Randel Consulting Associates
Leading Organizations through Change and Growth

Using Managerial Transitions to Build Stronger Teams

Congratulations - you're now managing the team! Perhaps you are a new manager, or maybe you've taken on a different managerial role, and you find yourself facing a group - only they are your group, your people, your team... and they expect you to be their leader.

So if management really is about achieving things through other people, what does that mean when you are leading your team? How do you go about building the team for which you have just become responsible?

This article will explore some practical ways you can go about building your team. But first, an introduction into why building stronger teams is something that should get your attention from the start of your transition into your new role...

Becoming an Effective Manager

> *"Management is responsibility for the performance of the group of people. It's a simple idea... To carry out this responsibility, you must influence others, which means you must make a difference not only in what they do but in the thoughts and feelings that drive their actions."*
>
> Hill and Lineback
> Being the Boss p.14

At the heart of management lies a paradox – while you may now have the responsibility and accountability for being the manager, you can only be successful in your role through the performance of the people that work with you and for you. In their recent book "<u>Being the Boss</u>", Hill and Lineback identify managing your team as one of only three imperatives that are essential for managers to master (the other two items are Managing Yourself, and Managing Your Network).

How Building Your Team Will Help You Be Successful

In today's work, we face challenges and opportunities that require collective attention. A manager can no longer afford to manage the people reporting to them on a linear, sequential basis – you have to engage them together, to tackle issues collectively.

 So you will have to face the question - are the people working with you a real team?   Or are they merely a group of people who somehow coordinate their individual efforts? The latter situation is unlikely to enable the creative work and tough discussions needed to show results on complex issues.

"A team is a group of people who do collective work and are mutually committed to a common team purpose and challenging goals related to that work."

Hill and Lineback p.137

This definition from Hill and Lineback shares many characteristics with other definitions of real teams, including:
- collective work
- mutual commitment
- a common, worthwhile purpose
- specific and challenging team goals

By defining and agreeing on the collective work, the team is more easily able to focus its efforts towards specific team goals, while the individual members gain the sense that they are working on something that is worthwhile. Committed to one another for how they will do this work, real teams exhibit greater self-motivation and stamina to deal with the inevitable setbacks and disappointments.

This also provides a foundation for the team to get very practical on the important matters of:
- its purpose and goals/deliverables
- its roles and processes

Benefits of Common Purpose and Goals
Defining the future fosters commitment within your team by bringing purpose to its work.
Benefits that flow from having a clearly defined future/plan include:
- there is increased commitment when the work of the team is imbued with purpose
- everyone on the team has a common goal and direction
- everyone on the team is focused on what's important
- being focused on clear goals heightens the team's trust and influence
- a common vision of the future reduces conflict
- a clearly defined goal is critical to the success of virtual teams

Clarity on Roles, Processes, and Progress

As the manager, you want to influence the culture of the team by ensuring that:
- **there is clarity about individual roles** – who does what and how each role contributes to the team's purpose and goals
- **there is clarity about how the team does its work** – work systems, practices, and processes
- **there is clarity about how team members work together** – the values and practices of collaboration that guide interaction among group members
- **there is clarity about progress** – feedback for the team and for individual members about both work results and how well the group is functioning as a team

So we recognize that these are important and necessary things to develop in your teams.

This article will provide you with descriptions of a large number of ways in which you can bring about this common purpose and clarity with your teams.

Let's introduce the first in a series of activities with which your team might engage in the process of becoming a real team.

A number of these activities can fruitfully be combined with others. Many of the activities will benefit from professional facilitation, and you should engage a suitably experienced professional facilitator for this (contact us for information on how to find professional facilitators around the world).

1. Conduct a Team Assessment

A good starting point is to conduct a team assessment in order to develop an objective view of how the team is doing. By using an external consultant, they can work independently and offer an impartial assessment. A common approach is to interview all the team members to draw out information and perspectives that highlight what the team is doing well, where the team has found common ground in agreement, and areas to which the team needs to pay attention.

