

## What Is The Definition Of A Team?

There's been a big push in the last few years to move organizations to a more participative team-based culture. Some businesses have attempted to use a team model with limited success. Others have been very successful. Many organizations saw teams as the answer to meet the demands of time to market, quality, and service. In reality, it's difficult to change an organization's culture. Period.

It takes planning, nurturing and support. If your organization has determined that teams are the right way to go, it's important to have a common "definition" of what constitutes a team. My favorite is from *The Wisdom Of Teams*, Katzenbach and Smith (1993).

"A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable."

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What is a small number of people?

Somewhere between two and 25. A team size of 8 to 12 is optimal. Why is this important? What impact does the team size have on its results? Teams meet more to accomplish their work. It's more difficult to get a large group together. Another key factor is decision making. If all members have to be involved in a decision, it will take longer with more members.

What are complementary skills?

These include technical, functional, problem solving, decision-making and interpersonal skills to name a few. In the past, all your business needed to be successful was to have some people with technical or functional skills and others with key interpersonal skills. Not so anymore. Businesses are recognizing that it's important to have people with a mix of talent. Strategic skills can take a team a long way in relationship building and customer satisfaction. And, communication is a primary key to team success.

Why is it important for a team to have a common purpose, performance goals and approach?

If they don't, you'll have chaos. Each member of a team has his/her own perception of what the team is about and each person is different. Without a common purpose, each individual works toward his or her own goal. The team, as a unit, should have a defined purpose that is focused on your business mission. The team should know why they exist to help accomplish that mission.

Additionally, each team should have goals and objectives to accomplish the team purpose and the goals should link directly to the departmental and company objectives. Management and business partner "buy-in" should be attained up front and revisited throughout the life cycle of the team as business needs change.

The team's approach includes operating guidelines, rules and commitments such as how they will communicate, how decisions will be made, when they meet and what the meeting format and guidelines will be. These are working agreements, which help eliminate confusion and foster cooperation.

Mutual accountability? So what is that?

It means each person takes accountability and responsibility for his/her actions within the team. It's important that both team and functional roles and responsibilities are defined within the team. It's also critical that team processes are defined to ensure that each team member can assist in making the others successful. If team members aren't clear on who does what, how can they be responsible and accountable?

When mutual accountability is practiced within a team, there is high commitment and trust among the team members. Team members take ownership of their work products. Mutual accountability and ownership lead to empowerment and enable higher levels of productivity, quality and achievement of goals. In our work with groups, the six components of the definition of a team validate themselves over and over again. When a team is experiencing an internal breakdown, the problem is usually focused in one of these six areas. When a team is successful, each area has been fully addressed and is being fulfilled by team members.

Remember, teams aren't something you can become. They're a way of existing together. Having a common idea of "what that looks like," can go a long way in helping your organization be successful.

Denise O'Berry answers your team building questions at [www.askteamdoc.com](http://www.askteamdoc.com)

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