

**TEAM LEADERSHIP
or
MONITORING AND SELF MONITORING
FOR TEAMS**

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Teams and targets from a team manager's perspective

H.B. Karp¹ posed the following questions to help determine whether teams and team work are appropriate: "Do people need to work interdependently in order to meet organisational objectives, and if so, to what extent?"; "Can greater employee satisfaction, higher productivity or better quality be attained through the combination of individual efforts?" If the responses to these questions are "yes" team working can most effectively bring about the required change or improvement.

So, one-person teams don't work. A carefully co-ordinated team effort is required to achieve organisational objectives. This is a tough job. Increasing productivity and adding value/profitability to organisations constantly having to reinvent themselves, due to the pace of change, doesn't come easy. Employees get stressed, distracted, confused. Some jockey for position, some give up. They look at *you* to 'fix things', and even those who are willing to help can't agree on *how* things should be fixed. Senior management is telling you to do more with less. "Do it better", they say, "it's the only way the organisation survives in today's competitive marketplace."

In this chapter we will look at a strategy that will reduce risks, protect productivity and retain team spirit necessary to achieve high performance and realise its objectives quickly and decisively. What follows is a practical guide and a review of the advice necessary for the Kaizen manager in how to co-ordinate team effort, set direction, targets, goals, and purpose for the team. Understanding these will help you monitor your own performance and that of your team:

Essential Advice for the Team Manager

1. Confront Reality

Your first priority is creating the team, a team that can work through the changes required. Your job is to orchestrate a carefully co-ordinated group effort and mobilise them against the threats to high performance. You must concentrate on engineering the individual efforts of the team into a unified, coherent, collective effort. You will have to create a team culture and team language relevant to the job in hand. The reality is that your reputation is at stake. The best way to protect that reputation is to get results.

2. Empower Yourself

To get results you must move with authority, make decisions, act. You must consciously influence and use your power. You can't mobilise others if you're immobilised yourself. You won't achieve anything without 'power' and if you can't do anything why are you in charge. People will not follow someone they don't believe in and they won't believe in you unless you believe in yourself.

3. Take Charge

Don't act tentatively in the early stages of constructing your team. Take charge and make things happen. Your effectiveness depends heavily on your credibility with your team members and you undermine that credibility when you wallow or waffle. People will not rally behind a manager they can't respect. Don't confuse respect with popularity. Focus on getting results. Do what needs to be done. Ensure that you solicit other people's opinions. That positions you to wield authority in an informed manner. Everyone has a voice, but you call the shots. Consensus management is great if you have time, but today it's often too slow a process. Take charge without being a bully. *Sell* benefits persuasively rather than only tell, admit mistakes when you make them, and press on. Make sure your team believes in you.

¹ H.B.Karp *A Gestalt approach to collaboration in organizations* 1976

4. Set a Clear Agenda

Team members need a clear sense of direction *quickly*. How else can they be effective as a team? Clear priorities help team members to figure out how to spend their time. The action plan sets out the agenda with crystal clear tactical objectives giving the team laser like focus. Alignment of effort depends on your ability to orient the team and orchestrate a co-ordinated effort. Map out new priorities. Keep them simple and tie them to a specific timetable. Set short-term goals that the team can achieve quickly. Potential resistance can be defused when your instructions are unequivocal and easily understood. Make known your commitment to them and their commitment to achieving the goals known. Tell them at the outset that they can expect some mid course corrections. The agenda will have to be adapts as the situation demands it. But, *always* keep it clear and communicate it constantly.

Of course, key team members can contribute to designing the team's priorities and objectives. You must consider their input. The more they can shape the agenda, the more buy-in and commitment they'll show. Plus, their ideas might dramatically improve your sense of priorities. In the final analysis, though, *you* remain accountable.

5. Focus on Concrete Results

With the pace of change accelerating many employees change their attitude towards their organisation. During times of change, which may be seen as upheaval by some, trust levels often drop. Morale slips. Loyalty withers. Job stress rises. As the person in charge, you had better take these emotional matters seriously. Strong feelings influence the way people behave. What all this means is that your job gets harder. These emotional intangibles must not become your top priority, however. Instead, focus on problems, not symptoms. How can you build trust? Simply be trustworthy in the way that you and your team pursue your goals. Focus on tangible results. Go for those operational improvements that are most urgently needed. Focus on those things that go straight to the bottom line or that contributes directly to competitive position. Stake out specific targets. Aim for a few - but ambitious - goals. Go for measurable gains. Kaizen is a results oriented strategy and indirectly it does the most to improve employee attitudes. If you focus on fighting the causes of your team's aches and pains and get rid of root problems, watch the 'emotional' symptoms disappear.

