MANAGING FOR EXCELLENCE & DEVELOPING GEN Y FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAM BUILDING

Anjana Srivastava [1]
Dr. Kirti Agarwal [2]

Abstract

Well-integrated, high-performing teams never lose sight of their goals and are largely self-sustaining. The team seem to take on a life of their own and it all comes down team leadership. The marketplace is changing, leading to fundamental shifts in the way companies compete now and into the future. Imparting a clear vision to Gen Y where they as a team should be headed, and inspiring its members to make it a reality, is fundamental to team success. In case of Gen Y it becomes more important to manage their ambitions and channelize their energies towards a meaningful goals and managing team building. Managers should operate in an organized and systematic way to build successful teams, and this does not only includes and involves what managers should say and do, but also what they should not say and do. It also involves working backwards—Managers should envisage the future before dealing with the present. Managers create a clear vision and describe it in simple language, take the time to get people to subscribe, or buy in, to that vision. Next, they assess the current situation, then work through the courses of action which are likely to yield results. It is the up-front work in getting to a clear end state that makes the process work. This foundation-laying aspect of Gen Y leadership is a determining factor in why some teams seem to grasp and then do their utmost to achieve organizational goals. It's all about how the manager continually visualizes a positive end result. So, when things get tough for the team (as they always do), these extraordinary Managers reintroduce the big picture.

Keywords. Gen Y, Developing Gen Y, Team Building, Managing Excellence.

Introduction

An important leadership competency for any size organization, the ability to build and lead high performing teams is especially critical in small-to-midsize businesses. Here, people must work closely together, wear many hats and work effectively across the organization to get tasks accomplished quickly enough to remain competitive.

Success in today's work world is more about team than individual performance. A team is more than just a group of workers, located together, doing their jobs. Real teams are interdependent. That means they must rely on one another to get the job done.

In order to understand the competencies needed to build and lead high performance teams, it is helpful to first define a team. Here is a simple but effective description from The Wisdom of Teams (Harvard Business School Press, 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."

Using this definition, we can outline three important competencies for the effective team builder and leader.

- Promoting understanding of why a group of people need to be a team. The team needs to understand its shared goals and what each team member brings to the team that is relevant and crucial to its overall successes.

- Ensuring the team has adequate knowledge to accomplish its task. This includes information relevant to the team's goals and individual job competencies.

- Facilitating effective interaction in such as way as to ensure good problem solving, decision making and coordination of effort.

Well-integrated, high-performing teams never lose sight of their goals and are largely self-sustaining. In fact, they seem to take on a life of their own and it all comes down to leadership. Teams always have a leader who creates the environment and establishes the operating principles and values that are conducive to high performance. The evidence for this is clearly seen in organizations where a leader who creates high performance moves to another part of the organization, or a different organization, and within some months they once again establish a high-performing team. These leaders operate in an organized, systematic way to build successful teams, and that the formula not only involves what leaders should

say and do, but also what they should not say and do. It also involves working backwards—leaders should envisage the future before dealing with the present. The four most significant behaviors consistently demonstrated by high-impact leaders are

a. defining clear goals, keeping in view overall organizational goals
b. creating action plan to achieve those goals
c. using effective communication to build trust, encourage forward thinking and create energy within the team
d. getting the right people

Imparting a clear vision of where the team should be headed, and inspiring its members to make it a reality, is fundamental to team success, considering Gen Yers it is fundamental because of the fact of very character of Gen Y. What high-impact leaders do especially with Gen Yers is to create a clear vision and describe it in simple language. They take the time to get Gen Y to subscribe, or buy in, to that vision and they work through the courses of action which are likely to yield results. It is the up-front work in getting Gen Yers to a clear end state that makes the process work. This foundation-laying aspect of leadership is a determining factor in why some teams seem to grasp and then do their utmost to achieve organizational goals. It's all about how the leader continually visualizes a positive end result. This foundation-laying aspect of leadership is a determining factor in why some Gen Y teams seem to grasp and then do their utmost to achieve organizational goals. It's all about how the manager continually visualizes a positive end result. So, when things get tough for the team (as they always do), these extraordinary Managers reintroduce the big picture.

