United States
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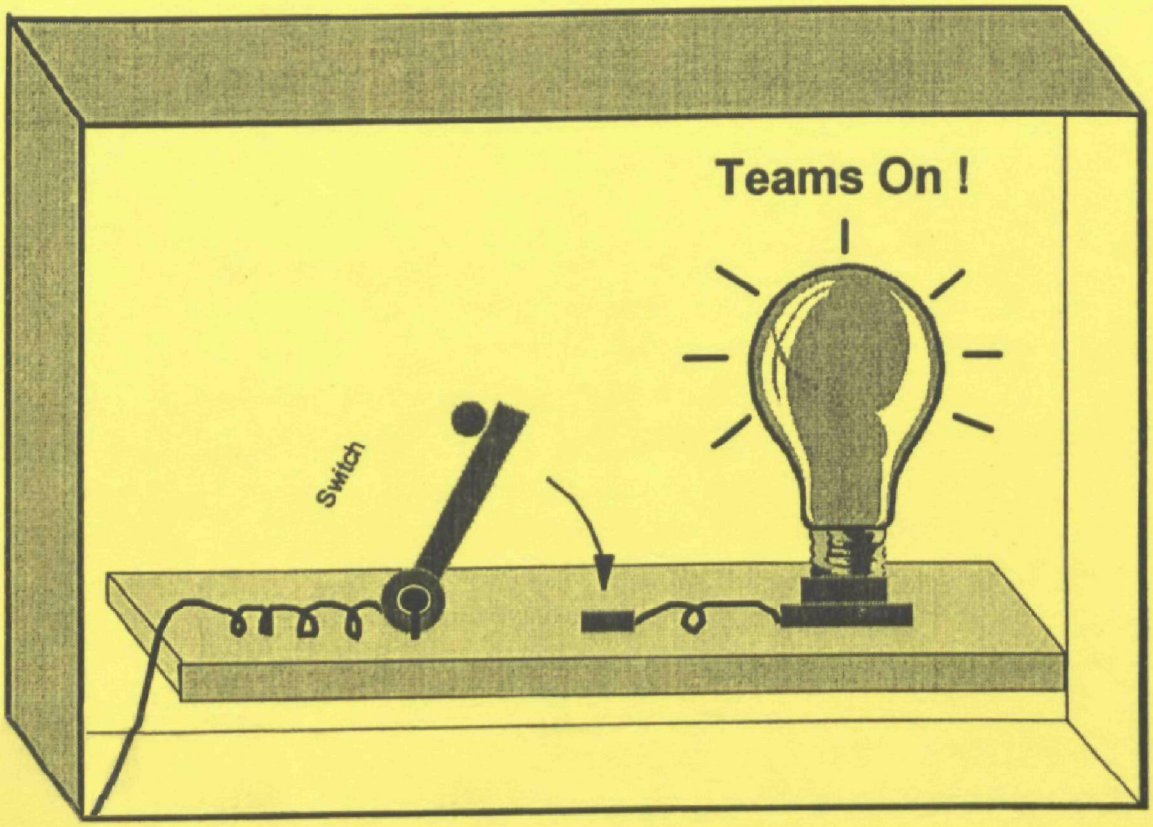
Administration And Resources Management (3634)

