

Team-Building

Introduction

Complex business problems that have emerged in the 21st century require unique expertise and innovative solutions. Rapid changes in technology have amplified the need for collaboration and coordination across multiple platforms. The expanding global economy has brought to light new, multifaceted issues that require diverse teams to pool their collective knowledge and expertise. These problems exemplify just how critical it is for us to understand the importance of teamwork and to develop new pathways to foster team-building.

In general, employees tend to be happier if they belong to a recognized group. Workers also want to feel that they are valued, connected, and engaged with the organization. Team-building is a continuous process that helps coalesce individuals into a unified group. In times of conflict or work related stress, group cohesion tends to suffer. If this occurs, team-building activities might be necessary.

In this reading, we will study common characteristics exhibited by dysfunctional teams and we will also explore some of the team-building exercises that might help to restore group cohesion.

Characteristics of Effective Team-Building

Teams that work well together often exhibit similar characteristics to other high functioning groups. You can probably name at least a handful of effective teams that you have seen or been part of. However, being able to identify and list the unique characteristics of those teams can be challenging. Below is a list of distinct team characteristics that you can look for in the future.

- **Good communication** – frequent communication with two-way dialogue
- **Clear goals** – team objectives and goals are clearly stated and simple to understand
- **High motivation** – members are enthusiastic about achieving or exceeding team goals

- **High collaboration** – members work together in order to solve problems and find solutions
- **High satisfaction** – members are happy to be part of the team and organization
- **High commitment** – members are dedicated to achieving the goals of the team
- **Well-documented processes and procedures** – processes to resolve conflict, problem solve, communicate, and others are well-documented
- **High innovation** – creativity and new ideas are supported and promoted
- **High trust** – members trust one another and delegate work appropriately
- **High respect** – members respect each person’s diversity and unique experiences
- **Increased productivity** – productivity and performance are high

If your current team does not possess all of these characteristics, team-building activities might help improve those areas of weakness.

Team-Building Exercises

There are several reasons for organizations to use team-building exercises. Most activities focus on building trust and dependence, improving communications, fostering connections, strengthening problem solving skills, and enhancing decision-making. Ultimately, team-building activities should be both fun and challenging fostering behaviors which are aimed at improving overall productivity. Below you’ll find a list of several simple and inexpensive team-building exercises.

- **Make connections** – A good game used for new teams to make connections with each other is *two truths and a lie*. This game requires the team to go around the table and tell three personal items about themselves. Two items should be true and one item must be a lie. The object is for the team members to guess which item is the lie.
- **Improve communication** – One way to improve communication within a team is to play a classic game of Pictionary. Divide the team into groups of two or three people. Each person should take a turn drawing, while the other people guess what is being drawn.

- **Eliminate stereotypes** – A good activity to eliminate stereotypes is to play the game *Who Am I?* The game requires the team to come up with a group of professions, and write them on individual pieces of paper. Some professions that they come up with might include a postal worker, chef, fashion designer, accountant, actor, or mechanic. Then, team members tape a specific profession on each person's back. Afterwards, each member should ask other members questions about what profession that he or she might have on his or her back, gathering the answers as clues to this profession. Each person then has to guess which profession type is on his or her back.
- **Enhance problem solving** – The game *memory* is a great way to enhance problem solving within a group. In this game the leader will assemble a structure out of kid's blocks. S(he) will then divide people up into groups of three to four. One person in each group takes a turn looking at the structure for 10 seconds before going back to the group and trying to recreate the structure. Each member is given 30 seconds to create the structure before the next person in the group is given a turn.
- **Build trust** – An exercise used to build trust and teamwork is the *obstacle course* game. In this game, use cones or chairs to set up an obstacle course in a large room, like a conference room or a cafeteria. Next, the team is broken into pairs, preferably partnering people with trust issues. Blindfold one person in each pair, and then have the other person in the pair use verbal cues to lead the blindfolded person through the obstacle course.

In summary, teamwork is essential to organizations in every industry and in every country. A team needs to be cohesive and work well together in order to be successful. In a famous quote by Babe Ruth, a well-known Hall of Fame baseball player, he reiterates the significance of good teamwork by stating, "The way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don't play together, the club won't be worth a dime." Team-building is a key component in establishing a strong, well-connected, motivated group of people that are able to accomplish team goals.

Summary

- Complex problems, rapidly changing technology, and the expanding global economy have amplified the importance of teamwork in the business environment.
- Teamwork helps employees to feel connected, to be more productive, and to achieve greater happiness.
- Team-building is a continuous process that helps a team develop into a unified group of people.
- Characteristics of effective teams include clearly defined goals alongside high levels of motivation, communication, collaboration, commitment, innovation, trust, and respect.
- Dysfunctional teams exhibit conflict, confusion, poor communication, lack of problem solving, lack of participation, negative behavior, low creativity, low morale, high complaints, and decreased productivity.
- Team-building activities should be fun and challenging while fostering teamwork aimed at improving overall productivity.

References

Baseball Almanac. (n.d.). Babe Ruth Quotes. Retrieved from <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/quotes/quoruth.shtml>