



## Five Issues to Be Considered in Teambuilding

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A group is “a collection of people who come together because they share something in common.” (Solomon, Davidson, and Solomon, 1993). What they share could be as insignificant as desire to get on the next bus that will arrive at a particular stop. A team, however, is “a group of people who share a common name, mission, history, set of goals or objectives and expectations.” A strategy that can help *groups* develop into real teams is teambuilding, “the process needed to create, maintain, and enrich the development of a group of people into a cohesive unit.” Teambuilding exercises are very important in the development of teams that will work together for an extended period of time on a complex project or a series of activities. Teambuilding is not a silver bullet for fixing dysfunctional teams, or assuring that all of your teams will work well. *But*, teambuilding exercises can be helpful in developing effective teams, if they are selected to enable teams to explore the five critical issues identified in this outline.

### Cohesiveness

This term refers to the attractiveness of group membership. Groups are cohesive to the extent that membership in them is positively valued, and members are drawn toward the group. In task oriented (e.g., learning or project) groups, the concept can be differentiated into two subconcepts: social cohesiveness and task cohesiveness. Social cohesiveness refers to the bonds of interpersonal attraction that link group members. Task cohesiveness refers to the way in which skills and abilities of the group members mesh to allow optimal performance.

*Team building exercises that have a component of fun or play are useful in allowing social cohesiveness to develop. Examples include: designing a team logo, sharing information about first jobs, or participating in activities to discover characteristics that team members have in common. To develop task cohesiveness, activities that allow the group members to assess one another's talents, strengths and weaknesses are useful.*

### Roles and Norms

All groups develop a set of roles and norms over time, whether or not these are explicitly discussed. Norms are the rules governing the behavior of group members. The use of explicitly defined roles enables the group to cope effectively with the requirements of the task. The roles and norms that govern cooperative learning groups are often imposed by the instructor, but that does not preclude a teambuilding exercise in which those roles and norms, as well as some that are specific to a group, are discussed and accepted.

*An example of a teambuilder which would help teammates to develop effective norms would be to ask them to develop team groundrules or a “Code of Cooperation.” A teambuilder which would help teammates use roles effectively might ask them to select the roles which are most needed to accomplish the task at hand and to assign those roles to team members.*

## **Communication**

Effective interpersonal communication is vital to the smooth functioning of any task group. Norms will develop governing communication - do those norms encourage everyone to participate, or do they allow one or two dominant members to claim all the "air time?" Team building exercises can focus on skill development, communication network design, and norms, but even when the exercise is focused on another issue, communication is happening. Watch it! Shape it!

*There are many ways of facilitating the learning of effective communication skills. Active listening exercises, practice in giving and receiving feedback, and practice in checking for comprehension of verbal messages are all aimed at developing skills.*

## **Goal Specification**

It is very important for group members to have common goals for group achievement, as well as to communicate clearly about individual goals they may have. Some teambuilding sessions consist entirely of goal clarification exercises. The process of clarifying goals may well engage all of the issues on this list. Indeed, shared goals is one of the definitional properties of the concept "team".

*A simple, but useful, team building task is to assign a newly formed group the task of producing a mission and goals statement.*

## **Interdependence**

This is the issue of how each team member's success is determined, at least in part, by the success of the other members. The structure of the cooperative learning task should be such that it requires positive interdependence: students in a team should "sink or swim" together. Functioning independently of other group members or competing with them should lead to poor performance for the entire group. Both cooperative learning tasks and teambuilding tasks should have such a structure.

*An example of a teambuilding exercise designed so that the team becomes aware of, and experiences their interdependence is "Desert Survival." In this exercise, teammates individually rank the importance of items they will need to survive after a plane crash in the desert. The team then comes to consensus on the rankings of the items. Team rankings, almost invariably, are more accurate than most individuals' rankings.*

## **References**

Solomon, Richard, Davidson, Neil, & Solomon, Elaine (1993). *The handbook for the fourth r: Relationship activities for cooperative and collegial learning*. Columbia, MD: National Institute for Relationship Training.

Some of the ideas in this article were adapted the work of University Associates (now Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer <http://www.pfeiffer.com/>) by Darwyn Linder. He and Susan Ledlow further refined it for use in cooperative learning workshops they offer on the ASU campus.