A Few Notes on Building Teamwork and Collaboration

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FOREWORD
Important

These notes are a few thoughts related to developing teamwork and collaboration in any organization. A first read may leave the reader with the impression that there are so many aspects to building teamwork and advancing collaboration that attempting to do so is too much work. The opposite is actually the case. These notes contain a super set of things that can be considered and any given organization often can benefit from performing only a fraction. Use these notes as awareness building for yourself and for your organization and as a general guide to whatever improvement efforts you decide to undertake.

Use Options
Options for Using These Notes

Option 1 – Read for your awareness.

Option 2 – Read and provide to your organization for awareness.

Option 3 – Read and provide to your organization for awareness and then apply one or more approaches for building team work and collaboration using these notes as a guide.

1) Background and Context, Why Teamwork and Collaboration are Essential for Organizations to Function

Any organization is a system composed of multiple inter-working parts just as a car, a hospital and a local IT network are formed of multiple parts that, when taken together, perform a desired function. All of the "parts" must "interface" and work together.

Organizations are composed of people and the organization's infrastructure consisting of methods (processes), systems, information and other components such as facilities. All of these organization components must work together to enable the organization to perform its primary function, i.e. the organization's "mission." The "people" in the organization are the most important part as they are collectively, the repository of the "organization's intelligence" that applies the organization's infrastructure to perform the organization's reason for being. People are the glue or interfacing agent that enables the organization to function as a whole. This "interfacing" is teamwork, collaboration and communication.

For the organization to function, interactions between individuals in the organization must happen. These interactions maybe tightly or loosely coupled or something in between and this organization variable determines the level of teamwork and collaboration necessary for effective organization operation.

A surgical team, a sports team and an emergency response team are examples of tightly integrated organizations. Very significant communication, teamwork, collaboration and other team related attributes and functions are needed just to allow the team to function. Where teamwork and collaboration does not exist, these teams fail to fulfill their mission.

A partnership of dentists that only share a building and an accounting function would be an example of a loosely integrated organization. There is value in having the organization (partnership for cost sharing) but the interaction between the organization's elements (the dentists) might be very limited. Here communication, collaboration and teamwork may exist at a relatively low level and might only consist of periodic meetings to make decisions on leases and shared services and possibly to share lessons learned in areas such as patient relations. Value exists in having the organization (partnership) but the interaction and resulting collective value of the organization exists at a much lower level when compared to the tightly integrated examples mentioned earlier. Still, teamwork and collaboration are of value, proven by the fact that such partnerships exist.

Most organizations in industry, academia, government and non-profits will be between these tightly integrated and loosely integrated examples and many will be closer to the tightly integrated type. As such, most organizations will need a significant level of communication, teamwork and collaboration just to function. Where such attributes are missing, frustration and pain can exist within the organization, the organization's customers will not be best served and the organization may not be fulfilling its mission.

2) Explaining Specific Values When Improving Collaboration and Teamwork

In addition to the needs for collaboration and teamwork for any organization expressed above, consider communicating the following values to specific individual stakeholder groups when educating your organization.

- **Value to the Organization** – As discussed earlier, an organization needs teamwork and collaboration just to function. As any organization increases the level of teamwork and collaboration, the organization itself becomes more productive, the quality of work outputs can increase and the working environment for all team members is enhanced. This positions the organization to better serve customers, to set the foundation for further improvements and to experience other values such as the ability to attract and retain valuable talent. Teamwork and collaboration enable the organization's to fulfill its mission and to do so in increasing levels of effectiveness.

- **Value to the Organization's Customers** – An organization exists to serve its customers; there is no other reason for existence. This is the concept of customer value. The most successful organizations focus on their customers and, as a result, the organization and team members benefit. As individuals in any organization increase their level of teamwork and collaboration, customers can be better served through the increased effectiveness of the organization's operations realized in terms of quality of products and services, costs, schedule and related organization success measures.

- **Value to Team Members** – Team members will benefit from enhanced levels of collaboration and teamwork in several ways. First, these efforts will generate new knowledge, new skills and a broader and more complete perspective for all team members, advancing their individual abilities and careers. Secondly, the organization itself becomes healthier and is more productive, providing a more interesting and more productive environment for team members to function within.