Extraordinary leaders employ distinctive forms of verbal communication. It is what these leaders say and what they don't say that gives them an advantage in getting Gen Y teams to high performance levels. These leaders truly

mean what they say. They don't mix their messages, fudge meanings or use ambiguous words. Their conversations are always candid, clear, and followed by committed action. Using effective communication they make blueprints come alive and create positive attitudes and energy on the part of Gen Y team members. They also encourage mutual understanding between team members and the leader. An Effective Communication to Gen Yers typically progresses in four stages.

STAGE 1: High-impact leaders spend more time needed on forming a clear vision which makes possible its completeness, undisputed acceptance of its attainability to Gen Y team.

STAGE 2: This entails a very candid and clear discussion of what Gen Y team are thinking and feeling. The high-impact leader makes sure that every team member's agenda is heard and explored while ensuring that the conversation remains relevant to the big picture. Once this is done, the high-impact leader assesses the agenda.

STAGE 3: The high-impact leader now skillfully discusses with Gen Y team members the issues enmeshed in their proposed agenda. Leader can deepen his or her understanding of the team's goals and bring to the surface any hidden agendas. The high-impact leader describes scenarios linking future outcomes with the current situation, then proceeds to refine them. He or she continues to keep the process focused on the target future state, and helps the team to see how far it has moved and what progress it has made.

STAGE 4: The leader makes sure participants know exactly what steps need to be taken next, and that they are open about what they will do to turn their commitments into reality. The closing of a powerful conversation is also the time when a leader makes sure there is absolute buy-in, or belief in what the team is setting out to do, that team members' commitments are clear and accepted, that all action steps are well-defined and understood. In this

way, the high-impact leader ensures that the powerful conversation will produce results.

These are the four most significant behaviors consistently demonstrated by high-impact leaders. But these are not the only such behaviors what leaders should do to get Gen Y team to work together to attain organizational goals.

Characteristics of High-Performance Teams

To better understand how these competencies create effective teams, let's examine some characteristics of highly effective teams.

An effective team understands the big picture. In an effective team, each team member understands the context of the team's work to the greatest degree possible. That includes understanding the relevance of his or her job and how it impacts the effectiveness of others and the overall team effort. Too often, people are asked to work on part of a task without being told how their role contributes to the desired end result, much less how their efforts are impacting the ability of others to do their work. Understanding the big picture promotes collaboration, increases commitment and improves quality.

An effective team has common goals. Effective teams have agreed-upon goals that are simple, measurable and clearly relevant to the team's task. Each goal includes key measurable metrics (that are available to everyone on the team), which can be used to determine the team effectiveness and improvement. Understanding and working toward these common goals as a unit is crucial to the team's effectiveness.

An effective team works collaboratively, as a unit. In an effective team you'll notice a penchant for collaboration and a keen awareness of interdependency. Collaboration and a solid sense of interdependency in a team will defuse blaming behavior and stimulate opportunities for learning and improvement. Without this sense of

interdependency in responsibility and reward, blaming behaviors can occur which will quickly erode team effectiveness.

The accompanying model shows the six characteristics in abbreviated form.

- Common Purpose
- Clear Roles
- Accepted Leadership
- Effective processes
- Solid relationships
- Excellent communication

Common Purpose.

The single most important ingredient in team success is a clear, common, and compelling purpose. Too often, a team's purpose is ill-defined, uninspiring, or foggy, leaving the team to figure out what success is supposed to look like. Teams are merely a means to an end — a method of achieving desired outcomes that are too big to reach through individual efforts; they are not the end itself. And it is team purpose that provides the reason for collaboration. A clear, compelling purpose gives reason for people to commit to a team. A common purpose not only calls the team together, it also holds the team together during the inevitable turbulence that will be experienced on the journey.

