

Creating a Total Team Perspective

Managing from All Points of View

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Teams are more than just a collection of individuals. For teams to be productive, they need to agree upon the values and principles that guide their work. They need common goals that support the larger organization's mission and also incorporate members' aims and desires. They need to inventory members' strengths and assign tasks accordingly. They need to agree on priorities and have procedures for making decisions and resolving differences. And they need to learn how to do all this quickly and efficiently, without taking too much time away from their business goals and functions.

But what should be the values and goals that guide the plans and decisions of a team? How can a team protect itself from the biases and blind spots of its members? How can a team identify what perspectives are missing and what to do to ensure that these missing perspectives don't lead to flawed decisions and costly mistakes?

Clarify Individual and Team Values

To turn an uncoordinated group of individuals into a collaborative, high-performing team, members must first develop a framework for dealing with similarities and differences in values, goals, and priorities. For instance, which comes first—planning thoroughly, or seizing opportunities? Seeking excellence—or giving people what they want? To manage these kinds of conflicting priorities, a team needs to learn how to understand and appreciate people, problems, and

situations from the perspective of four basic, universal values at the basis of all productive enterprises: excellence, action, reason, and harmony.

Develop Total Perspective

No team's plans and decisions are any better than the completeness and accuracy of the information it possesses. It is often said that there are two sides to every issue, but it is more accurate to say that there are at least four sides. These sides represent the different perspectives or points of view of the *four* basic styles.

Most teams do not naturally have the total, 360° perspective that comes when all four points of view are represented. Often the person who selects the team chooses members based on his or her own personal preferences. Sometimes the appropriate personnel available for a project do not represent all four perspectives. As a result, the team is likely to overlook important information or disregard significant issues, leading to lopsided decisions and plans.

To develop a 360° perspective, teams can appoint one or more members to be the voice of the underrepresented point of view. These members can learn to ask the key questions and present the special kinds of information that come naturally to a person who



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values the team’s missing perspective, thus ensuring more balanced decisions and plans.

For a team to develop a total perspective that integrates these four basic values, the individual team members must first clarify their personal priorities and then identify the positive contributions that can come from other points of view.

Inventory Team Strengths

In addition to differences in values, goals, and priorities, different people like to do different things—and to do things differently. Some enjoy directing and persuading; others enjoy planning and organizing. Still others prefer being helpful and supportive, while others enjoy negotiating differences to ensure that friendly feelings prevail.

But how do you define and describe what each person has to offer? Stylistic instruments such as the LIFO[®] Survey can be very helpful for identifying the strengths each team member likes to contribute.



People who prefer different styles have different ways of looking at problems and responding to people. They prefer different kinds of tasks and get results in different ways. Sharing this information fosters mutual understanding of each member’s potential contributions to the group and creates a positive, nondefensive climate that sets the stage for improvement.

Give Positive Corrective Feedback

We all naturally tend to think that our way is the best way. For this reason, others can usually see how we could improve our performance more easily than we can ourselves.

However, simply criticizing another team member’s negative or unproductive behavior usually makes the person feel defensive, increasing his or her resistance to change. Instead of labeling people right or wrong, strong or weak, good or bad, team members need to learn how to make nonjudgmental, positively worded requests for others to perform more of and less of specific actions. In this approach, no refer-

ences are made to weaknesses that must be overcome. People are simply asked to change the amount of what they do, not who they are.

Because this kind of feedback is framed in terms of using more of or less of one’s strengths rather than working on one’s weaknesses, participants accept it without defensiveness. After considering the feedback, team members can moderate their behavior in ways that are more productive.

Utilize Individual Differences

A corollary to thinking that our way of doing things is the best way is the assumption that our way is the right way. Other ways are “wrong.”

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In teams, this frequently leads to unresolved conflicts, reduced communication of important information, and limited creativity when planning and making decisions.

Team members need to understand why other team members value different ways of acting. They need to understand the benefits of each approach—for both the individual and the team.

Developing an appreciation of stylistic differences can radically alter the dynamics of a team. Appreciating the unique contributions of each member helps the team stop arguing over whose way is the best. Instead, the team can organize its tasks so that team members can work on those parts of the job that utilize more of their strengths.

Take Focused Action

It is easy for teams to undermine their performance by favoring one perspective over the others. Unchecked, these excesses can waste time and alienate people, both inside and outside the team. Ironically, the team is simply doing “too much of a good thing.” For example, a team whose members enjoy seizing opportunities, taking risks, and acting quickly is likely at times to act impulsively and gamble on high-stakes ventures without considering possible pitfalls and costs. Another team, whose members like to gather data, analyze their options, and work methodically can easily get trapped in “analysis paralysis” or cling to established procedures when changing circumstances require innovative thinking, timely decisions, and vigorous action.

Teams can safeguard themselves from over-relying on certain perspectives in two ways. First, individual team members can develop action plans for moderating the excesses of their own most preferred styles. Second, team members who prefer different strengths can work together so that their strengths counterbalance each other and keep their excesses in check.

Benefits

Implementing these teamwork strategies naturally leads to a total perspective that takes into consideration all points of view. It produces greater:

Commitment. The contributions of all members are incorporated into the team’s action plans.

Confidence. Decisions are thought through from all viewpoints.

Communication. Team members give and receive open and honest feedback that promotes quick problem solving and decision-making.

Collaboration. Teams set priorities more easily and maximize the contributions of all team members. 

Contact Us

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