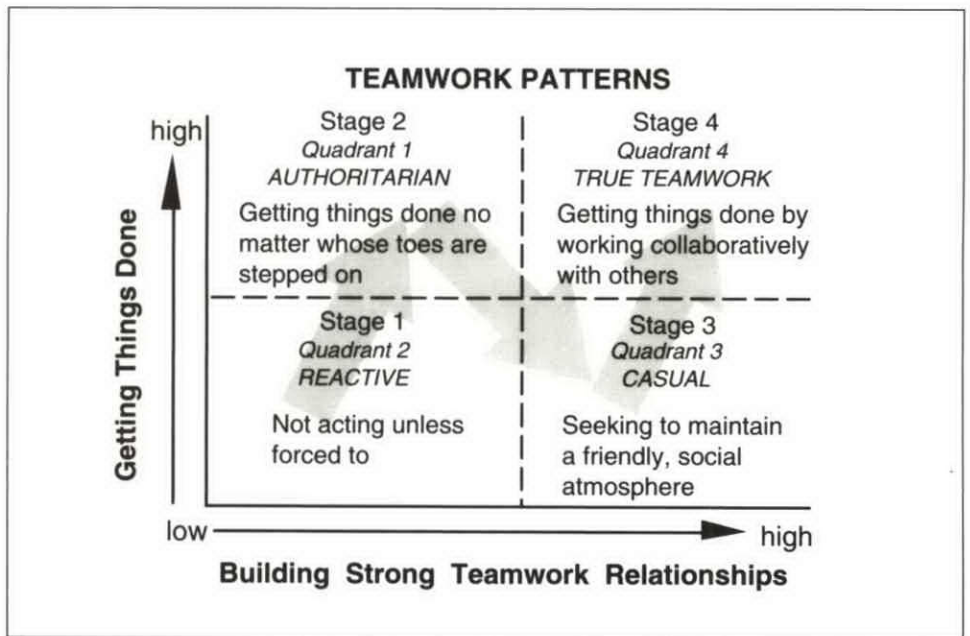

TEAMWORK PATTERNS
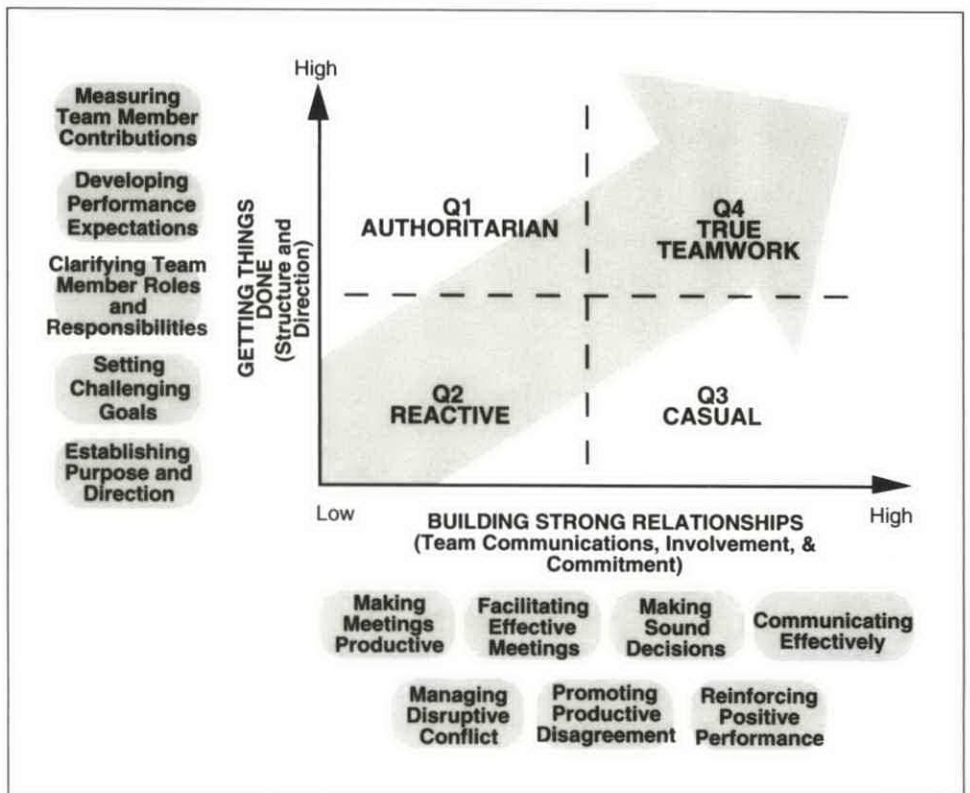
Exhibit 4. Natural Pathway of Team Development