While individual interviews are conducted on a confidential basis, the consultant prepares a synthesis of the themes and issues surfaced during the interviews. This synthesis is presented back to the manager and the team in a feedback workshop, which serves as the basis for agreeing on areas of the team that require attention. The consultant can then work with the team to develop appropriate team development processes that enable the team to reach a healthy consensus on areas where they see differences.

A further benefit of having a consultant conduct the team assessment is that they can return periodically (at six monthly or annual intervals) to conduct a "mini – assessment." By interviewing a selected number of team members, or conducting some group interviews, the consultant can provide the team with an update on its progress since previous meetings. This serves as encouragement for the team, as the external perspective helps them track their progress, while also drawing their attention to areas that might require continuing work.

2. Align with Team Sponsor expectations

The Team Sponsor traditionally is someone outside the team, who mandates the team's work and is willing to invest their authority, influence and resources to help the team be successful. So it is important that the team takes the time to align itself with the Sponsor's expectations for the team.

Rather than attempting to do this through guess-work, you can invite the Sponsor to meet with the team, and to share their expectations first-hand. A professional facilitator can help members of the team raise questions to better understand how the team can align with these expectations. The meeting also helps the Sponsor gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the team's business situation.

Among the ways of doing this are:
- **Interview the Sponsor:** write out a list of their expectations on a flipchart during the interview, so they concede that you heard them correctly. Then share this list with the team.
- **Create a Poster of Sponsor Expectations**: review the e-mails and other communications where the sponsor has communicated their expectations, and write these up in a poster that the team can review in its early meetings.
- **Invite the Sponsor to a team meeting**: invite the sponsor to come and provide some context and information about their expectations directly to the team. Write these down on a poster so the sponsor sees that you and others heard things correctly.
- **Name your Team to Reflect your Purpose**: if you have a compelling purpose, consider developing an appropriate name for the team. A name like the "Renewal Team" can help the team and others better understand its purpose then the "Management Team."

3.   Convene a Team Charter Workshop

A Team Charter, or Contract, is a document that sets out, for a team, their purpose, deliverables, resources, the roles of team members and how the team will operate. By developing this Charter with the team, and making all these elements explicit and agreed, the team has a foundation to which it can refer as it proceeds with its work. The Charter document can be used at a later stage to help integrate new team members.

A professional facilitator can help you consider different ways of approaching a Team Chartering workshop. They can range in duration from one to three days. It can also be done as a series of shorter meetings – such as half-day meetings once a week.

The Team Charter typically includes descriptions and agreements of the following components:
* **Purpose and Direction** - why the team was formed, and what it aims to achieve
* **Goals** - the specific outcomes the team aims to accomplish.
* **Norms and Agreements** - the 'how' of team operations - how team members will interact, reach decisions, manage meetings and communications, etc.
* **Measures** - the indicators that will help the team know how well it is progressing towards it goals.
* **Composition and Roles** - the team members and specific roles they will play to help the team achieve its purpose.
* **Organizational Context** - any aspects of the context in which the team is located that should be understood by all team members.

4.   Establish Clear Goals and Roles

While a shared team purpose is important, it is also critical that the team have specific and challenging Team Goals. These are goals towards which the whole team contributes.

A powerful technique is to create a "Line of Sight Chart." This can mobilize the team's focus by visualizing how their work will lead to sustained change, or results. Similar to a Results Chain, this chart reveals the Means–to–End logic by which the Goals are linked to deliver results.

Once the team has identified clear and shared Goals, you can develop a plan or a 'Road Map' for how they will be achieved. This 'Road Map' focuses on the major steps in reaching the goals, and considers the time and resources required.

The Goals and the 'Road Map' make it much easier for the team to discuss Roles. It will become more evident how the work will be divided, with named individuals, working in interaction with others, responsible for specific aspects of the plan.

5.   Review and Update Team Processes

While you, as the new manager, have been taking a fresh look at the team's existing processes, other team members may not have looked critically at how the team operates. Starting with the current business situation, the team should consider how well the current team processes (such as team meetings, decision-making processes, leadership styles, and participant roles) are aligned with the requirements for acting effectively.

