

The Real Work of Teams
Published in *Human Systems Management*, Volume 15, 1996
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Facilitators, leaders and trainers could use a framework to help employees comprehend the full range of responsibilities of being a member of a self-directed work team. This article describes a framework of five key team processes--plan, share, learn, administer, and produce--and defines the requirements for making each process successful. During the initial stages of a team's formation, it is critical that more time and attention be paid to the first four processes. As the members develop their team capabilities, they can devote more time to production. The article concludes with suggestions for implementing the five team processes.

Teams have become the means of accomplishing significantly higher levels of productivity and anyone who has been responsible for making them effective knows how challenging this task can be. Significant difficulties must be overcome before a group becomes a team. Most employees who are new to teams are accustomed to executing narrowly defined job responsibilities, as typically outlined in job descriptions. Furthermore, they are dependent on one person, their boss, for specific accountabilities. They have been rewarded for meeting the expectations of one person, who defined expectations and handed out rewards.

In periods of instability, rapid change, and fierce competition, the bureaucratic, hierarchical model with objective-based management and close supervision will fail to promote the necessary changes in people. On the other hand, customer-focused teams who have complete purview over all the tasks required to meet marketplace demands can be expected to find and implement dramatic improvements in costs and production cycles and to develop new products and services.

Leaders who are responsible for creating a team-based organization structure have discovered that the tricky part is developing teams so they are capable of meeting higher expectations. Much of the literature on teams lacks an overarching framework to describe team capabilities. Such a framework could help team members understand the processes they need to do to function effectively.

Approaches to team development

A typical approach to team development uses the five-stage social psychological model of forming, storming, norming, performing and mourning.¹ This model, although it appropriately describes the experience of many teams, is not universally applicable. More important, it does not provide team members with steps they can take to move rapidly from one stage to the next.

Another approach uses the Meyers Briggs Type Indicator to help promote understanding of the various personality types of team members. The assumption is that the team's functioning will improve if team members perceive the different ways members process information.² Insight into personality types, however, rarely leads to behavior change. In the long term, it is unlikely that such team training will provide the expected benefits. What is more problematic is the assumption that personality type is a major factor in determining team performance. Frankly, it is not.

A third approach to team training is to help members surface any emotional baggage that has developed between them. The assumption is that once the members have appropriately addressed their issues, they will be free to relate more effectively with one another and to deal with producing work. This approach is narrow in its assumption that the source of the team's performance difficulties are primarily interpersonal. More often, a lack of clarity around the work itself is the real source of interpersonal struggles.³

A fourth approach focuses on re-engineering the production tasks of the team. This approach assumes that if work were streamlined and the organization more appropriately structured, productivity would increase. Re-engineering will be successful only to the degree that people are willing to complete their tasks in new ways or able to focus their energies more effectively.⁴

All of the above approaches have merit. None of them, however, will help newly forming teams understand the big picture of the work that lies before them. They need a framework that lays out the tasks and competencies the team must undertake and develop so they can begin to achieve a high performance profile. The framework described below is intended to demystify the processes, tasks and competencies that team members must achieve along the way to success.

Productive capability comes before production

Two types of processes are required to accomplish anything: The first is known as productive capability, which enables the team to determine what will be produced, how it will be produced, the resources required to accomplish the anticipated result, how to obtain the necessary approvals to move forward. The second is known as production, which is comprised of the processes required to make the product or deliver the service.⁵ To be productive, the team must be capable of working together. The primary value of setting forth this dichotomy is to discourage team members from jumping into production without first establishing the necessary groundwork. The tendency to jump first and think later is particularly seen among groups of employees who perceive that they must become responsible for each other without the presence of a traditional manager. Historically, they may have questioned the value of their manager's efforts, which they may have perceived as adding little value.

The primary power of a team structure lies in its potential for developing the needed productive capability faster and more effectively than is possible in the traditional

bureaucratic model. The success of a new team will depend to a great extent on its members' abilities to carry out the activities that build productive capability. Team members need to know how to do the activities associated with the creation of productive capability.