3) Situations to Leverage When Moving to Enhance Teamwork and Collaboration

The following are example opportunities within an organization that can support the initiation of efforts to increase teamwork and collaboration. Other situations exist as well.

- **Internal Common Interest** – This is something that all members of the group have a real interest in that is directly related to their professional endeavors. Examples could be the application of new technologies to their work, common awareness and discussion of new information in their respective field or a discussion of what an external peer organization is doing in a given area. A breakthrough of methods in an adjacent field and a new implementation of a current technology are other opportunities for a team to discuss and to investigate the possibility of leveraging those ideas inside their organization.

- **External Common Interest** – Something all members of the group have an interest in that is NOT directly associated to their professional endeavors and is generally "external" to the work place. This might include a sport, volunteer work, "after hours socializing" or participating in a common cause. Such activities generate interaction, communication and sharing of ideas outside of the workplace. This collaboration in the external environment can generate an increased level of collaboration back in the office.

- **Organization Strategic Planning or Implementing Strategic Actions** – Reviewing the current organization vision, revising or validating that vision and defining this year's strategic plan are great ways to get a group to work as a team. Where specific strategic actions have been defined, assembling a team to complete one or more actions is another opportunity for teamwork that can be quite valuable.

- **Common Enemy** – Pain, injury or even annihilation may happen if the group does not band together to fight an external common enemy. Industry Example – New product development team focused on completing and rolling out a new product to meet or beat a competitor's product offering.

- **Common Pain Point** – A common point of pain or frustration all members of the team experience can bind a team together for developing and implementing a solution for all. Even if little or no solutions are found, some discussion of the issue, possibly including some "work-arounds" and even some common commiserating can be of value.

- **Potential for Group Recognition / Rewards** – Where the group, or higher level organization, can be recognized or rewarded for something, a common interest can exist to work as a team to achieve such recognition.

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4) Things to Consider When Working to Increase Teamwork and Collaboration

A few notes follow on things to be aware of when initiating efforts to increase teamwork and collaboration.

- **Team Individuals Need to Understand the "Value" to Themselves**

  o Value to Individuals - For individuals to work as a team and collaborate, they need to see "the value to them" in doing so. One might think of past team efforts where one was energized to participate and what values were seen in that situation. Use this example to support others seeing value in future efforts. When approaching group members to initiate a new team effort, having a pre-defined set of advantages for each team member that can be offered during initial discussions can be of critical value. Some values to group members might be unique to the individual, such a knowledge growth experience, and some advantages may be common to all group members such as meeting a common need or removing a common pain point. Value to the

organization as a whole and value to customers (as mentioned in paragraph #1) are additional important values to be communicated during initial discussions.

- o <u>Net Value to Individuals</u> - For individuals to put time and energy into teamwork and collaboration, they also need to see that "the value to them" exceeds any value they perceive that they may lose or "pay for" as a result of increased collaboration. Anticipating what concerns or drawbacks a given individual may perceive, real or not, that increased teamwork and collaboration may pose and then offering offsetting values to those concerns may be needed in garnering support.

- **Organization Culture Drivers** - Individuals consciously and unconsciously conform to the culture of the organization and follow the behavior of the leaders of the respective organization. Leaders can be actual management and can also be others that lead due to their acknowledged expertise, accomplishments or other attributes. As such, if the organization's culture is based on teamwork and if leadership demonstrates teamwork and collaboration on a consistent basis, a great supportive environment exists. Where these conditions do not prevail, attempts to promote teamwork and collaboration will be more difficult, not impossible, but more difficult. The awareness of this later condition is important information when setting expectations for all when initiating change.

- **Phased Communications** – A phased approach to communicating ideas is often needed when instituting any type of change in an organization. If one were to just call a meeting and throw out the idea of forming a team to address some issue needing improvement, this approach may not succeed in securing a critical mass of support as individuals have not thought about the issue's pros and cons, and might be prone not to support something that has not been given proper consideration. If, on the other hand, each team member is approached and the general issue or improvement idea is offered along with the importance to the organization and the value to the respective individuals in pursuing the topic, this approach can generate understanding of the need and build support for group acceptance of the idea addressed in a subsequent meeting. This "pre-meeting" or "phased communication" approach can also provide insights into any concerns that might exist on a given topic allowing the person initiating the change idea to be able to respond to those areas of concern at the time or later as the group meets to discuss.