The outcome of this review process will be that the current processes are validated as appropriate, or you have identified and agreed on necessary changes. The benefit of this review is that the team will be clear as to why it does things in a particular way.

6.   Working with Remote Staff: Face to Face Workshops

You may well have staff working in remote locations from where you are based. Though you, as the manager, will have the opportunity to travel and meet them in their work places, this does not benefit the team. Multiple research studies have established beyond a doubt that effective virtual teams are characterized by solid relationships among team members, and these result from team members spending time together working through purpose, goals, roles and team processes.

It is important to make the investment in building a coherent and strong team, despite the cost of bringing the entire team to one location. And these in-person meetings need to be repeated periodically (at least once a year) to allow team bonds to endure and strengthen. These periodic meetings will also provide an opportunity to integrate any new members who have joined the team since its last face-to-face meeting. By using a professional facilitator to design and run the meeting, the manager is able to engage as a participant.

7.   Working with Remote Staff: Virtual Workshops

There may be times when it is just not possible to bring the whole team together from the different places where members are based. Or there may be a long delay before the face-to-face meeting can take place.

A good alternative to the face-to-face meeting in such a situation is to convene a Virtual Workshop. This is not just another virtual meeting, which may be fairly common already for the team. A Virtual Workshop is a structured and deliberate effort to replicate aspects of a traditional face-to-face meeting in an online environment. It might involve a series of extended sessions (each one being two to four hours in duration) that tackles an ambitious agenda, such as developing a Team Charter.

A description of a Virtual Workshop is available through this link. Consultants experienced in virtual workshops can play a critical role in designing and facilitating these workshops for maximum success.

8)   Experiential learning/team building

There is a place and role for the traditional 'team building' events. Their purpose is to place the members of the team in a challenging situation, in which they have to solve problems that have a parallel to the sorts of problems they face on a daily basis. By working on issues in a 'safe' context, the team gets to explore how well it did, and can identify lessons to improve how it can approach its 'real' work.

It is advisable to work with a professional facilitator. In addition to certain activities requiring expert guidance for reasons of safety and security, you will want to engage in activities that will really stretch the team in how it thinks of itself and builds its capacity. You also want to avoid 'games' that might undermine the serious work of building the team into a stronger and more cohesive unit.

Such team building processes can be integrated with other Team Learning Activities, such as Team Charter meetings or Goal and Roles workshops.

9) Service Learning

A less common team development event is to participate in a service learning program. The team visits a community where it can contribute something that will benefit the community (such as the team's labor to help construct houses or rehabilitate schools and clinics). In exchange, the team members engage in meaningful work that is valued by their hosts.

The Service Learning experience provides the team with a memorable experience – not only are bonds within the team strengthened, but links between your organization and the wider communities are built.

10) Immersion Programs

An immersion program is an opportunity for members of the team to spend time with local families and communities. Such programs have been used by a growing number of companies, especially those with a global market, as a way for their staff to have a deeper appreciation of the context in which people live in a particular country, and to experience the multiple versatile ways in which people develop resilient ways of dealing with daily challenges.

One way members of a team can participate in such an immersion experience is to spend a weekend staying in a poor community, hosted by local families (the visit may well be coordinated through an NGO or community organization with ties in the area). Team members participate in the regular daily activities of their hosts. At the end of the weekend, the team and their hosts can gather to reflect on the experience.

While a team does not spend time during the Immersion Program discussing its purpose and goals, the visit can play a significant role in a common experience that binds team members together.

We have now introduced 10 different activities that you can use and adapt to help your team become more effective. Some of them can work well as stand-alone activities, while others will have more impact if they are paired with other activities. Some of the discussions can be handled by the team working by itself, while other activities will benefit greatly from the support of a professional facilitator.

Contact us to learn more about how one of our professional facilitators can work with you, or to find out how to be connected to someone in our broader network of professional facilitators around the world.