The work of the team, then, is not only to produce a product or service, but also to achieve all the capability tasks that enable it to *be* productive. Figure 1 and Table 2, describe four productive capabilities--plan, share, learn, and administer and one production activity.

Figure 1: Five Team Processes

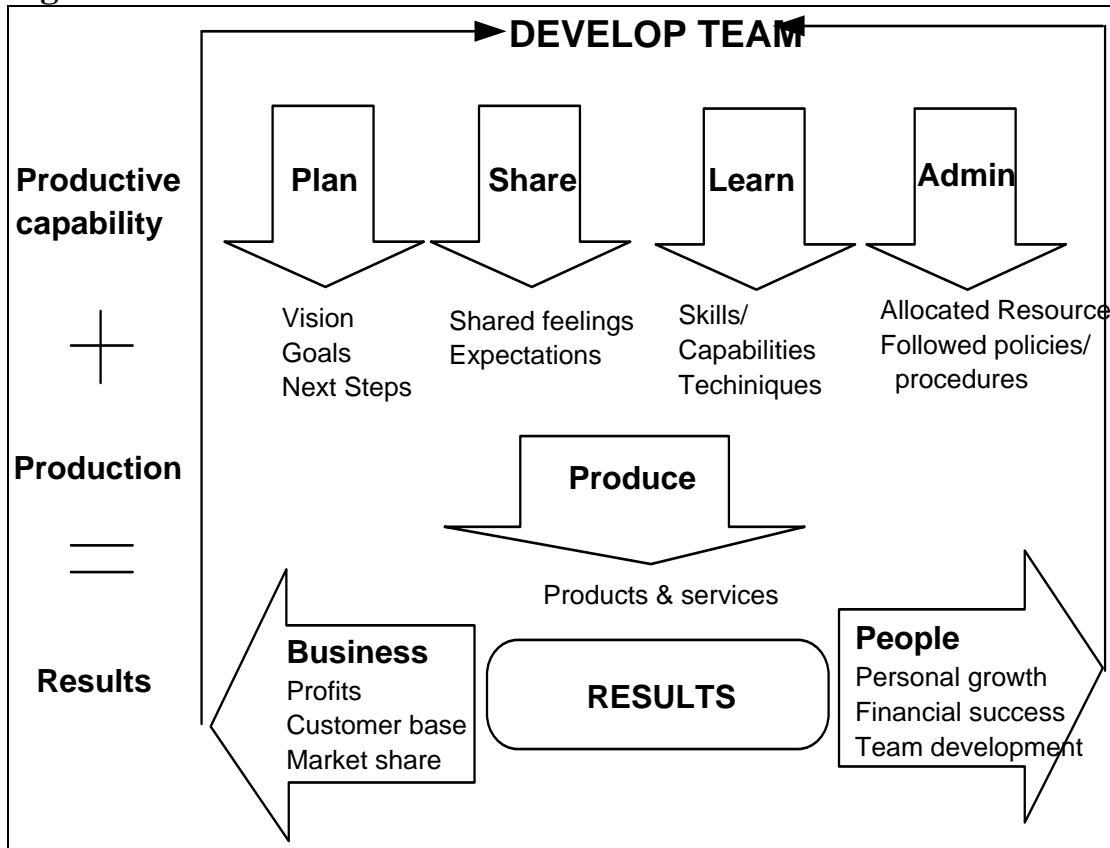


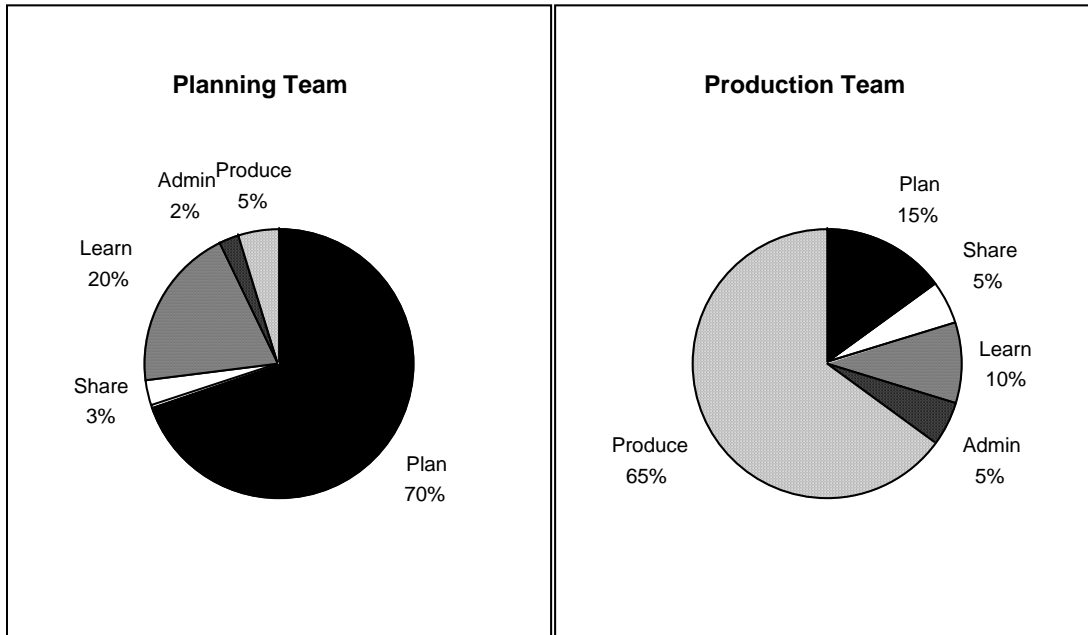
Table 2. Purpose and Examples of the Five Team Processes

Type	Purpose	Examples
Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop future scenario based on new set of realities • Desire to achieve a different outcome through establishing a goal and determining what must be done to reach it. • Opportunity to investigate changes in the voice of the customer, marketplace or critical competencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team one year plan • Individual's life plan • Plan to install new process • Schematic of new factory • Market plan
Share	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create common bond and further understanding by relating personal experiences and perspectives. • Share personal concerns and clarify expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal experiences of past • Frustrations with another person • Concern about a course of action
Learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquire new capabilities to improve performance or personal satisfaction • Establish realistic expectations • Determine faster more effective ways of achieving the goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New job skills • Interpersonal skills • Business skills
Administer	Perform those maintenance functions required to sustain the team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete budget • Fill an open position • Communicate news from home office
Produce	Build products/deliver services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make widgets • Training program • Deliver pizza

Team purposes