EPA

Implementing Work Teams



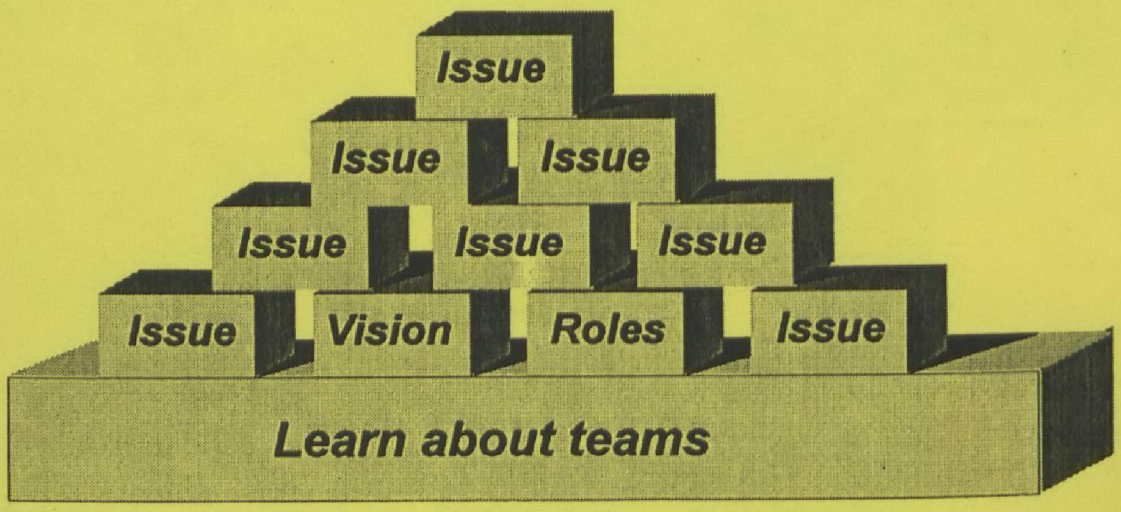
Number 3--Work Team Series

This booklet is part of a series of Work Teams booklets written to guide EPA managers and potential work team members in implementing work teams. Many EPA organizations are changing a number of their work units into work teams. Management and employees will have to carefully plan their transition to teams. This booklet is a step-by-step guide to implementing work teams.

On the first few pages readers are encouraged to:

- learn about teams
- define a vision and set clear goals
- identify the roles of Senior Leadership, a Steering Committee, and Design Teams

After that introduction, eight key issues that should be addressed to implement work teams are described. To the extent that you discuss and reach consensus on those issues, you will be more likely to successfully implement work teams.



Learn About Teams

Before you begin to implement work teams, gather as much information on the subject as possible. Do this in a variety of ways:

- attend workshops and conferences
- read articles and books
- visit and observe a work team firsthand
- discuss the nuances of work team organizations with a consultant
- confer by phone, email, and correspond with work team leaders and members.

Define a Vision and Set Clear Goals

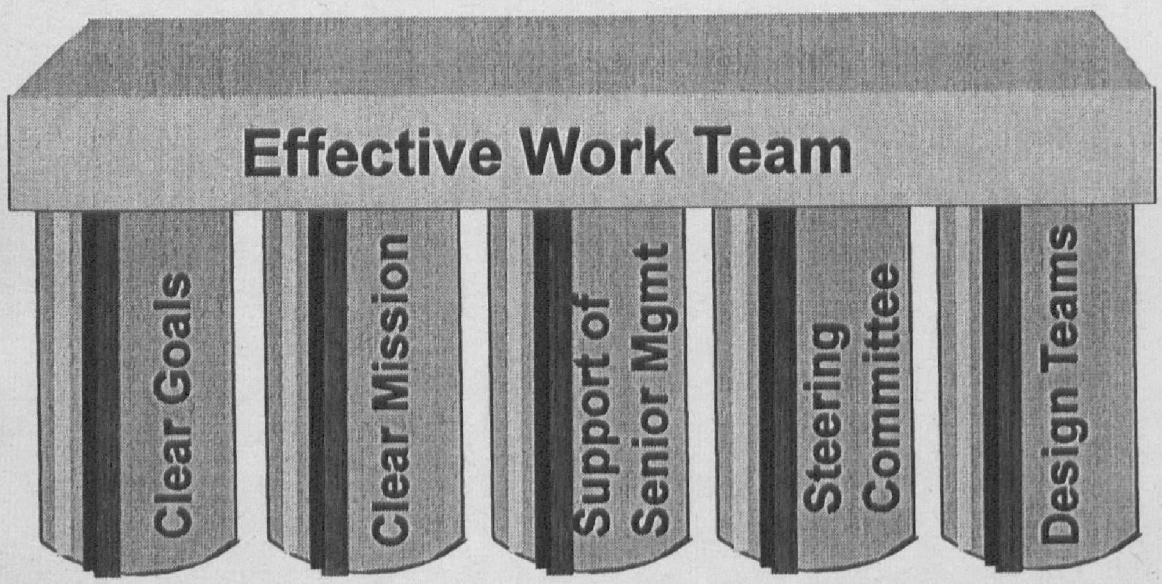
In many traditional command-and-control organizations, top management has a clear sense of what is to be accomplished. As long as the vision is clear to senior managers, the organization will be able to get much of its work done because top management can, through middle management, direct employees.

In contrast, in a shared-leadership situation, employees are largely expected to figure out for themselves what to work on and how to do it. If your organization shifts away from command and control but you don't clarify mission and goals, teams and team members will find something to do, but that may not be consistent with the overall purpose of the organization.

Once the organization has clarified its overall **purpose**, all of the major work units and work teams can define and ratify with management what they will accomplish and when. Once that is clear, everyone can concentrate their efforts on getting there.

Roles of Senior Leadership, Steering Committee, and Design Teams

A clear set of goals will not guarantee success, however. Teams are much more likely to strengthen the organization if three external groups help in specific ways. Those groups are (1) senior management, (2) a steering committee, and (3) design teams.