6. Know your Team

The casting of people - determining who goes, who stays and who goes where - carries a lot of weight. Put people in the right place to begin with, and you won't be forced to make shifts later on. New challenges rewrite job descriptions. So, start from scratch in analysing your available people assets. Approach the exercise as if all team members were 'new hires.' Check for people's adaptability. Ask yourself who is best suited for which role. If there are weak players that you must use position them where they'll hurt the team least. Size up your team with a dispassionate, discerning eye. You need good data, and you need it in a hurry. You can't afford to sit back and figure out your team members as the months go by. You need to make informed judgements *now*. If you don't trust your skills at this, or if you feel that you just can't make the timer, get help.

Look for strengths. Weaker points. Aspirations and work preferences. Experience and areas of expertise. Concerns and points of resistance. The sharper your insights into each individual, the better the odds that you'll manage him or her effectively.

7. Keep Your Best People

Your key people can be the cornerstones of your team effort, so don't take these people for granted. *Re-recruit* them. Make *everyone* feel important. Invest the same time and effort in creating the team that you would in recruiting a new employee. Try to capture people's spirit. Put some fire into their feeling about the work in hand. Ensure they're on board *emotionally*. Successful teamwork depends heavily on your ability to stabilise the group. Try to keep it intact throughout the project.

8. Ensure Roles and Responsibilities are Understood

Ensure everyone knows what's expected of him or her. Don't leave people to figure things out on their own. Get rid of rule ambiguity. Nail down every team member's responsibilities with clarity, precision and attention to detail.

There must be no question regarding where one job stops and the next one starts. Leave no blur regarding the responsibilities each team member is supposed to shoulder. Figure out precisely what needs to be done, who's going to do which part of it and communicate your plan. Give every team member a brief job description. State your expectations regarding standards of performance. Describe the chain of command in the team. Outline each person's spending limits, decision-making authority, and reporting requirements. Everyone will be best served if you put this information down in writing.

Check to make sure that each team member understands the team's (whole) set-up and how it fits together. Be careful to avoid job overlap, since that feeds power struggles, wastes resources and frustrates everyone involved. When explaining to people what to do also specify what they should *not* do. Differentiate between crucial tasks and peripheral, low priority activities. Spell out what needs to be accomplished in each position and for what the person will be held most accountable. Once you have done this, pay attention to what team members are doing. Keep everyone on track. If you see something going wrong, fix it immediately.

9. Be Urgent

The team manager's role is to energise the team, mobilise it and to keep additional change from choking off its energy. You need to show a strong sense of urgency. Seriously consider what your work habits say to the team. Are you putting in extra hours? What about your personal productivity? Does your behaviour show a burning job commitment? Without a sense of urgency, you can't function as the pivotal influence around which the members coalesce into a team. Like it or not, you're the role model and team members take their cue from you.

Keep the pressure on for productivity. Set tight deadlines. Push for quicker decisions. Expedite. Operate with a bias for action. Let everybody know that you will be tolerant of honest mistakes, but intolerant of inaction and inertia. Praise those who are energetic. Nip at the heels of those who drag their feet.

Instead of patiently planning, preparing, just get going. Move immediately to make measurable results as soon as possible. Start with the resources you've got. Start with an attacking strategy, score quickly and start building momentum. Inertia is your big enemy right now.

10. Tighten Discipline

High performance teams are disciplined. The team members are strict with themselves and they execute with precision. People play for the team - not just for themselves - and are intolerant of

half hearted effort. These teams are self-policing. They deal swiftly with members who disregard the team's rule system, whether those rules are written down or just implicitly agreed by all.

The team leader must function as the main disciplinary agent for the team. Start by setting high standards. Then defend them. Aim for excellence to build pride, esprit de corps and cohesiveness. Keep things tightly organised. Don't allow people to drift back into old routines or habits. Hold team members accountable for all their assigned tasks. Keep them to their agreed timetables and deadlines. Don't be vague or fuzzy in laying down the rules, or in explaining what you want, or inconsistent in enforcing objectives. If you make as many exceptions as you do rules, you have no rules. Always be prepared to back up your words with action. Team members will listen to what you have to say, but their behaviour will be shaped by what you *do*. Keep a high profile. Remember that you have no more powerful way to communicate than by example. You can't lead by example if the team can't see you. This way team members will have confidence in you.