- **Respect for All Views** – Little can be more destructive to teamwork and collaboration than for any individual, or the team as a whole, to unnecessarily criticize any given view or idea. For some personalities it only takes one significant criticism of an idea voiced in public and that individual may never offer another idea for a long time. That individual might also not be willing to work on a team that has publically criticized their ideas. All views are real as they are the perspectives of those espousing them, whether or not they are valuable or implementable. Constructive debate is an important team function, but team leaders, and team members themselves, should "bend over backwards" to avoid destructive criticism and give all views due respect. The team as a whole will eventually and generally "do the right thing" so listening to all views may pose little liability and the voicing of many views may well surface separate ideas that can be combined to form a best overall solution.

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5) Conditions to be Aware of That Hamper Teamwork and Collaboration and a Few Solutions

There are challenges involved and being aware of those challenges is a first step in surmounting them.

- **Loners** - The existence of many individuals in the organization that are more "loners" and individual contributors than team players can be a challenge. This does not mean teamwork and collaboration is not possible, it just means it will take longer with more effort. Expectations should be set for a lower level of change and more time to achieve change when compared to an organization where a high level of "non-loner" team members exists.

- **Low Self-Confidence** – Low self-confidence can exist at the individual level and at the group level and both can be a challenge to advancing teamwork and collaboration.

    o Individual Low Self-Confidence – Team efforts can cause an individual with low self-confidence to feel that any knowledge or skill deficiencies they have might be uncovered and their reputation will be harmed as a result. This can make those individuals less inclined to participate in group discussions and activities. This can be a challenge but can be partially overcome by making any initial team effort or project as "non-threatening" as possible and later by providing recognition of the accomplishments to all involved.

    o Low Group Self-Confidence – If the group, as a whole, has low self-confidence this can be a real challenge as starting any group effort may be perceived as an effort that will just fail. One solution here can be to have the group work on a short and simple effort where success is highly probable and then to leverage the confidence built by that successful experience on more difficult efforts.

- **Bad Past Team Experience** - Some individuals may have little interest in group work as they have had bad experiences working in groups. These difficulties might have included one or more of the following.

    o A lack of essential effort structure could include a lack of a commonly understood and accepted effort goal, an unclear project deliverable, little or no planning, unclear or conflicting roles and other missing project management essentials. Any of these conditions can make a team effort a frustrating experience and the lack of multiple project fundamentals can make the experience downright painful, if not causing outright failure. The solution here is the application of project management fundamentals at a level of implementation acceptable to the team. This can make the effort more organized and productive and will set the stage for more positive attitudes for future team efforts. (Review the thoughts in paragraph #8 for ideas on how to better structure team efforts).

    o Individuals on a team that have very different personality profiles will be a challenge to team work but these can be overcome. (See paragraph #6 on this topic).

- o <u>Members of the team not "carrying their weight" forcing a subset of the team to do most or all the work</u> can be especially frustrating as a given individual agreed to support the effort and then finds they are doing much more work than they believe they agreed to do. A real bad precedent for any future team effort. A partial solution here is to have clear work assignments and clear work output accountabilities for each team member along with a clear schedule defining when specific work is needed. As the status of the work efforts is reviewed by the team collectively in periodic team meetings, those that are not "carrying their load" may experience some level of "public embarrassment" providing some incentive for those individuals to "pick up the pace." Making sure all team members understand the value to the organization and to customers is an important method in supporting all team members "pulling their part of the load."

- o <u>Introverted individuals can be uncomfortable working in teams</u> and especially in working with extroverts. A partial solution here includes not trying to accomplish all work in a group and allowing individual efforts that are then later integrated by the group.