Engage Senior Management

Senior management (at the AA, RA, or Office level) can enable the organization to realize the vision by clarifying, guiding, rewarding, and modeling action which meets the new expectations.

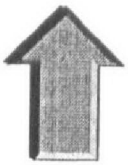
Senior management may choose this new direction through a series of "vision setting" sessions.

With the vision defined, senior management can facilitate transition to teams by working toward modifying the culture and realigning the organization. They can change the culture by adjusting:

- values or norms regarding work behavior,
- incentives influencing work behavior,
- ways of conveying information throughout the organization,
- how resources are allocated, and
- how feedback is provided to employees.

For example, senior management may elect to focus on customer service as one of the guiding principles. The Steering Committee might then work with the Design Teams to determine the ways in which customer expectations could be better met such as by giving employees greater discretion over task completion and resources. If discretion and resources are increased at lower levels, employees can and will often take immediate action to creatively meet customer needs.

Support Work Teams



Align Organization

Change Systems & Incentives

Involve a Steering Committee

You cannot create a viable organization solely from teams. In a traditional organization, middle management performs several essential functions, including:

- coordinating work
- moving information
- selecting (or hiring), developing, and rewarding employees
- ensuring customer service
- allocating resources

In a team-based organization without much middle management, these functions still need to be performed. One way to accomplish this is to establish a transitional (non-permanent) organization in the form of a steering committee. It would be the committee's responsibility to determine how such functions will be carried out.

Steering committee membership might include, but not be limited to, all levels of management, union officials, staff, and customers.

Establish and Involve Design Teams

The Steering Committee guides the work of Design teams which are also temporary in nature. Design teams typically are responsible for designing, monitoring, and aligning resources in support of work teams. Design teams work with work teams to help define their purpose and processes. Some of the matters that design teams discuss are:

- training needed
- team composition
- scope of a team's work

Design team membership may include supervisors, team members, union officials, customers, and human resource practitioners. Depending on the major tasks of each work unit, subject matter experts, such as engineers or scientists, may serve on design teams as well.

Design teams guide work teams. They help carve out details on work team implementation. The design team should use employee involvement as the driving principle to assess, build, and implement work processes. Because employees do the work and meet with customers, employee involvement adds clarity and precision to designing work processes and allocating work team roles and responsibilities. Eventually, work team members decide how things get done on a day-to-day basis.

Develop Your Implementation Plan, Addressing Key Issues

Once you have:

- your shared vision,
- an active steering committee, and
- functioning design teams,

you will need to resolve a number of implementation issues. We have identified eight issues that frequently are surfaced. What follows is a discussion of each of these, including examples of EPA experience with each, and some suggested readings.

The eight issues are:

1. To what degree should we give additional information, discretion, and responsibility to employees, therefore empowering them?

2. Should aspects of our jobs be changed to create a greater degree of interdependence in order to improve work flow and quality?

3. How do we integrate process improvement methods (multi-voting, fishboning, nominal group technique, etc.) with people skills?

4. What type of training will be useful to our senior leadership to create an environment where teams will take hold and prosper?

5. What kind of information system can keep employees informed and active in the new workplace?

6. Since we will need a comprehensive work team curriculum, what will our training plan look like?

7. How will we adjust our reward systems so as to place the emphasis on teamwork?

8. What kinds of resources will be required to set up work teams?

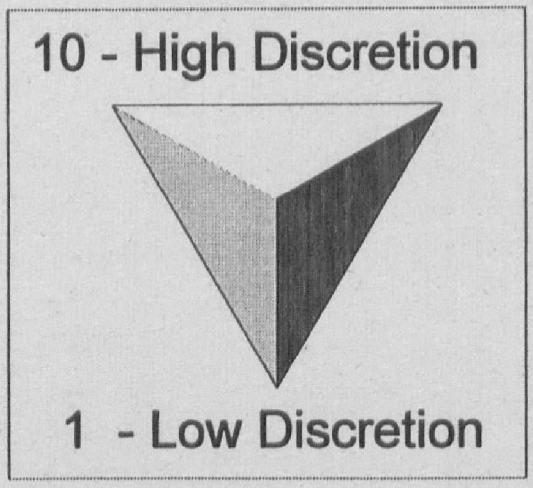
Issue 1:

To what degree should we give additional information, discretion, and responsibility to our employees, therefore empowering them?

Empowerment means different things to different people; as a result, management and employees must work together to develop a shared meaning. One author describes empowerment as moving information, resources, discretion and responsibility down to the lowest levels in the organization.

Empowered employees have ***discretion*** concerning their roles, work processes, and day-to-day operations. Different work teams are likely to have different levels of discretion, depending on the functions handled, management style of their coach, and maturity and capability of team members.