A team chartered with establishing future direction, such as a design team or a strategic planning group, will obviously focus significantly more of its time in planning and learning than producing. A team formed to determine factors impacting morale will spend more time sharing. A team formed to explore new production methods will spend relatively more time learning and producing. The examples in Figure 3 illustrate differences in process times between a team that is responsible for developing a strategic plan and a team that produces products and services.

Figure 3. Process time comparisons of planning and production teams



Both teams should spend time in all five processes. However, the amount of time spent in each activity will differ significantly over the life of each team. If the planning team spends insufficient time learning about its business--the marketplace, the competition, and so on--its plan, will unavoidably be a continuation of what has been or a reaction to what currently exists. The team will not be capable of developing a proactive, forward-looking plan. Also, if the team is not capable of producing a planning document and communicating its plan effectively, it will fail. The production team that does not plan will not be motivated by a larger vision. The members of the team will narrowly focus on their current production responsibilities. The production team that spends too little time sharing will not be successful in creating the atmosphere and spirit of community.

Teams formed to produce products or services must expend significant effort on each of the five processes. Unfortunately, the focus of members of production teams will be on their production activity. They have been afforded few opportunities to build their capabilities in planning, sharing, learning, and administering. It is assumed that such capabilities are the responsibility of the manager. The framework of essential team processes demonstrates why employee teams typically find the move from a bureaucratic to a horizontal structure exceedingly difficult.