- **Low Trust** - If the level of trust between team members is low, this can be an issue for teamwork. No "magic wand" solution here but what team efforts can be defined and successfully executed as a team, will over time, develop a level of trust. A team effort external to the office can be a good initial way to start teamwork and build some trust as it is neutral territory and some of the attitudes and behaviors toxic to teamwork in the office can be absent in the external environment. Another way to build a level of trust within the team is for the team to collectively work toward a very important organization goal where clear advantages exist for all involved.

- **Strong Egotistical Personalities** – Strong egos can hamper teamwork as those with that personality trait often must be "right all the time" and/or "must lead everything" and/or "will not be led" by others. When working on a project, the leader might listen to their ideas but then would make sure all others on the team offer ideas as well. The leader might also make sure everyone, including the egos, have clear role and work deliverable assignments and that all team members are held accountable (by the group) for their individual accountabilities. This latter action can be accomplished in team project status meetings.

- **Career Focused Mindsets vs. Team and Organization Focused Mindsets** – Where individuals exist that have their own career as their first three priorities, or maybe their only priority, teamwork and collaboration will be difficult as these individuals are focused on themselves and not the project, the organization or the customer. Give up if you think you will change their attitudes, it generally is not possible. Awareness of this condition along with communicating a clear personal value to all individuals working on this team and clear individual work assignments can be a partial solution.

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6) Different Personalities Pose Challenges and Advantages to Teamwork

A huge impediment and a huge advantage in team efforts are different personalities. A team leader, and all team members, can do two things related to personalities to support teamwork.

1) Know your own personality type (Myers/Briggs or others), leverage your skills and manage your challenges to support the team.
2) Be aware of the personality traits of other team members (as best you can) and understand that they actually do think differently than you do. Have tolerance and respect for other personalities and learn to work with them.

The following are a few summary thoughts on the attributes of different personalities from a M/B's perspective, not an exhaustive description at all. Use awareness of these attributes to support the team working together.

> *[The following is a paraphrasing from a tutorial titled "Personality Types and Team Work" by Angelica M. Morgan where the ideas in the tutorial are derived from Kroeger, Otto (with Janet Thuesen). 1992. Type Talk at Work. New York: Dell Publishing.]*

- o **E**xtroverts – Listen More; make your points to support the team and then be careful not to waste others time with long "orations," be aware that others may need time to themselves to digest what is happening and think even though you may not; don't try to resolve conflicts by monopolizing the conversation, allow others to voice their views and listen respectfully.

- o **I**ntroverts – Talk More; make sure you step in and be heard, keep everyone on a timeline-you are good at that; when you need a break from the group thing-take a break; put forth your view during conflicts vs. staying quiet. When you have collected your thoughts, tell the group what you think.

- o **S**ensors – Use your skills to simplify problems for the team to understand; look beyond the facts for extenuating circumstances when resolving conflicts; be somewhat flexible when planned schedules do not happen-work with the team to make schedule allowances.

- o i**N**tuitives – Use your skills to offer creative solutions, especially during team conflicts; keep the big picture in the minds of the team, stick to the relevant issues; understand that others need to work on a schedule and support their need to do so even if your personal focus is on the nature or quality of work vs. the schedule.

- o **T**hinkers – Use your skills to establish context and a good overall perspective of the topic, allow that some team members maybe emotional about some topics and that is ok for that to happen especially in resolving conflicts, express your own emotions as best you can; use your sense of priorities to help the team do the most important things first and allow that others may have different priorities or no priorities at all.

- o **F**eelers – Support all team members in participating, ok to express your emotions; be firm and frank on issues; don't shy away from discussions or issues that may be unpleasant from a personal relationship issue, attack them directly working top priority items first.

- o **J**udgers - Keep the group focused and on track, but don't be a "know it all," also things are shades of gray, not just black and white and others have valid opinions also so listen to them; keep the team on a timeline as you are good at that; don't expect that the team will see your view of needed structure so compromise on the structure to a degree; don't let the schedule pressures reduce the quality of team output to a level less than what is needed.

- o **P**erceivers - Keep the group's options open, be the devil's advocate in a constructive way; tell the team both sides of the argument but also pick a side when the time to make a decision exists; understand that some level of structure is needed for team efforts even if you do not like structure; understand that things need to be done with some type of schedule so support meeting timelines when others see it as important.