Think of the level of discretion as ranging from one to ten.



Discretion levels will vary over time. Conceivably, a work team could start at a level three (3) and move to a level six (6) in a short period. Also, as with technical skills, developing people and leadership skills takes time.

To decide the level of discretion to allocate to a particular work team, ask the following types of questions (they represent the types of information required to decide the realistic level of discretion to assign):

- What is the team's level of willingness to take on greater responsibility in goal-setting and work performance?

- What is the team's demonstrated goal-setting experience?

- How much experience does the team have working without supervision?

EPA Experience

Region 3 established a self-directed work team that reports directly to the Regional Administrator. It is a multi-functional team, with responsibility for working with the press, communities, Congress, other elected officials, and local governments in the State of Pennsylvania. The team has been given the responsibility and discretion to carry out the mission of the Agency and to establish regional "messages for the RA" on major issues and events.

The team operates independently, manages its budget, and recommends awards and other recognition for team members. Feedback from customers such as regional and local media, municipalities, counties, and local officials has been positive. Public statements and press coverage of EPA programs have also been more supportive since the team has been established. Also, as the team has completed major public activities, members' morale has risen.

Employees in an **OHROS (The Office of Human Resources and Organizational Services)** division that had set up work teams thought that they could now participate in all decisions regarding the division. They felt responsible for managing the division.

While they felt responsible, they were confused about how much discretion they had and the matters over which they had discretion. The Division Director and employees debated about the division's direction and work. The manager and the employees found a need to negotiate the level of discretion and to decide where to apply it.

Discretion does not occur by chance; it must be discussed, identified, clarified, applied, and maintained. As the transition occurs, care should be taken to avoid falling back into previous hierarchical forms of behavior.

In **the Office of Air and Radiation**, a design team has assessed the progress of a work team. The work team, which has a team leader, had intended to gradually move to self-management. However, each work team member has said they do not have enough leadership experience to operate at the expected level of independence.

In response to their concern, and to provide leadership experience, each of the six members will now be held accountable for a specific core task and its respective work flow. Thus, they have been designated task leaders. In addition, each "task leader" will develop a team member, who could substitute on the task in the event that the main task leader is absent.

Readings:

Edward E. Lawler III. High Involvement Management. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1986.

Jack D. Orsburn, Linda Moran, Ed Musselwhite, John H. Zenger, and Craig Perrin. Self-Directed Work Teams. Homewood, Illinois: Business One Irwin, 1990.

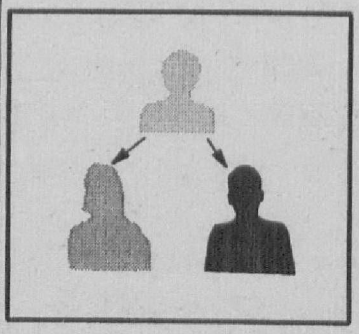
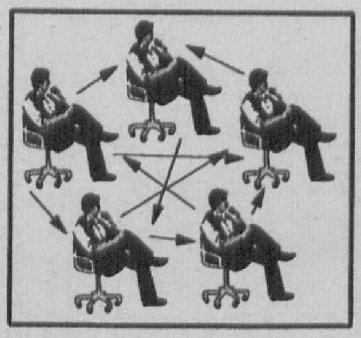
Issue 2:

Should aspects of our jobs be changed to create a greater degree of work interdependence in order to improve work flow and quality?

Employee work interdependence is characteristic of the work team setting. Work interdependence can vary and can be managed. Before you try to manage interdependence, it helps to understand its components.

In some cases, greater interdependence is desirable to improve work flow and quality. Look to see if there are useful ways to redesign positions and work processes to make employees more interdependent. If as a result, you establish or increase interdependence, teams will be worth considering.

The table on the next page contrasts organizations with low versus high levels of interdependence.

Characteristics of a Position or Group of Positions	Individual (Low Interdependence)	Teams (High Interdependence)
Degree of division of labor, segmentation of work, or specialization	Highly segmented	Work is comprehensive in scope and highly integrated.
Sequence of task completion	Linear	Circular
Means of coordination	Supervisor needed to coordinate all fragmented parts of the work. 	Coordination occurs amongst team members or is facilitated by the Team Leader. 

EPA Experience

Region 8's Public Water Supply Program Section Self-Directed Work Team has gone to great lengths to make sure they understand their entire team's responsibilities. They have generated their own vision and mission statements and "Mission Specifics Tasks" for each activity within their mission statement. This has been of immense value. It has been helpful as they have begun allocating, managing, sharing, and tracking the entire team's work load.