Stages of team development

All teams do not go through all the development stages of forming, norming, storming, performing, and mourning. What is more, some teams may spend unusual or insufficient amounts of time in each stage. Although it is helpful for team members to understand

that their affiliation will likely go through stages, it is important for them to understand what they must do to be successful within each stage. Successful teams move more smoothly through the developmental stages and more quickly get into the production stage. The framework of the five activities can provide benchmarks for the kinds of activities a newly formed team will wish to undertake through its various developmental stages.

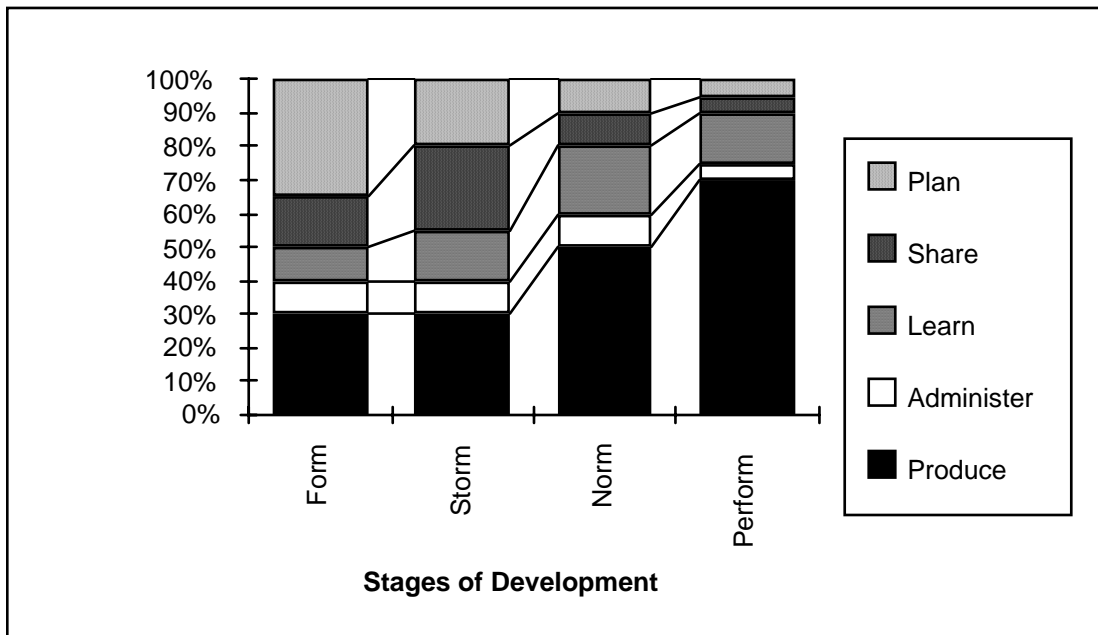
In the earliest stage, known as forming, the team will establish vision, mission, values, develop a plan of action, determine the resources needed to achieve its goals, and negotiate members' roles. During the forming stage, it is helpful for people to share their thoughts and concerns, learn the business they are in, and build the interpersonal skills needed to operate within the team environment.

During the storming stage, the team will begin to realize that their team environment is different from what they had imagined. In this stage, the members must select a leader and determine what their relationship with that individual will be. The team must devote the time and have the communication skills to share their concerns and solve any interpersonal issues that arise. They must also begin to focus on how they will accomplish productive work together. The members will feel they are ready to move forward because they have established a plan. In reality more sifting out of ideas must first occur. At this point, the decision makers who sponsored the move toward a self-directed team structure may become discouraged. They may not understand why employees are not excited about the freedom that has been given them. They become concerned that their hopes for increased productivity through teams will not materialize.

When they know the team vision, mission, and values, when they know their own responsibilities and have come to terms with the leadership issue, then the team members are ready to spend more time on the work itself. During this stage, they examine how they will accomplish the work and may experiment with new methods. This is the norming stage. During this stage, the team can expend more time and energy on accomplishing its primary goal. They will spend less time planning and sharing, more time learning and producing.

Once they have established a solid foundation of capabilities, the team will be ready to perform. This is the stage and the range of the high-performance work team. At this point, the leadership of the team moves from being concerned with the internal team environment to being concerned with managing boundaries, typically the external boundaries with customers and with organization decision makers. The graph below provides an illustrative example of the transition of a production team through four stages of development.