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7) A Few Ways to Get Started

Review the previous list of situations that offer teamwork and collaboration opportunities (see paragraph #3) and select the most appropriate based on current conditions within your organization.

Follows are a few ideas for getting started using some of those opportunities.

- • **Address a Common Problem** - Pick a common issue, a problem or pain point that all in the group would view as important to resolve. Elicit support to address the issue possibly through a review of past examples of pain or frustration coupled with the idea that we can lessen or remove the undesired situation. As the group agrees to address, start group discussions to perform the following steps:

  - o Specifically define the issue to be resolved and limit the scope to something that is doable
  - o Discuss root causes
  - o Brainstorm alternative solutions
  - o Select a solution (or solution set) based on some relevant and mutually agreed upon criteria
  - o Work to identify a plan for action where all team members participate in some way

  This effort does not have to be an in-depth problem analysis and solution trade-off, but the steps above are important to discuss even if only done verbally. For simple topics the above steps might be accomplished in a single meeting. For more complex issues, especially where multiple root causes and/or multiple alternative solutions may exist, some individual efforts may be needed coupled with several meetings. This process of working as a team to perform

these steps and to resolve a common point of pain can be a valuable way to initiate enhanced teamwork and collaboration. Once success is attained, follow it up with another topic, perhaps a more demanding one.

- **Support a Management Initiative** - Take a current management initiative and form a team to brainstorm ideas to support the initiative. Such initiatives might be related to organization quality improvements, cost reductions, increasing value to customers or enhancing the working environment. Put together a brief timeline and work assignments and then implement, using periodic team meetings to review progress and make needed course corrections. Have the team as a whole present their findings to management and ensure all team members are given proper recognition.

- **Review an Operational Deliverable** - For an important organization deliverable such as an annual report, proposal or some other critical work output where the quality of that deliverable reflects on the organization as a whole and where review of the deliverable by the group is appropriate, have group members review and share comments. Accept all comments without criticism. Such actions "bind" each individual to the organization as they were "involved."

- **Work to Develop the Organization's Strategic Plan** – With management concurrence, pull together a team to work the annual vision and strategic planning activity. This is a great way to promote teamwork and collaboration as it not only gets individuals working together and communicating, but it also gets individuals to work on defining the future directions of the organization itself, increasing their ownership of the organization's role.

- **Work to Perform a Strategic Action** – Where the organization's strategic plan is in place and strategic actions are identified, with management's concurrence build a team to address one or more actions. This is a great way to promote teamwork and collaboration as it not only gets individuals working together and communicating, but it also gets individuals to make improvements in the organization that all can benefit from.

- **Participate in a Social Event or Cause** - Organize an "out of the office" event, social gathering, volunteer work, "a cause," sport, etc. to get individuals to talk and work together. It is important to find an event that all group members would be willing to participate in. No one should be left out. Then soon after, leverage those new relationships back in the office by initiating some type of internally focused team effort.

- **Work With a Peer Organization** – This is an opportunity where two organizations need to work together on a topic of common interest and each organization defines a team to form a larger group to address the given topic. Collaboration results between the two organizations but collaboration is also generated within the team members from each involved organization. Even though all members of a given organization may not be directly involved, those team members that are directly involved can go back to their respective organization to meet with the remaining organization members to provide an awareness of the activity and to solicit input, further supporting team work and collaboration.

- **Enhance Communication Where Colocation Does Not Exist** – Colocation is very important for collaboration as significant team communication happens in the hallway. Geographically

dispersed teams, including just being on a different floor in the same building or in a building right next door, are impediments to establishing team work. Where colocation does not exist, periodic team communications (virtual or real) need to exist to support teamwork and collaboration. No communication ⇔ no team ⇔ no teamwork ⇔ no collaboration.

- **Group Information Repository** – Where "person-to-person" interchanges are difficult for any reason, starting with a "non-person" collaboration approach such as establishing or enhancing an information repository can be a good place to start. Some groups send emails to others when they find something of interest, but emails go away or you can't find them later when you need them. Have the team discuss the feasibility, purpose, value and contents of such a group repository. If the group deems the idea to be of value and feasible, discuss and agree on how it would be implemented, managed and maintained. Ask for volunteers to perform certain tasks and these roles can be rotated as desired. As a repository is implemented, this can lead to more "person-to-person" communications and collaborations. If a group already has a repository is in place, a team effort to review what it is, what it could be and what improvements might be considered is another teamwork building opportunity.