The Office of Pesticide Programs (OPP) established a full-time work team in the Registration Division called the **Labeling Unit** with a simple and clear mission: to ensure that the labels on pesticide products are clear, technically accurate and consistent.

The new unit elaborated on its mission statement by establishing six programs, each with a program goal, objective, and tasks. Those tasks and estimated completion dates are summarized at the end of the mission statement. The document has been essential to the remarkable progress the Labeling Unit has made.

A ***Region 3*** self-directed team began with the help of a design team made up of staff from the Office of External Affairs. The design team developed a "straw" document that included a mission and vision for the team, which the team later revised. The design team also used brain-storming to identify possible team measures of success. Later, the team sorted those measures into categories and narrowed the focus. Those measures will be instrumental in rating team performance this year.

In the Office of Air and Radiation, work team members were asked to discuss their knowledge of day-to-day operations. Team members hesitated. After all, they said, the former supervisor is the only one who saw the total picture. However, they said that, in time, they would understand it.

Several months later, the team had identified the purpose for their organization, documented all of their work flows, and written standard operating procedures covering all of the work team's tasks, roles, and responsibilities. The team documents described:

- all of the steps necessary to get the work done,
- roles and responsibilities,
- the various forms that they needed to use, and
- new software they found to help them with their work.

The team's next step is to inform their customers about how to access the team's services and products. The team will negotiate customer expectations while seeking customer understanding. Management is supporting them in this effort. That support includes training on teams, TQM and interpersonal relations, as well as endorsement of their efforts with internal customers who report to the same senior executive.

Readings:

J. Richard Hackman and G. R. Oldham. Work Redesign. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1989.

Calvin H. P. Pava. Managing New Office Technology: An Organizational Strategy. New York: The Free Press, 1983.

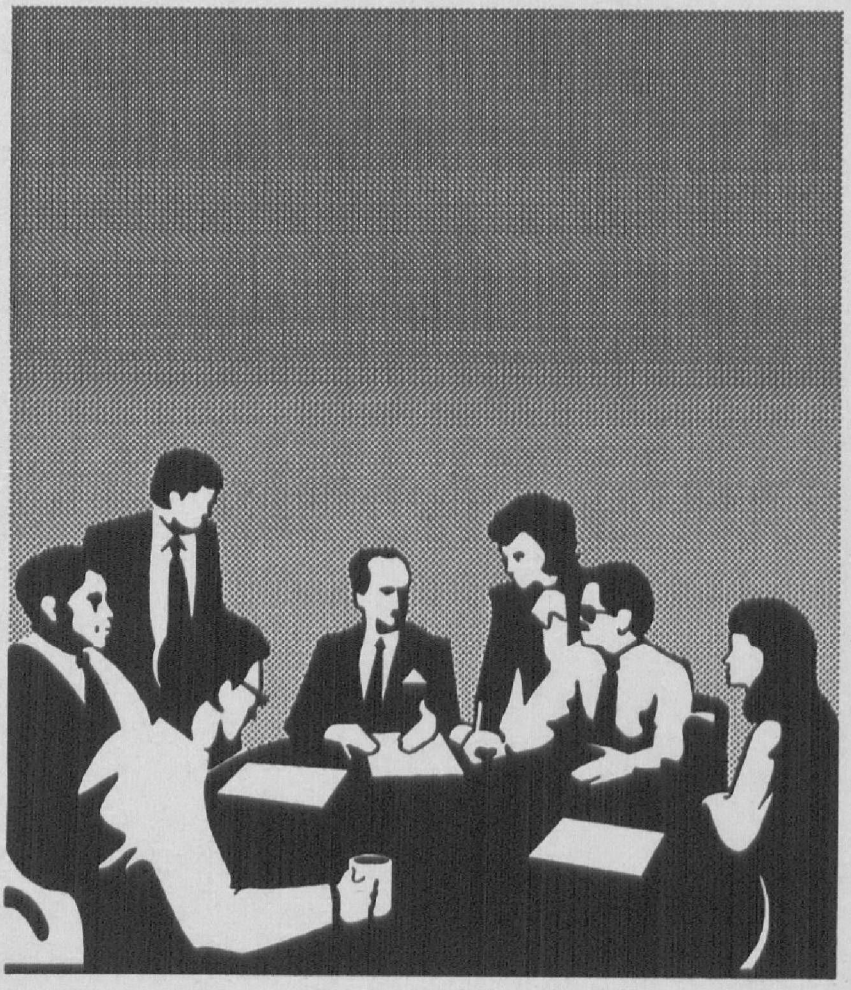
Issue 3:

How do we integrate process improvement methods (multi-voting, fishboning, nominal group technique, etc.) with people skills?