Exhibit 5. Direct Pathway to True Teamwork

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	Internal Coordination	Team Communications	Managing Conflict	Team Meetings	Team Decision Making	Team Goal Setting	Appraisal and Feedback
Stage 1	19%	22%	23%	14%	24%	14%	27%
Stage 2	43%	37%	33%	40%	29%	29%	24%
Stage 3	4%	12%	13%	7%	7%	7%	10%
Stage 4	34%	29%	31%	39%	40%	50%	39%

Exhibit 6. Assessment of Teamwork Patterns for Top Management Teams

While the literature on the stages of team development suggests that teams naturally evolve and fully develop into a Stage 4 collaborative team, the research by Psychological Associates proves otherwise[12]. Based on the Dimensional Model of Teamwork Patterns, an assessment process was developed to accurately measure team patterns related to important operations like decision making, goal setting, resolving conflict, etc. Exhibit 6 illustrates how a sample of 26 executive-level teams described their teamwork patterns on seven important team operations. The percentages indicate the consensus among the team members of the behavior the team normally displays when engaged in the various team operations. Similar patterns have been observed in middle-manager teams and large samples of lower-level teams[13].

This data makes it clear that teams do not move predictably through the stages of development and the patterns defined by the Dimensional Model. Rather, teams display a mixture of behavior that represents vestiges of each of the patterns. Moreover, the patterns vary from activity to activity. By pigeon-holing a team into a specific stage or teamwork pattern, the true complexity of team behavior and dynamics is treated in an overly simplistic way.

The data also suggests that team development is not a one-shot proposition. It must be ongoing. True Teamwork needs to be defined in clear behavioral standards; and an ongoing process of diagnosis, team critique, and appraisal must be used — supplemented by proper training — to improve on strengths and shore up weak spots. Only then will a team approximate and sustain the behaviors we define as the Stage 4 True Teamwork pattern.

Summary

Teams and team members, when left to their own devices — primarily trial-and-error experimentation — do tend to mirror the sequential four-stage process described in the literature. However, teams do not follow a consistent developmental pattern like that of a genetically programmed caterpillar-to-butterfly sequence. Teams at any given point in time, are most apt to demonstrate a mixture of the characteristics within the four stages. In other words, it is unlikely that a team will ever be a "pure" type (Q1, Competitive; Q2, Cautious Affiliation; Q3, Harmonious Cohesiveness; or Q4, Collaborative Teamwork). The reason why teams, whether early or late in formation, tend to be a mixture is that their behavior and effectiveness are functions of how they structure themselves to accomplish the specific business task they are charged with — and how effectively their relationships promote open communication and collaboration.

On most teams, direction, structure, organization skills, and relationship-building skills are apt to be unequally developed or unevenly applied in any given team activity. For example, a team with clear team direction and purpose may lack definition of roles and responsibilities. A team may be effective at getting involvement and accomplishing results in meetings, but team decision-making activities may be laden with destructive conflict and disagreement. A team may have clear standards of performance, but the manner in which they were imposed on the team may result in low commitment to adhering to them.

