



# Create the Conditions to ENSURE Team Success

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**M**uch writing on leadership focuses on the capabilities and behaviours of effective leaders of large divisions or enterprises. We read about such important characteristics as transparency, vision, authenticity, and optimism, and such behaviours as setting big, hairy, audacious goals. These are no doubt critical, but many firms have been increasingly relying on teams to help solve business problems and drive results, and leaders of these teams need additional skills. Teams are not a new phenomenon; however, based on my experience working for several Fortune 500 companies, I've discovered what's different about many teams today:

- Teams are led by individuals who have no formal authority over them. Team members do not report to the leader nor are some of them even in the same business unit or

division as the leader. In one organization where senior management was seeking to redesign and rationalize its staff functions globally, the majority of team members came from the line.

- Team members are increasingly diverse — demographically, functionally, and geographically. In their efforts to capture the best thinking globally, organizations are turning to their talented employees worldwide to participate in these teams. In many global teams I've led, members have come from different regions of the world and represent different levels of the organization. It was not uncommon, for example, to have a high-potential junior team member from Germany in the same team as a vice-president of a corporate staff group.

- The emergence of new networking technologies has made virtual team meetings, at least in theory, easier to manage.

All these create different challenges for team leaders. Because the team leader has no “legitimate power”, they must rely on other sources of influence to motivate and engage the team. Occasionally, the goals of the team may be in conflict with the agendas of team members. For example, team members from line organizations may see the centralization or consolidation of such staff functions as finance, procurement, and human resources as an attempt to reduce their control of resources and their ability to influence these functions. In a team I led whose members were from an organization that had just been acquired by the parent company, the goal was to accelerate the integration of the two companies, but many team members initially perceived that the parent company was imposing its practices and management approach onto the acquired company.

Another challenge arises from the level of commitment of the team members. While it is motivating for a team member in, say Latin America, to be invited to participate in a global team that might have significant impact on business results, that member has a regular job and may have day-to-day pressures that will drive out any good intentions to contribute to the team. More importantly, individual team members' bonuses may be based on achieving business results for their area of responsibility versus contributing to the team's success.

Finally, while some new technologies are elegant, they can also reduce the opportunities for social bonding and make it more difficult to establish trust among team members. With audio conferences, for example, it is difficult to make sure that everyone is equally engaged and paying full attention to the conversation. Even with video conferencing, it can be difficult to replicate the give-and-take that takes place in a face-to-face meeting.

Team leaders, therefore, need to ensure that they implement these four focused strategic actions:

## 1. *Create the conditions to ensure team success, especially around sponsorship, resources, and rewards*

Are the members, and especially you the leader, clear on who is sponsoring the project? Are you clear on what the expectations of the sponsor of the project are? Do you have the right resources for the team to succeed? Have you secured sufficient IT support to ensure you can use the technologies available and the appropriate training for your team? Have you worked with the team members' managers and negotiated with them on time commitments, as well as how to recognize members for their contribution to the team? Have you worked with HR to design rewards to ensure it is worthwhile for members to be in the team?

## 2. *Engage and excite the team with a shared vision*

This does not have to be some lofty abstract ideal but must be something that challenges and inspires, that taps into a business

issue members all agree is important for the organization to address, and that may lead to some breakthroughs. How can you link the business impact of your project to the organization's success? How can you engage the team so members become committed to participating in the team and doing the work?

## 3. *Leverage new technologies, but consider face-to-face meetings always best*

Have you given enough time for members to try out and become comfortable with the new technologies? Have you built into your budget expenses for face-to-face meetings and laid out a plan on how often these meetings should be held? In one team I was involved with, we worked closely with IT to make sure that virtual members, many of whom were in different countries, had the infrastructure in their locations enable them to participate effectively long distance.

## 4. *Work on one-on-one relationships and team processes*

Pay close attention to the cues on whether members are becoming less engaged. Spend time with individual members to get to know them and understand their concerns and motivations. Also pay close attention to the way the team is functioning. If conflicts emerge, determine the best way to resolve them and act swiftly. Daniel Goleman and Richard Boyatzis, in writing about "socially intelligent" leaders, tell us it is essential that team leaders have social intelligence, and senior managers selecting team leaders would do well to use this as an important criterion.

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Team leaders are the cornerstone of today's organizations. Being a team leader is a challenging assignment, but it also carries great rewards, not only from a professional standpoint but also because it can personally be very fulfilling.

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