Work teams often use process improvement techniques while making technical decisions to enhance their services or products. Employees also need strong interpersonal skills.

Interpersonal skills are important because team members need to interact with one another effectively to get the job done. A "social" assessment can help to determine the team's effectiveness in such areas as communications, problem solving, conflict management, and decision making. It is essential that teams receive periodic feedback about all aspects of their work, including how well they interact among themselves.

Fortunately, there are individual assessment instruments, such as the Myers-Briggs, the Birkman Relational Management System and the Personal Profile System which help clarify individual differences. Those differences have implications for team communications, problem-solving and decision-making, training needs, and work performance.



EPA Experience

In **The Office of Pollution, Pesticides, and Toxics**, employees serving on work teams held a meeting during which the facilitator asked what characteristics were found in effective work teams. Brainstorming and multivoting were used to identify the three most important characteristics. Trust and good communications (important in interpersonal relations) were two of the characteristics cited in effective teams.

At a meeting of another work team, the nominal group technique was used to identify alternatives for communicating reinvention efforts in the AAship. Several options were identified. The group then ranked them. This process identified a number of excellent alternatives, some of which were carried out. While helping the group accomplish its work, the facilitator taught committee members how to fully involve regional and field members. He did this by beginning every "round-the-table" discussion by asking those participating by teleconference to provide their input before turning to members who were in the room.

A manager in **Region 5** described how team members who had not held leadership roles before were having to learn a great deal about working with different personalities. Team members were thus having to learn some of the interpersonal relations skills which middle managers had relied on for years.

Readings:

Making Teams Work: A Guide to Creating and Managing Teams. Burlington, Massachusetts: Organization Dynamics, Inc., 1993.

Mary Walton. The Deming Management Method. New York, N.Y.: Perigee Books, 1986.

Calvin H. P. Pava. Managing New Office Technology: An Organizational Strategy. New York: The Free Press, 1983.

Geary A. Rummler and Alan P. Brache. Improving Performance. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Publishers, 1990.

Issue 4:

What type of learning and understanding will be useful for our senior leadership to create an environment where teams will take hold and prosper?

Senior managers have to do several things in order for their teams to succeed:

- recognize that teams are needed,
- allow teams to make decisions without inordinate risk, and
- empower teams and "let go."

Senior managers need to understand their roles in a work team environment and how these roles enhance work team performance. New behavior on the part of senior management will stem from reaching a clearer sense of purpose, implementing a flatter organization, and increasing the decision-making power of employees.

Senior managers will create and maintain the conditions that nurture work team viability. Senior management can begin by raising their own level of awareness and preparing themselves to cascade the team philosophy and tools to different organizational tiers. Meanwhile, managers can become coaches and mentors to teams on issues ranging from conflict resolution to problem-solving and decision-making.

EPA Experience

The support and cooperation of management within the ***Water Division*** have been very important to the success of Region 8's pilot self-directed work team. The Water Management Division Director attended all of the basic self-directed work team training and has been an outspoken advocate of teams.

When it became apparent that only one level of management was needed between the Team and the Division Director, a Branch Chief agreed to remove himself as much as possible from the management chain and serve as "consultant" to the team. As the team matured, a Section Chief, who was not a member of the team, became a "Coach" to the team. Without this kind of cooperation and flexibility by management, the team could not have thrived.

Readings:

Edgar Schein. Organizational Culture and Leadership. A Dynamic View. San Francisco, CA.: Jossey-Bass, 1985.

Workforce Capacity Team Report, National Performance Review. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, (August 1993).

Peter M. Senge. The Fifth Discipline. New York: Doubleday Currency, 1990.

John H. Zenger and Associates. Leading Teams: Mastering the New Role. Homewood, Illinois: Business One Irwin, 1994.

Issue 5:

What kind of information system can keep employees informed and active in the new workplace?

Employee discretion will require increased access to wider and deeper levels of information. How the information system will be tailored to meet work team requirements needs to be explored. The information system should be modified to provide work team members with pertinent information about all aspects of their operations. Continuous performance feedback will be necessary.

As the team's discretion increases, it may assume these responsibilities:

- gathering data on customer satisfaction
- measuring team performance
- improving financial efficiency

For example, employees will need to have greater access to, and be involved in, the budgeting process for their work teams. They will need this fiscal information to make decisions about team expenditures in such areas as training, providing services, and delivering products.

EPA Experience

As work teams have been established and have evolved in organizations such as ***OUST, OSWER, and OARM***, an essential part of that progress has been communication via local area networks. A recently formed work team in OARM, consisting of about 15 members in various locations in Waterside Mall, has relied on LAN-mail and a shared directory for communications. Team members communicate several times each day via the LAN. Often they communicate via LAN-mail to the entire team via a group directory.