Inefficient trial-and-error team development must be replaced with specific diagnosis and early identification of the

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structural and relationship needs of the team. Then, and only then, can training be targeted to the needs of teams and the specific developmental objectives they have. One-shot training, however, is not the answer. Teams and their needs will change and develop over time. Unproductive and relationship-damaging behavior that has been dealt with effectively in the past will likely reappear.

Development of teamwork and the skills associated with it must, therefore, be considered an ongoing process.

How Effectively Is Your Team Functioning?

How effectively is your team operating? How does your best teamwork experience rate? How does your worst teamwork experience compare with your best?

The following survey lists 12 important factors essential to building an effective team. Completing it will enable you to assess various team experiences and gain insight into behavior patterns that were productive and relationship-building — and patterns that inhibited the team from reaching its full potential.

The first five items on the survey deal with the things a team must do to provide direction and organization for the team — and structure team activities to get results. The next seven items deal with important team activities that require effective working relationships if the team is to foster maximum collaboration in accomplishing important business objectives.

By completing the survey candidly and thoughtfully, you'll get an indication of the overall effectiveness of various teamwork situations. By examining the rating for each item and interpreting your score, you'll get an indication of where your team has developed and is functioning effectively — and where further development is needed. ■

Survey of Team Development[14]

Read the team behaviors described below. Next, rate the frequency with which you see each behavior on your current team, the best team you've been on, and the worst team you've been on, according to the following scale:

0 = Rarely; 1 = Sometimes; 2 = Often; 3 = Almost Always

TEAM BEHAVIOR	Current Team	Best Team	Worst Team
1. All members are committed to our mission which clearly defines our team's business, customers, and values.	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3
2. We have strong ownership of challenging team goals and action plans for achieving them.	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3
3. *Roles, responsibilities* and *coordination requirements* of each team member are understood and accepted.	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3
4. We have clearly defined *standards of performance* and *expectations* for team member contributions.	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3
5. We use on-going *performance reviews* to measure the performance of the team and the contributions of the members.	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3
6. Our *team meetings* have clear purpose, active participation of all the members, and end with clear-cut action steps that we're all committed to implementing.	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3
7. *Communications* on our team are two-way, focused, and candid. There's lots of probing, listening, and pooling of ideas and information.	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3
8. We use an efficient *decision-making* process that gets all the members involved and makes full use of the relevant data to arrive at sound decisions we all feel good about.	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3
9. We have effective *facilitation of our meetings* that results in balanced participation, open communication, and optimal productivity.	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3
10. Disruptive *conflict* is surfaced by the team and dealt with quickly and constructively before it interferes with team productivity and working relationships.	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3
11. We welcome *disagreement* among team members and use it constructively as a way of increasing creativity and thoroughly analyzing alternatives.	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3
12. We effectively *manage performance* and coach team members by providing positive feedback that's specific and motivating, and negative feedback that's constructive and educational.	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3	0 1 2 3

Total your scores for each column here. **Totals:** _____ _____ _____

INTERPRETATION: *Compare your three team scores to the scale below to determine the level of effectiveness each team situation achieved.*

0 – 12 = Low Overall Effectiveness/Development
13 – 24 = Moderate Overall Effectiveness/Development
25 – 36 = High Overall Effectiveness/Development

ENDNOTES

The authors wish to thank Janice K. Niehaus for her help with earlier drafts of this article.

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11. This behavioral model and variations applying to the full range of teamwork skills and functions was developed by A. Montebello, D. Karraker, and B. Chott. It is used throughout Psychological Associates' Dimensional TEAMWORK SKILLS training modules as a learning, diagnostic, and prescriptive tool for building teams and improving teamwork.

12. See Endnote 10.

13. Based on unpublished norms from Dimensional Team Building seminars conducted with middle-management teams and lower-level teams.

14. This questionnaire was adapted from a training needs assessment survey and a teamwork assessment questionnaire used in conjunction with Psychological Associates' Dimensional Teamwork Skills training modules.

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