11. Compliment and Praise

Reward, reward and reward good performance. The intangible rewards you have to offer are limitless. Words of encouragement, compliments, empathy and understanding, a note of appreciation. Stopping to share a cup of coffee or taking a team member to lunch. Giving team member's special assignments or more decision-making authority. A sincere thank you. Asking about the family, celebrating small victories, soliciting opinions and suggestions. Listening, really listening. A smile, a warm handshake or pat on the back. Taking someone into your confidence. Asking team member's for help is gratifying because it validates one's worth.

Caring takes time. It requires that you pay attention to what's happening. Create a supportive team environment - nurture - and watch it bring out the best in people. Show approval and see how it arms the team. When you affirm, you empower. People feel safer, valued and more optimistic. Trust levels increase. Team members are more creative and engage their talents more fully. If you make every member of the team feel special, you'll end up with a very special team.

12. Ensure Communication Flows

Give the team constant updates. Even no news is news. If you don't regularly update the team, they'll fill in the blanks themselves and you feed the rumour mill by default. Unless you speak for yourself, somebody will speak for you. If you want certain information to stick keep saying it. If you have to deliver a complex or difficult message, put it in writing.

Since communication travels four times as fast from the top down as from the bottom up, you should put new 'pipelines' in place to carry information to you. If you know what the problems are and hear about them early enough, you can usually fix them. So, deputise every team member. Ask them to go looking for problems. Instead of looking for proof that changes are happening or working, search for evidence that they're aren't.

Bring your team together often. Talk. Air issues and discuss. Pool everyone's thoughts on how to resolve problems so as to keep everyone "in the loop." Invite argument and allow conflict. You'll end up with better solutions. Don't allow differences to be swept under the rug as this will haunt the team later. You won't have a high performance team unless you meet the tough issues head on.

13. Point your Team in one Direction

Teams need to know where they're going. Team members perform best when they unite with a keen sense of mission, knowing they're heading somewhere special. If the aiming point is clear and the vision is compelling, it draws the team together and pulls them forward. Concentrate on making the vision a *cause*. Teams get fired up about crusades and not about 'strategic plans.' Give the team a sense of purpose that captures their imagination and encourages them to close ranks.

Co-ordinate team effort by concretely explaining to the team the specific results the team is expected to achieve. You must believe in what the team is doing. If not, how can you defend it, sell it and turn the vision into reality? True leaders, true visionaries, do everything to control events. Team managers must become true leaders. True leaders are driven by a vision, every team member must be part of that vision, and that vision must encompass the individual visions of every team member. In addition, nothing leads to disillusionment more quickly if the team feels that it cannot change or implement what it is supposed to change.

"I have a dream!" was Martin Luther King's sales message. He certainly had a dream and by pulling out the essence and distilling it into a few clear, crisp paragraphs, he told everyone prepared to listen the essence of his dream. This dream was underpinned by a great, overarching, simplicity: "make Americans equal." Like most of the best visions his was simple. Simplicity has the benefit of being easily communicated and remembered. Team visions, too, must be simple and describe what the team is supposed to achieve in the given time span. To do this they must satisfy 'the three R's': they must be **relevant** to the organisation and its present situation, they must be **realistic** and achievable and they must be **robust** and not collapse in the face of setbacks.

14. Pay Attention to Process

High performance teams always pay attention to process. Think of this as your team's gearbox, the internal machinery of how it goes about its business. Destabilised teams need to be self-monitoring, or self-correcting. But during times of change or transition, team members are notorious for side-stepping or overlooking the problems of group process. Most team members look out for themselves rather than for the team. Team members are so busy "doing" that they don't take time to evaluate *how* they're doing it. Sometimes they lack confidence in the team's ability to handle the stress of self-analysis, so they don't force the issue. The result? Nobody calls attention to dysfunctional process.

As the person in charge the team manager should focus attention on process. What's going on inside the team? Analyse its effectiveness. Determine what's missing, what's getting in the way, what needs to happen. You need a sharp eye plus the nerve to make the team deal with process problems. Regularly stop the team in its tracks. Call a halt long enough to let the team hold a mirror up to itself. Process analysis is as simple as saying, "lets look at what's going on now. How do you feel about that? Let's analyse how we're working together as a team." Make everybody take a hard look at what's happening. Don't let people dodge issues, gloss over sensitive points, or turn the conversation toward mere chit-chat. Make the team face the facts and come up with constructive ideas on how to handle the process problems. Finally, make it clear that each team member is in charge of protecting team process. Tell everyone to throw the spotlight of attention on behaviour that gets in the way.