The power of a team flows from the alignment of each member to the purpose. Creating this alignment is one of the most important roles of leadership. Misaligned teams are often a clear indicator of poorly led teams. There are five key criteria essential for team alignment:

- Clear: I see it. The benefits of team effort are understood by everyone.
- Relevant: I want it. Team purpose and goals align to individual goals and interests.
- Significant: It's worth it. Team objectives are of sufficient

magnitude to make the work worth the effort.
- Achievable: I believe it. Everyone believes the team purpose is realistic and attainable.
- Urgent: I want it … now! A sense of timeliness drives behavior.

The above is straightforward. However, aligning to a common purpose is harder than it looks. A common mistake is to launch the team too quickly and push them into implementation before members have had the opportunity to coalesce around a purpose and ensure that everyone is aligned to it. In short: No team purpose, no team.

Clear Roles.

How we apportion the team purpose will in large measure determine the team synergy. High-performing teams leverage individuals' different roles against the collective work products. Therefore, it is essential that every team member is clear about his or her own role as well as the role of every other team member. Roles are about the design, division, and deployment of the work of the team. While the concept is compellingly logical, many teams find it challenging to implement. There is often a tendency to take role definition to extremes or not to take it far enough.

If the team purpose is the reason for cooperation, then the development and division of clear roles is a team's strategy for cooperation. When teams divide the labour, they introduce a side effect called interdependence. If the team is to reap the rewards of interdependence, its members must collaborate. Collaboration is a choice, and despite the obvious logic of collaborating, many teams experience interdependent people acting independently.

An activity that team leaders often avoid or fail at is facilitating the discussion about roles, especially the issues of role clarity.

Achieving role clarity is accomplished through discussion - lots of it.

Accepted Leadership.

High-performance teams need competent leadership. When such leadership is lacking, groups can quickly lose their way. Whereas a common, compelling task might be the biggest contributor to team effectiveness, inadequate team leadership is often the single biggest reason for team ineffectiveness.

In most organizational settings, it is the leader who frames the team purpose and facilitates discussions on its meaning and nature. The vision, commitment, and communication of the leader govern the optics through which individual team members see the team purpose and become aligned to it.

Because collaboration is a choice held by each team member, leaders must be capable of calling out the initiative and creativity that motivate exceptional work both by individuals and through collective performance. Leaders who must rely on positional authority and autocratic style to achieve desired outcomes seldom see the levels of team performance shown to leaders who act in service and support to the team.

There are five key qualities that make up the mind-set of effective team leaders:

- They appreciate the collective intelligence of the team.
- They believe in the power of diversity among team members.
- They see team leadership as a role by which to serve the team, not a position to be served.
- They see power as something to be released and shared rather than something to hold and control.
- They understand that teams are for achieving a team purpose.

Because collaboration is a choice, it is important that the team accepts its leader. Leadership acceptance, like so many dimensions of teaming, is not an on-off concept but rather a matter of degree. Team members can strongly support and accept the leader, accept the

leader with reservations, or reject the leader.

In every respect, team leadership may be the most challenging of all leadership roles.

Effective Processes.

Teams and processes go together. It would never occur to a surgical team, construction crew, string quartet, or film crew to approach tasks without clearly defined processes. The playbook of a football team or the score sheet of a string quartet clearly outlines the necessary processes. Business teams have processes as well, which might include solving problems, making decisions, managing a meeting, or designing a product.

Hopefully, for every process, each team member has a clear, specific role based on function, skills, and expertise. In many business settings, however, processes are inadequate, ill-defined, or missing entirely. High-performance teams identify, map, and then master their key team and business processes. They constantly evaluate the effectiveness of key processes, asking, How are we doing? What are we learning? How can we do it better?