There are now about 30 documents on their shared directory, and they engage in electronic dialogues by inserting comments in various documents as each member reviews them. All working documents are placed in the share directory as they are being commented on and edited, so that any of 160 colleagues in the office can look at them if interested. Voice mail (including group voice mail), interoffice mail, and faxing are also used.

Region 3's External Affairs Team found that they lacked the basic skills to track their budget. More importantly, the data systems in the region were not set up to deal with budget information in the team context. The Information Systems Unit, however, responded by establishing a hybrid tracking system, which met the team's needs on a short-term basis. Just as there are special facilities and training needs for teams, teams need data that they can access, and that can be broken down to the team level. Teams may also need training in budget formulation and execution.

As a contribution to the decision-making process, ***the EPA Institute*** has created an "Electronic Meeting Room" to improve the quality of team meetings. The new software combines the use of technology with group facilitation in support of collaborative group processes. It enhances many group processes:

- generating and organizing ideas
- evaluating alternatives
- building consensus
- conducting analyses
- making decisions
- developing action plans
- managing information

The Electronic Meeting Room allows for anonymous and simultaneous ideas and complete record keeping. Teams are able to obtain data printouts during their meetings.

Readings

David Nadler. Feedback and Organizational Development. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1977.

David Nadler, Cortlandt Cammann, & Philip H. Mirvis. Developing a Feedback System for Work Units: A Field Experiment in Structural Change. The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 1980, Vol. 16, No. 1.

Calvin H. P. Pava. Managing New Office Technology: An Organizational Strategy. New York: The Free Press, 1983.

Issue 6:

Since we will need a comprehensive work team curriculum, what will our training plan look like?

Training will be a foundation for work team efforts. The new organization will require increased:

- awareness about work team organization and processes
- understanding about the mission, values, and objectives of the new organization
- interpersonal skills
- technical skills
- administrative skills

It makes sense to use a variety of approaches to develop the knowledges needed. In **team training**, members of a team attend workshops or conferences together, rather than individually. Since one objective of teams is to create a broader range of ability among the employees, **cross-training** is essential.

The stages of group development provide a strong rationale for sequencing training. Recall the group development stages: **forming, storming, norming, and performing**.

Forming The initial training ought to focus on organizing a team. Training modules can include:

- ☐ meeting management,
- ☐ total quality management tools, and
- ☐ listening and other communications skills.

Storming During the second stage, team members can benefit from training in:

- ☐ consensus management,
- ☐ conflict management, and
- ☐ building trust.

Norming The target skills and knowledges for this stage could include:

- ☐ technical skills,
- ☐ process reengineering skills,
- ☐ small group interaction, and
- ☐ project management.

Performing Team and individual performance becomes easier to measure after moving beyond the initial work team stages. Training in this stage might emphasize:

- ☐ data collection and assessment,
- ☐ ability to work collaboratively with other offices,
- ☐ external communication, and
- ☐ advanced project management techniques.

EPA Experience

An ***OHROS*** division director is now in the process of working with the staff on a training strategy. Some of the employees are asking for individual development training that does not fit the demands of a work team environment. Although individual needs will be considered, the division's top priority is now training related to work teams.

A divisional training committee is making recommendations in three areas:

- how to function in teams,
- interpersonal relations, and
- leadership in the team context.

At a recent workshop on conflict resolution and feedback in the division, the trainer provided a discouraging observation: "Members of the division do not listen to one another. I see people talking about their interests. I do not see people listening to what others have to say. I am not sure how you all communicate important information. Do you have any ground rules on how you make group decisions?"

The trainer told the group that a work team's forming stage requires that work team members set up ground rules to guide problem-solving and decision-making. The ground rules should be applied explicitly in their decision-making process.

Training in conflict resolution is recommended for teams. Since most of the team members in ***Region 3's*** self-directed external affairs team are very strong communicators, interpersonal skills are natural. Even so, the team encountered several instances in which conflict resolution training could have alleviated tension, particularly during the earlier phases of team development.

Readings

Bruce W. Tuckman. Developmental Sequences in Small Groups, Psychological Bulletin 63, #6, 1965.

Issue 7:

How will we adjust our reward systems to reflect an emphasis on teamwork?

Cooperation among team members is crucial. Performance management and incentive systems should be designed to reflect the need for cooperation. Building and maintaining cooperation will not occur by chance; it will develop only if employees realize that it is the best way of doing business in a work team environment. Employees will change their behavior when they see strong signals in the form of positive feedback and rewards for employees who are cooperating and collaborating effectively.

