

Structuring Your Team

Does it sometimes feel like your team is working against rather than with one another? In part, this could be because it lacks an effective structure.

Even the best team can falter if it is poorly constructed. Think of a sports team that is loaded with talent but is unable to deliver a winning record. Often, the problem is not with individual efforts, but because the team's members do not have complementary skillsets or work well together as a whole.

If your team is struggling to mesh, it may be helpful to take a step back and objectively evaluate its functioning. Some questions to consider include:

- ▶ Does my team have the appropriate expertise and technical skills to complete assigned tasks?
- ▶ Are the different roles within the team appropriately balanced to maintain our team's workflow and support its objectives?

- ▶ Have I clearly articulated the team's goals?
- ▶ Does each member of my team understand their specific duties and how they fit into our larger goals?

If your answer to any of these questions is "no," it may be time to reconsider your team's structure and directives. Consider these steps:

- ▶ **Establish concrete goals.** Whether you are responsible for determining team goals or they are assigned by a more senior manager, it is important to define them clearly. This may mean re-framing them in terms your team



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can understand. For instance, “use time more effectively” could be reframed into more concrete goals, such as “limit meetings to the topic at hand” or “identify and streamline work logjams.”

- ▶ **Learn about your team.** If your team has members in specialty roles that are outside your area of expertise, learn about what they do and why it is key to the organization’s functioning. Exploring different problem-solving approaches may help you determine new or more effective ways to reach goals.
- ▶ **Schedule regular meetings.** Meet with your full team and any sub-teams or task groups on a regular basis. (Exercise discretion on how often you need to attend small team meet-ups.)

Use these meetings to review goals, refine procedures, and discuss problems. Solicit input from team members and other relevant parties.

- ▶ **Summarize and follow up.** It may be helpful to distribute a summary of team meetings, including a list of pending discussion items. Encourage questions and suggestions, while also continually reinforcing core messages and objectives.
- ▶ **Identify blind spots.** When solving a problem, consider if you are missing any relevant perspectives. For example, if a project requires a large data transfer, consult with a member of the IT department. In some instances, it may be appropriate to delegate specific projects or

tasks to smaller sub-groups or a single team liaison.

- ▶ **Encourage growth.** If a team member expresses interest in learning new skills or moving into a different role, foster opportunities for cross-training when appropriate. Encourage team members to learn about each other’s roles and build camaraderie. Remind your team of the value in collaborating effectively with other departments or vendor partners.
- ▶ **Make changes as needed.** If it becomes apparent that a team member is in a role that is ill-suited to their abilities, take action. Adjust duties as appropriate to ensure that objectives are being met or workflow doesn’t suffer. Talk to HR before making any changes that would materially affect an employee’s work duties or job description.

Effective teams take time to gel, and changes in personnel may require you to make some adjustments. Keep in mind that the effort you put into maintaining your team’s structure will likely pay dividends that go well beyond productivity.

The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can help you develop your leadership skills. It can also assist you with addressing team or employee concerns. Call anytime.

How Do I Say That? Team Conflicts



Is there tension within your team? When differing points of view lead to a tense atmosphere or escalate into conflict, it's important to take action. The following steps may be helpful:

1. Define the conflict. Determine why the tension is occurring. Possibilities include:

- Friction that is interpersonal, interteam, or between cliques
- Disagreements about workflow, processes, or use of resources
- Poor communication
- Harassment or other inappropriate behavior

2. Consult with Human Resources. HR will review relevant company policies and suggest helpful resources. In addition, the LifeMatters Management Consultation Service is available to assist you with determining how to address the concern.

Note: If the conflict is a result of harassment or bullying, follow HR's instructions and company policy regarding next steps.

3. Schedule a team meeting. The best way to learn about why a conflict is happening is to listen to the parties involved. Keep in

mind that some employees may be reluctant to disclose the reason for a conflict for fear that they will experience retaliation or because they don't want to "rock the boat." Remind all employees of expectations regarding appropriate behavior at work.

Sample language: "I know people have differing opinions on how to achieve our goals. Let's talk about some different options and consider next steps."

4. Chart a path forward. Look for ways to incorporate your team's ideas into any changes you make. Keep in mind that the goal isn't to please everyone, but to improve workflow and team functioning. Let your team know that you've heard their concerns and respect their contributions.

Sample language: "I appreciate everyone's comments and suggestions. I've included many of your ideas in this new plan."

5. Meet privately with individual employees. Schedule a private meeting with employees who are central to the conflict or who have expressed frustration regarding the workplace or colleagues.





Address performance issues as appropriate.

Sample language: “I understand that things have been tense lately. Let’s look at ways to address your concerns while keeping the focus on work.”

6. Refer to LifeMatters. LifeMatters can assist with managing stress, improving communication skills, and many other concerns. If the employee’s workplace performance is off track, consider making a performance referral.

Sample language: “LifeMatters

can help you cope with work and personal concerns. Please call.”

7. Follow up. Meet with your team at a later date to review any changes and make adjustments as needed. If individual employees are struggling, follow up with them and monitor any performance improvement plans. Consult with HR before taking any disciplinary action.

Whether conflict is derailing your team or you would simply like to become a more effective leader, the LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can help. Call today.

Management Consultation

LifeMatters is available to help with:

- ▶ Confronting an employee about performance issues
- ▶ An employee’s personal problem
- ▶ Suspected drug or alcohol use on the job
- ▶ Interpersonal conflicts between team members
- ▶ Establishing clear, attainable expectations for performance
- ▶ Addressing crisis situations, such as a violent incident, the death of an employee, or a natural disaster
- ▶ Your own personal concerns
- ▶ Any other work-related issue

LifeMatters offers professional management consultation when you need it, as often as you need it. Call anytime.

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