Organizations that leverage cross-functional project teams have learned that new team skills and well defined processes go hand in hand. Simply, there are two primary kinds of processes — working and thinking. Teaming efforts tend to focus primarily on implementation or work processes at the expense of thinking processes. Thinking processes are essential to high-performance teams. Yet teams often ignore thinking processes for expediency. Organizations that have built successful teams and a collaborative culture have made an investment to train teams in thinking processes that facilitate problem solving. In effect, these organizations have recognized the importance of addressing thinking processes with the same degree of deliberateness invested in working processes.

Solid Relationships.

One of the biggest misperceptions in the world of teams and teamwork is the belief that to work and communicate effectively, team members must be friends. In fact, the diversity of skills, experience, and knowledge needed to divide tasks effectively almost precludes high levels of friendship, which is most often based on commonality — of the way people think, their interests, or beliefs.

Speaking of diversity, we find that the more differences that exist on a team, the smarter it can be. A team whose members look at the world through the different lenses of function, gender, ethnicity, personality, experience, and perspective has a decided advantage over a more homogenous group. The diverse group will be able to surround problems, decisions, and other issues with a brighter collective intelligence. They will see more creative solutions if they can channel their differences into synergy rather than strife.

Solid team relationships provide the climate needed for high levels of collaboration and are characterized by trust, acceptance, respect, understanding, and courtesy. Trust is clearly the non-negotiable element of interdependent relationships. Team leaders cannot mandate trust, they can only attempt to create an environment and opportunities that will facilitate its development among team members. People will not be interdependent with people they do not trust; therefore, without trust, high levels of collaboration cannot be achieved.

Excellent Communication.

Communication is the very means of cooperation. One of the primary motives of companies choosing to implement teams is that team-based organizations are more responsive and move faster. A team cannot move faster than it communicates. Fast, clear, timely, accurate communication is a hallmark of high levels of team performance. High-performance teams have mastered the

art of straight talk; there is little motion wasted through misunderstanding or confusion. The team understands that effective communication is essential, and as a result, they approach communication with a determined intentionality. They talk about it a lot and put effort into keeping excellent team communication.

You will notice that the team model now circles back to common purpose, the first characteristic of a high-performance team. The connection is intentional, for a team cannot maintain unity of purpose without exceptionally good communication among team members. Once a team loses its ability to communicate well and thereby understand one another, it quickly loses its sense of purpose. Confused communication and unity of purpose cannot coexist.

When it comes to building high-performance teams, these six characteristics are the essential few. If a team gets these things right, it will raise the probability of success and therefore achieve its desired outcomes.

The Roles of the Effective Team Leader

In order to encourage this level of collaboration and interdependency, the team leader must provide the necessary support and structure for the team, starting with putting together the right people. Team members should be selected and their tasks assigned with their natural skills in mind. Not every person is capable of doing every job.

The team must also have the resources and training required to develop the skills needed to do their jobs. This includes cross-training. Cross-training gives team members a greater awareness of how their jobs are interdependent, increasing the team's flexibility and improving response time.

The quality of the team's response is highly dependent on the timeliness of the feedback received from the team's leader, other team members and customers. Receiving timely feedback is

crucial to the effectiveness of the team. The effective team leader ensures that feedback reaches the entire team on its goals and metrics, as well as feedback to each individual team member. This feedback must be received in time to make adjustments and corrections.

Feedback is a form of constructive communication, another necessary tool in the effective team leader's tool chest. Timely and appropriately delivered feedback can make the difference between a team that hides mistakes and a team that sees mistakes as opportunities.

When a team views mistakes as opportunities for improving the team's process and results, it's a sign that the team leader has successfully created an environment that promotes problem-solving.

Creating an environment that promotes problem-solving is part of creating an effective team structure. Poor team structure can actually create negative, ineffective behaviors in individuals and impede communication. The responsibility for poor performance is usually a function of the team structure rather than individual incompetence; yet, it is individuals who are sent to human resources or training programs for fixing. If team members feel like they are pitted against one another to compete for rewards and recognition, they will withhold information that might be useful to the greater team. When a team has problems, the effective team leader will focus on the team's structure before focusing on individuals.