Work team experience and research in the field suggest that there are three interrelated areas to watch in determining work performance measures:

- Customer Feedback--How does the customer evaluate the products and services that the work team has provided?

- The viability of the work team--Is the team still working together and performing well, or have recent interactions led to distrust or avoidance of working together?

- Cross-training--Are the members getting appropriate cross-training and developing the skills and abilities that they need to work collaboratively?

You are doing well if there is progress in each of these three areas.

EPA Experience

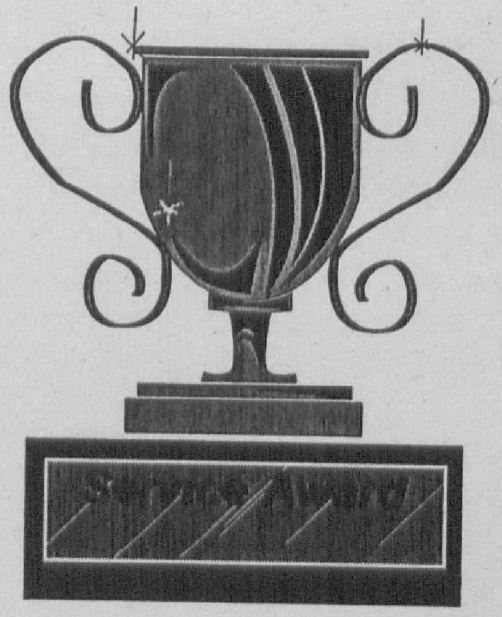
A work team at ***Headquarters*** recently developed a performance appraisal process with these three components:

- customer feedback,
- the team's assessment of its own performance, and
- feedback to team members from the supervisor (not a team member) about the skills they are developing.

At two recent consulting sessions with work teams ***in two different AAships***, the question was asked, "How do we handle a team member who isn't contributing enough?" The teams were advised to begin by telling the team member that they were disappointed with this person's performance and by explaining why. In one case, the team member was very concerned and opted to work with the Branch Chief to achieve a common understanding of what was expected. The team member's contribution has improved dramatically.

Another ***Headquarters*** work team-based organization is using a team evaluation instrument as input to each team member's performance appraisal.

Region 3 adjusted its award system by delegating an independent award budget to the team to be used for recognition throughout the year. The team also developed a performance standard on how well a team member interacts with others, carries out other members' functions, and is flexible. So far, the jury is still out--only two small cash awards have been awarded by the team.



Readings

Allan M. Mohrman, Jr., Susan M. Resnick-West, & Edward E. Lawler III. Designing Performance Appraisal Systems. San Francisco, CA.: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1989.

Paul A. Goodman and Associates. Designing Effective Work Groups. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Publishers, 1986.

Glen H. Varney. Building Productive Teams. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Publishers, 1989.

Issue 8:

What kinds of resources will be required to set up work teams?

Work team implementation plans require an analysis and alignment of the organization's resources. Teams are more likely to be productive for the organization if:

- small team meeting rooms are made available with electronic recording flipcharts that produce page-sized copies of notes
- all team members are on, or can attach to, the same local area network
- capable, committed employees are assigned to each team
- significant funds are set aside for regular training, and arrangements are made so that members do attend scheduled training
- management invests in coaching and mentoring of team members and works with the team as a group to develop its effectiveness

EPA Experience

OHROS in Headquarters recently conducted a series of "Future Search" conferences. The purpose of OHROS' future search was to gather data for its upcoming reorganization.

The reorganization was based on an assessment of OHROS' purpose, work processes, customer needs, and employee skills.

OHROS included many nonmanagerial employees and customers in the planning conference. There were two three-day sessions, followed by a two-day session to integrate information gathered and draft the new organizational structure. The Future Search reviewed the organization's past and present and identified "common futures," or aspects of the organization that all participants agreed would be desirable.

Two of many interesting issues were:

- How much input will customers have about work performance and outcomes?

- Will customers be willing to participate in partial funding of services and products, since customer needs may be so different that internal resources may not be available to meet them all?

This investment in the gathering of detailed information through the future search process will be of value as OHROS progresses to work teams.

Readings

John H. Zenger and Associates. Leading Teams: Mastering The New Role. Homewood, Illinois: Business One Irwin, 1994.

Jack D. Orsburn, Linda Moran, Ed Musselwhite, John H. Zenger, and Craig Perrin. Self-Directed Work Teams. Homewood, Illinois: Business One Irwin, 1990.

J. Richard Hackman and G. R. Oldham. Work Redesign. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1989.

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EPA Work Team Consultants

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