- **Group "Lesson Learned" / "Best Practices" Repository** – Related to the group information repository, but having a distinct and focused function, is a place for individual group members to "publish" things they have learned that are successful and things they have learned that should be avoided. Both are important to advancing an organization's productivity and the quality of deliverables at the same time advancing the team's skills and knowledge. Periodic meetings (example: one lunch a month) to review and discuss recent "postings" is a great way to enhance teamwork and collaboration in any organization.

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8) Conditions That Must Exist to Support Team Projects Being Successful

Having a meeting to talk about improvements of any type is "having a meeting" and is not a project that will necessarily produce change. Little or no sustained change happens by talking where no outcome or defined actions result. Real changes most often result from a project effort where a clear issue is defined, requirements for the solution are discussed (at least in general terms), alternative solutions are defined and a means to implement a selected solution is planned and executed. All of this could be done in a few meetings, but these necessary project steps are needed to actually effect a change. Any effort needs the application of fundamental project management methods, even if some steps are handled informally.

Where this is done, teamwork is enhanced. Where this is not done, teamwork is often diminished due to the frustrations experienced by the team in trying to complete "a disorganized project" that may actually be nothing more than a series of discussions. Additionally, team members may develop an attitude that "this organization as a whole is really disorganized" because the efforts of the group are disorganized and do not produce results. A few project management fundamentals can go a long way in preventing these teamwork "killers" from existing.

Follows are basic things that need to be in place for a successful improvement effort.

Important Note - Don't use the following list to identify one item that does not exist right now and then claim the project cannot happen. Do use this list as a general guide to determine if a preponderance of success supporting conditions exists to support a decision to start and perform a project.

- **A Project Must Be Real** - The project must be real, i.e. not just generated for the purposes of building team work or for some other purpose.

- **A Project Must Be Feasible** - The project must be feasible in terms of time, finances and other factors.
    - The resources needed for the project are or will most likely be available
    - The schedule for the project is mutually compatible with other organization efforts and priorities as well as the anticipated scope of work for the project
    - The project is consistent with delivering something at a time when it is of value
    - The project has a reasonable probability of being completed

- **A Project Must Have Visible Value** - The project must have clear value to customers, organization and team members. Stakeholders need to see:
    - Value to customers – Customers will benefit from this effort, directly or indirectly
    - Value to the organization – The organization will benefit from this effort
    - Net value to team members – Team members need to see that the "net value" to themselves (acquired value less any value lost in participation) makes the project a good investment of their individual time and effort

- **The Project Has a Clear and Feasible Goal** - The project must have several driving factors defined. This includes a clearly defined goal / desired outcome and some type of requirements for this outcome. These driving aspects of any project must be defined and commonly understood and generally accepted by all stakeholders. Note that a clear project goal may not be known at project start and the team's first order of business would be to establish that goal.

- **Projects Need Management Support, or At Least an "OK"** - Projects most often need management support. Many team members will only support efforts that they believe management supports. Additionally, when the project needs resources and other support needs, management needs to "be on board" to provide that support. Make your case to management and ask for their visible support. If real visible management support is not possible, management concurrence that the project can precede should be garnered at a minimum.

- **Projects Need a Plan** - You can't run a project successfully by having meetings and "sharing ideas," that is information sharing, not a project. The project must have some type of plan to reach the desired outcome. The plan might be nothing more than a few milestones and a flow chart of major work elements along with work assignments. The plan will not be known at the start and will be developed as the team decides what to do. The plan will be revised as the project progresses but a plan that all team members understand, see as feasible and accept is very important. Having the team brainstorm a list of work and a sequence of work for the plan can be a good way to build the plan and to start the team building efforts. If the team is prone to planning, a more in-depth effort in planning could be done. If the team is not prone to

planning, the leader, possibly working with one or so team members, might assemble a "straw plan" and present as "ideas only" for team feedback and refinement and eventual acceptance.