Creating and sustaining a culture of high performance.

1. People need to feel safe in the workplace.

Gen Yers need to know that they're physically safe. But they also need to know that they are emotionally and psychologically safe

A winning culture must include an environment where team knows that they will not be attacked emotionally,

and they need to know that they can openly and safely share ideas.

2. People need to feel that they belong to something that matters.

As humans, all naturally seek out something bigger than ourselves to belong to. Leaders can help fulfill this deep, human need by creating a workplace where Gen Yers are inspired by the work they do, and can see how their work is tied to the big picture.

Knowing how important this sense of belongingness is, when taking on new team members, leaders should also pay close attention to whether or not a person would be a good fit for organizational culture. If a person doesn't feel that they fit in, they could quickly become disengaged.

3. People need to be appreciated frequently and authentically.

People need to be appreciated for the tasks they accomplish, for their ability to display emotional mastery, and for their ideas.

Leaders of the most successful teams create a culture of catching people doing well in all three of these areas and they make it a point to offer some type of specific, genuine praise.

4. Appreciation needs to be combined with accountability.

Talented people don't want to be on a mediocre team. Appreciation is vital for creating a culture of excellence, but so is accountability.

Every member on a team needs to have clear expectations set forth and know who is accountable for what. Winning teams create a sense of mutual accountability, and have systems in place to regularly measure progress towards goals and determine what the team can do to ensure goals are met.

5. Goals need to binary.

Ambiguity will result in mediocrity. High performing teams set very

specific, binary goals. A binary goal is either achieved, or it isn't. There is no ambiguity or subjectivity. In addition to making expectations more clear, binary goals also reduce personal conflicts.

6. Create more "A" players.

All Gen Y employees need to be coached and mentored. But is there one group of employees that should receive a little more attention?

High-performance Teams: Understanding Gen Y Team Cohesiveness

Teams are the basic structure of how projects, activities and tasks are being organized and managed within companies worldwide. Global organizations striving for competitive advantage are increasingly incorporating the use of high-performance teams to deploy complex business strategies.

Work done in teams provides many advantages and benefits. The major advantages are the diversity of knowledge, ideas and tools contributed by team members, and the camaraderie among members. A characteristic commonly seen in high-performance teams is cohesiveness, a measure of the attraction of the group to its members (and the resistance to leaving it). Those in highly cohesive teams will be more cooperative and effective in achieving the goals they set for themselves. Lack of cohesion within a team working environment is certain to affect team performance due to unnecessary stress and tension among coworkers. Therefore, cohesion in the work place could, in the long run, signify the rise or demise of the success of a company.

Stages of Team Development

Gen Y Team development takes time and frequently follows recognizable stages as the team journeys from being a group of strangers to becoming a united team with a common goal. According to researcher Bruce Tuckman, in both group dynamics and the four stages of team development he popularized (forming, storming, norming,

performing), leaders must retain the motivation of team members in order to successfully overcome the challenges of the storming and norming stages (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Stages of Team Development
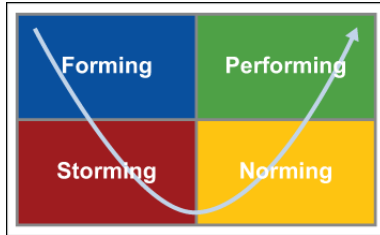
The forming stage represents the beginning, the honeymoon period; great expectations are shared from all team members. Relationships are developed, purpose is clear and ground rules are established. The storming stage is triggered once team members start jostling for position, stumbling from confusion, having arguments about leadership, strategy and goals. This is when team leadership becomes imperative. The leader must succeed at keeping the team motivated, addressing all concerns and clarifying purpose and goals. Once the storming stage is overcome the team is ready to establish open communications, stable positions and norms – the norming phase. Trust is finally gained, and "when the trust account is high, communication is easy, instant, and effective. These are the first steps towards cohesiveness. Once cohesiveness is achieved, teams will move from norming to performing and subsequently to highly performing.

