

Are You Receiving Group or Individual Efforts from your Team?

By Wolf Gugler

As our economy changes, so has the traditional work relationship between employees and their employers. Downsizing, resulting in “lean and mean teams” has consequently shifted much responsibility and autonomy to each individual. Most company incentives revolve around individual achievement, yet the principle of business is to run on collective effort. When achievement for team efforts goes unrewarded, the Manager has to struggle to keep a group of self-interested, autonomous individuals in line.

Managers are waking up to this reality, often abruptly. One volunteered his sales team as a test case for a teamwork study conducted by the Centre for Creative Leadership, a Harvard-level management research institute in Greensboro, North Carolina. He was surprised to find the result of the survey findings were: “Team, what team?”

Dr. Sonya Prestridge, who organized the study, delivered the bad news; his team’s comments were “we’re rewarded on individual sales goals. What are the incentives for us to work as a team?”

Some may say that achieving corporate goals is the be-all and end-all. But affected managers complain of disinterest in team goals and the individual’s reluctance to take on a task not directly affecting their personal financial outcome. Barry Price, a Pace University Professor, suggests you may actually find team members working against the group for their own personal gains. “Sometimes when you put these individualists together, they’ll find a way to sabotage the project. They’ll feel threatened because they’re not going to get the individual attention.”

Companies try to understand a lack of team spirit, but the simple explanation in many cases is that workers are just following the path the company has laid out for them. “Our entire compensation system drives individual efforts and diminishes team efforts,” says Cliff Hakim, author of *We Are All Self-Employed*. “We have to ask, do we want to reward an individual or a team?”

Most rewards are in individual performance appraisals, sales incentives and bonus plans—based on rewarding the top performer. It’s got everyone looking out for number one as a result.

Here’s the **Team Start-Up Checklist**, developed by Sonya Prestridge:

This checklist is designed to help individuals and organizations assess their readiness to form a team. Ensuring operational readiness can help companies save time, money and ultimately produce effective, productive teams. Do not answer in terms of how you would like the team to be; answer in terms of how prepared the team is at this time.

Purpose

The team has a clear organizational mandate.
The team’s members can articulate its purpose.

The team leader and members can answer the question, “What tasks are we going to complete?”
The team leader and members can answer the question, “What is our final product(s)?”

Task

The team's members have a set of interdependent tasks that connect them to each other.

A responsibility matrix that sets up relationships between members and tasks is identified or developed.

The team members are assigned collective responsibilities for all the team's major outputs.

Tasks and decisions that need everyone's input and which do not have been clarified.

Communication channels and processes have been identified.

Goals

The team goals will require members to work cooperatively rather than competitively.

The team's members can articulate its specific goals.

Process

A plan for basic processes (communicating information, making decisions, handling conflict, etc) and procedures (task management) is in place.

Roles

A procedure is planned for the members to get to know each other's functional areas and/or expertise (what they can contribute to the project).

The team roles, if appropriate, are clear and understood, e.g.:

Team leader

Team Member

Coordinator

Designer

Facilitator

Disseminator

Executive Champion

Technology Supporter

Authority/Empowerment

Clear levels of authority have been established which delineates the team's authority to decide the following without further authorization:

How to meet Customer demands.

Which actions to take, and when.

Whether to change its work strategies when it deems necessary.

Timelines/Delivery Dates

Completion dates are set for the team's project(s) and work.

The team has a calendar with due dates, deadlines, check-in times and milestones.

There are specific guidelines for managing the team's projects.

Performance Measurement & Learning

A credible, specific performance-measurement system that aids in conducting appraisal of progress, providing feedback and allocating rewards, recognition and bonuses is established.

Rewards, recognition and bonuses are available to reward the team as a whole for meeting its goals and objectives.

Celebration of milestones, if it's an ongoing team, and the conclusion of the team's project(s) and work is planned.

A process for assessing and sharing what is learned about project results and working together in a dispersed environment is in place.

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