- **Defined, Understood and Accepted Roles** – For larger efforts, the project must have clear team member roles that are understood and accepted. Roles are higher level definitions of team member involvement in the project as compared to work assignments. An individual team member may have several work elements or tasks they are assigned to perform and they also may have a specific role on the project that identifies higher level and more overarching accountabilities. As an example, a given team member might be responsible for 3 project tasks and they might also have a role of managing the quality of all work outputs delivered external to the team. Another role example would be a team member operating as an interface to an external or peer organization. Another role example is the management of the project's information or the development of project reports to external stakeholders. These roles maybe defined sometime after the effort is initiated as it may take time to define what exactly will be done and who should do it. Team discussion, understanding and agreement on roles is essential. Specific roles may not be needed for smaller efforts but usually larger efforts can benefit from their definition.

- **A leader** – The leader is needed for success. A leader is needed to facilitate team interaction, monitor progress and make recommendations when the project deviates from a successful path. Teams that try to function without a leader, often fail as "no one is at the helm looking where the ship is going." Where the leader is a peer, that person has special challenges in that they cannot be overbearing or dictatorial, yet not passive nor failing to facilitate the team staying on a productive track. Having the team decide who should lead is a great approach and many team members maybe quite happy not to lead. Where multiple individuals want to lead, a co-leadership or a deputy leader approach can be a solution.

9) Some Advice to "Improvers"

Enhancing teamwork and collaboration requires changing behaviors and this can inject uncertainty, fear and uneasiness into any organization. The real world comes into play, so be aware of the realities of working to make changes as you embark on your effort.

- **Everyone Will Probably Not Be Fully On-Board, so "Make Do"** – Some individuals are improvers and want to change things and others are not and want things to remain the same and some are in the middle. Be aware that you probably will work with all three mindsets. For other team members that are "improvers" and want to make changes, leverage their interests and energy to support your work. For those that are in the middle, work to convince them of the importance of the effort (see paragraphs #1 & 2) and be happy with partial support. For those individuals that want things to remain the same, do several things. First understand that is how they think and you are most likely not going to change that. Second, work to educate them on the need for improvements, the value to them directly with the hope that you move their position from negative to perhaps neutral so that the team efforts can move ahead.

- **Understand that Change Takes Time** – Just expect that making changes will take more time than you think and more time than management may want if management has initiated the effort. Do not set management or team expectations that changes will be quick. Identify short term "mini-milestones" so that progress toward a goal can be planned, tracked and especially so that management and the team can see a level of progress being made. This keeps the team energy up and enhances management awareness and sustained support. Have both long term and short term goals and above all, be patient and properly set expectations on the timing of what can happen. "Mini-Milestones" with interim accomplishments is one method to keep interests and motivation up for longer efforts.

- **Allow That Some Re-Direction May Be the Right Thing** – Virtually all improvement efforts start with good intentions, but as the effort progresses and the team understands more about the nature of a problem or improvement need, the solution needed, there may be a need to "re-direct" the improvement effort. The original effort may not be addressing a root cause, the effort may be too costly in terms of budget, schedule and available resources, the effort may be lacking necessary political support or the effort may be working to make a deliverable that has become OBE (overcome by events). To maintain the original plan may not be the right thing and a re-structuring of the improvement scope, goals and plan may be necessary. Care must be taken, of course, to ensure that any such re-structuring is not done just to lessen the work load of the team, but is always done with the best interests of customers and the organization in mind.

- **Keep Your Energy Up, Keep Your Attitude Positive but Realistic and Always Be Professional and Constructive** – If you are leading an improvement effort of any kind, the team will consciously or unconsciously be affected by your behaviors. Always be professional and constructive and maintain a fixed focus on "doing the right thing" for the organization's customers, the organization and the team, in that order. Be positive, but do so in a realistic manner, overly positive or negative attitudes can be teamwork killers. Periodically restating the importance of the effort and your short term and long term goals helps ensure team members and management do not lose the important perspectives that caused the effort to be initiated in the first place. Above all, consistently work hard to "do the right thing" and you will gain the respect and support from all to make your effort successful.

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