Best practices for effective Gen Y teams

1. Define and Create Interdependencies. There is a need to define and structure Gen Y team members' roles.
2. Establish Goals. Gen Y teams need to be focused on shared goals and outcomes. Commitment to that goal is essential for success. Ideally, team goals should allow both the team as a unit and the individual members to achieve both personal and group goals.

3. Determine How Teams Will Make Decisions. Whether the leader makes the decision, or it is a democratic or consensus process, the Gen Y team needs to understand beforehand how decisions will be made. This reduces conflict within the team when a decision or choice has to be made.
4. Provide Clear and Constant Feedback. Gen Y teams need to know how they are doing in order to stay motivated and to correct performance problems or inefficiencies. Ideally, a system should be in place so that team members receive ongoing feedback while doing their jobs.
5. Keep Team Membership Stable. Particularly in complex tasks, it takes a lot of time for Gen Y team members to learn to work together at an optimum level.
6. Allow Team Members to Challenge the Status Quo. If innovation is important, it is critical that Gen Y team members feel secure in being able to challenge processes if they feel that there is a way to improve. In order to innovate, teams need to be open to considering and constructively criticizing existing practices when needed.
7. Learn How to Identify and Attract Talent. Just as processes sometimes need improvement, teams can get better by attracting new talent. Organizations that put a lot of resources into identifying and recruiting talent simply do better.
8. Use Team-Based Reward Systems. Too much emphasis on individual rewards can lead to in-fighting and resentment. For Gen Y teams a combination of individual and team-based rewards is often best.
9. Create a Learning Environment. Emphasize the development of the Gen Y team, learning through successes, but particularly through mistakes. A team with a culture of continuous improvement and where members are motivated to develop their skills and knowledge are high-performing teams.

10. Focus on the Collective Mission. Mission-driven teams and organizations perform better because they see beyond their individual workload and tasks and feel as if they are working for a higher purpose. It is imperative that Gen Y team members be committed to the shared mission, or they should be replaced.

These rules apply whether Gen Y teams have a formal, appointed leader, or whether they are self-governing. The key is to put in the time and energy needed to adhere to these best practices.

Conclusion

Gen Y willingness to participate collaboratively as a team member does not guarantee the desired outcome. Gen Yers thrown into a collaborative situation, especially those without experience operating in this mode, need assistance to guarantee success. Leaders who are skeptical of team participation to begin with often throw Gen Yers into an unplanned, unstructured decision-making process, responding with "I told you so" as they watch their team flounder. By contrast, leaders who focus on promoting good understanding, ensuring adequate knowledge and facilitating effective interaction, will watch the transformation of their job from one that required constant supervision, fire-fighting, and oversight, to one that allows the leader to focus on serving the needs of the team and each individual team member.

For high performance of Gen Y team leader has to able to show clear goals of where the team should be headed, and inspiring its members to make it a reality which is fundamental to team success. Leaders need to describe vision in simple language and give time to get Gen Yers to subscribe, or buy in, to the goals and make effective action plan which are likely to yield results.

References:

1. Stagl, K.C., Salas, E., & Burke, C.S. (2007). Best Practices in Team Leadership. In Jay Conger

and Ronald Riggio (Eds.). The Practice of Leadership (pp. 172-197).

2. http://www.linkageinc.com/leadership-development-documents/files/content/10-Leadership-Techniques-for-

Building-High-Performing-Teams.pdf

3. http://www.di.net/articles/a-process-to-build-high-performance-teams/

4. http://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/6-tools-for-creating-high_b_5647908

5. https://www.isixsigma.com/implementation/teams/high-performance-teams-understanding-team-cohesiveness/

6. http://www.inc.com/resources/leadership/articles/20070101/musselwhite.html