

Characteristics of Effective Teams and How the Facilitator Can Help

The facilitator has a responsibility to not only help the team meet its immediate goals, but also to encourage the members to grow and learn as a team. The following characteristics of an effective team provide guidelines for team development.

In an effective team...

1. Members do not ignore seriously intended contributions

Each member needs to know the effect of his/her remarks if s/he is to improve the ways he participates in the team.

The facilitator should ensure that all contributions are acknowledged.

2. Members check to make sure they know what a speaker means by a contribution before they agree or disagree with it.

The question "What is it?" should precede the question "How do we feel about it?" This process ensures that understanding occurs prior to evaluation.

The facilitator should ensure that ideas are understood before they are assessed or reacted to.

3. Each member speaks for only him/herself and lets others do the same.

Each member states his/her reactions as his/her own and does not attribute them to others or give the impression s/he is speaking for others.

The facilitator should ensure that team members speak only for themselves. Encourage the use of "I" statements.

4. All contributions are viewed as belonging to the team, and to be used or not as the team decides.

A team member who offers a suggestion or idea does not have to defend it as his/hers against the others. Instead, all accept responsibility for evaluating it as the joint property of the team.

The facilitator should reinforce the collective ownership of all ideas and contributions; once offered and recorded, their origin becomes irrelevant.

3. The team recognizes that whatever it does is what it has chosen to do.

When a team faces an issue it must decide; it may openly agree to take action, it may openly agree to take no action, or it may decide by default to take no action. However, decisions by default are felt as failure by team members and create tension and frustration within the team.

The facilitator should ensure that the team is clear on what decisions it has made, even if the decision is to do nothing, and that there is agreement on the decision.

4. The team brings conflict into the open and deals with it.

The members recognize that conflict (of ideas) is an inevitable and even useful aspect of the process of reaching the "best" decisions. However, they also recognize that the choice is theirs whether the conflict will be open (and subject to team control) or disguised (and out of control).

The facilitator should ensure that the team consciously and openly recognizes the presence of conflict and makes decisions about how, or whether, to deal with it.

7. When the team senses it is having trouble getting work done, it tries to find out why.

When the team feels that it is "spinning its wheels", or that other factors are preventing the team from moving ahead, members are able to shift from working on the task to a discussion of its own team dynamics.

The facilitator should ensure that the team is encouraged to address openly (using "I" statements) factors they believe are blocking team progress.