15. Making the Team Holographic

Your role is to make the team *synchronous*. This means that everybody understands that change is accepted for all the other team members as well as for oneself. Essentially, teams work very well

when individuals don't worry about their personal gain. The first condition for good teamwork is that each member of the team is aware that he or she **alone** is responsible for the whole. It is not shared responsibility; it is the responsibility for everything on the shoulders of each one. The team manager's goal is to realise a *holographic* team. If you take a holographic image of a house and cut this image into pieces, you find the image of the house on each piece. The state of mind of each team member reflects the state of mind of the whole team. This is the definition of your team's spirit.

Teams and targets from a team member's perspective or what team member's worry about

From the team members perspective what are the priorities? Do they feel that there is a purpose to this? Does each individual have a clear sense of direction that is tied to a specific timetable? Assuming a positive or negative answer how can team members then, monitor and adjust their own performance to ensure they stay on track?

Jack R. Gibb's research on group behaviour² together with Arthur Young's process theories³ contributed the view that people bring the following four basic concerns to all social interactions that can be adapted to team performance:

1. **Acceptance concerns** about the formation of trust, acceptance of oneself and others, anxiety and how to decrease it and confidence and how to increase it. Acceptance concerns primarily relate to issues of membership.
2. **Data concerns** about the communication of perceptions, feelings and ideas to team members and about the social norms of how they should be expressed.
3. **Goal formation** concerns about goal setting, problem solving and decision making and about resolving different motivations. Productivity, fun, creativity learning and growing is considered part of goal setting.
4. **Control concerns** about the regulation, coordination and sequencing of activities.

Young's conclusions indicated that team unity is found by appreciating the nature of processes and together with Gibb's findings the team-performance model was created. This found that as a newly formed team defines its work and makes choices, boundaries and restrictions are created. Teams that are successful in resolving their basic concerns appear to achieve the most freedom. High performance is associated with breaking the boundaries of individual capacity.

What follows is a study of how teams can explore their limits and monitor what they must do to stray on track and break the boundaries of individual capacity. We address eight primary elements, each representing a set of concerns that team members face when they work together. If team members can answer the questions contained in each element, questions that we regard as self-monitoring, the team has a greater chance of being successful.

1. Orientation into the Team

The issues here are membership and acceptance. The core question is "*Why am I here?*" Each person who joins the team must answer this question in order to begin the process of finding his or her niche. Later, the core question becomes, "Do I belong here?"

Team members then normally ask themselves, "*Do I want to be here?*" They must believe that the team's objectives are valuable in order that they buy fully into the team's mission. They must also

² Bradford, Gibb and Benne *T-group theory and laboratory method*. 1964

³ A. Young *The geometry of meaning and the reflexive universe* 1976

believe that the team can do its work or tasks well. Finally, they must believe that their skills will be used, that they will be heard, that their being there matters and that they have some power to influence the team's direction and results.

2. The Quest for Meaning

Meaning refers to a value, having a sense of value, worth, fulfillment, satisfaction, respect or success. Value comes from an understanding of an activity and the achievement that comes from it. Meaning answers the question: what is something good for? All team members want to understand: *"Why this effort, Why this work, action or activity? What do I get out of it? What value do I derive from doing it? What value do others derive from this work, action or activity?"* If we were to ask team members to write down their rate of interest in their participation in their team what would many write? The objective should be *"this interests and excites me."*

3. Building Trust

The main question here is *"Who are you?"* the hidden concern here is *"What will you expect of me?"* Many questions, too, need to be answered about team members. *Are they reliable? Are they good at what they do? Are they dedicated to their work? Do they have hidden agendas?* Being able to answer these questions affirmatively builds team trust.

4. Objectives and Role Clarification

During this stage, team members are primarily concerned with issues such as identifying options and managing the accompanying decisions. The purpose of creating the team in the first place is that it gets somewhere. Individual team members will be asking themselves *"What must I do, how and by when?"* and considering the 'contract' with the team manager will want to know *"How should I behave in the team and with the team manager?"*

5. Commitment

The team is now ready to take action. The core questions are *"How?"* and *"Which way?"* During this phase the team chooses the directions and divides responsibilities.

6. Implementation

The key questions are *"How should things be done? Who is doing what, when and where?"* The sequencing and scheduling of work is a major concern here.

7. High Performance

"How can we create harmony and excitement in the team?" Which aspects of my work require the highest levels of performance? Ideally, each team member believes that he or she is essential to the work effort and feels responsible for his or her contributions.

8. Renewal

At the renewal stage the key question is *"Why continue?"* This allows team members to examine their jobs and to ask themselves whether the task in hand suits their lifestyles and their career plans. To a certain extent this stage is similar to the orientation stage. Team members are trying to assess where they are, why they are there and what now needs to be done. Positive responses to these questions usually energize the questioners and renew their sense of commitment. Negative answers, on the other hand, indicate an unwillingness to continue.