

# FIVE STEPS TO IMPROVED TEAM PERFORMANCE

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## IMPROVING TEAM PERFORMANCE

In today's business world of collaborative management and inclusive employee involvement, leaders have at their disposal a powerful tool to aid in solving problems and improving operations. Cross-functional work teams bring employees together to address problems/issues and set the groundwork for implementing team results.

While work teams are a well-known problem-solving method, too often, sincere efforts at organizing these programs lead to meetings full of arguments and time-wasters. Below are five steps leaders can take to improve their team's performance. Effectively applying these steps increases the chances a team will both generate greater benefits and produce higher quality team solutions.



*Ensure, the composition of the team, is appropriate*

Make sure team composition is appropriate to the issue under study. Members should be cross-functional (from different business functions), represent multiple organizational levels (high to low), and possess a variety of skills. Individuals should be either directly affected by or have specialized expertise in solving the problem under discussion. A team with this composition can provide excellent insight into a problem. Once a solution is developed, it is important that team members have sufficient authority to assist with 'selling' and implementing



*Define the team's problem-solving process and ensure it is understood by all team members*

The process for conducting team meetings is critical to the success of the team efforts. Establish firm start and end times and set a clear agenda well in advance of the meeting date. The tone of the meetings must be positive, without negativism, and should be conducive to idea generation and problem-solving. Also, the team lead should continuously work to head off criticisms, promote trust, and develop 'win-win' solutions.

Idea generation should be free flowing. Whether an idea is considered to be 'good' or 'bad,' it should be included in the list for further discussions. Postpone the review and analysis of ideas until the team is ready to develop solutions. Waiting to evaluate suggestions promotes a maximum number of ideas and encourages members to 'build' on the ideas of others.



*Headline the problem, make the problem visual, and generate ideas*

First, develop a clear and precise statement of the problem. Vague problem statements result in unclear and misdirected discussions. A poorly stated problem definition, in turn, results in the team failing to reach helpful solutions. Increase clarity by developing data or graphics that illustrate and explain the issue.

Once you are sure the team is fully on board, work can begin on generating ideas for solutions. Be sure no single member dominates the discussion and discourage negative comments. Call upon all team members to offer ideas and suggestions. No idea, however, should be evaluated at this point. Instead, encourage members to build or expand on the ideas presented.



*Organize the ideas, prioritize and select the best, then get buy-in*

At some point, the team will cease to develop new ideas. When this becomes clear, prioritize the suggestions that have been gathered. Those ideas with the greatest benefits will rise to the top. Other considerations will be cost to implement, required timeframe, and resource requirements. Discuss all ideas and add any new ideas to the list.

Consider the impact of each idea. Typically ideas with the biggest impact will rise to the top. From this list, the team should select one solution to implement.

Frame the selected idea in concise, clear language with benefits and costs as a backup. At this point, all team members should agree on the solution to the problem. While this is not always possible, total buy-in should be the goal.



*Set an action plan and lay out next steps*

Next develop an action plan. Include the required tasks, responsibilities, time frames, and deliverables. Outline resource requirements and, if necessary, schedule presentations to upper management. It is also important to develop methods of measuring the impact of the implemented solution.

As soon as approval is secured, the installation of the solution should begin. The team is responsible for ensuring the plan stays on schedule. The team should begin measuring the solution's effect, and, should things go off target, adjustments should be made.



Cross-functional work teams can be an important element in the success of any business or organization. Often companies maintain work teams as part of a continuous improvement program. Using the above steps will help ensure your teams have a positive and significant impact on your bottom line.

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