Figure 4: Process Utilization Over Time



A Major Roadblock to Implementation

Further investigation and insight into the five team processes reveals several built in dimensions among them that are likely to confuse team members. One example is the dimension of time. When planning, the team's time horizon is in the future--anywhere from one week to ten years. When sharing, the team members focus on communicating events that happened in the past. When learning, the team members apply experiences to improve their future performance. When producing, team members are focused on the present.

The dimension of team environment required for each process also varies. When planning, team members must be open to new ideas. When sharing, it is critical that members listen to and accept others' feelings. When learning, the team must create a safe environment in which to try new skills or experiment with new methods. When producing, the team will find it important to follow their established procedures.

The leadership dimension for each process varies significantly, which makes it plain why a single person is unlikely to be able to meet all the leadership needs of the team. When planning, the team leader analyzes significant amounts of information and interpolates what this information might mean to the team. When sharing, the team leader creates an environment in which feelings can safely be aired. When administering, the team leader ensures that established guidelines and procedures are followed. When producing, the team leader ensures that everyone fulfills his or her role expectations. This diversity of concerns is a tall order for a single individual. The differences in leadership functions are highlighted in Table 5.

Table 5: Comparison Of Processes By Major Dimensions

Process	Purpose	Time	Type of environment	Leadership	If absent	Mental model	How to improve
Plan	Common focus, vision Accountability Resources	1 week to 2 years	Consider possibilities Thinking beyond current boundaries Projection into the future	Encourage out of box thinking Utilize planning process	Reactive environment Unnecessary stress Lack of common focus	It is for top echelon Not part of regular job	Allocate time Use feedback data Utilize processes Teach
Share	Develop sense of community	Past	High level trust/safety	Strong relationship/empathy Creates safe environment Role model	Little communication between members Sense of isolation Sum less than parts	No place for personal life at work can be which can be separated without impact It's messy	Set time aside Encourage surfacing of issues Teach listening skills/tools
Learn	New skills, techniques, processes and paradigms	Bridge between past and future	Ability to experiment and fail Don't shoot messenger--focus on solutions--not problems	Structured processes and programs Encourages movement out of comfort zone	Continue to make same errors and/or do things same way Lose competitive edge	Too little time Primary focus is job skills Can't change anyway	Individual/team development plan Reward risk taking Use mentors/coaches
Admin-ister	Keep group functioning	Current	Follow establish guidelines/regulations	Follows up to ensure that processes followed/ assures compliance	Improper resource allocation Legal impact No paycheck	Paperwork has little impact Not as important as other processes	Teach processes Rotate accountability Ensure it is done
Produce	Develop products/services Maintain products/services	Now	Follow guidelines & schedules, meet commitments	Focus energies on meeting requirements (time, cost, quality)	Angry customers/ owner Reduced market share/ eroded margins	Get rewarded for what "I" do Don't need/ want to rely on others	Pre-establish expectations Monitor customer sat Team rewards

Implementing the five-process framework

The five-process framework is simple and easy for people to understand and use without significant amounts of training. It helps members of a newly forming team to comprehend the range of activities required for their success. After seeing the model, employees often say, "Now I understand why we have to...." The team must determine which activities under each category are critical. Below are examples of tasks that might fall within each process.

Table 6. Examples of activities within each process

Plan	Share	Learn	Administer	Produce
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual team plan • Personal plan • Determine supplies for the month • Schedule for the week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal goals and objectives • Frustrations with other team members • Expectations for the leader • Dialogue regarding possibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training classes • On the job development opportunities • Review of past performance • Determining how to improve work processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget: plan versus actual • Human resource procedure for hiring/firing • Follow safety procedures/inspections • Complete purchase orders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate equipment • Make sales calls • Complete the written document • Deliver speech

Assessing current performance levels

The team leader may ask the team how well they are currently performing the above tasks. Example questions are as follows:

Plan

- Is our core strategy--vision, mission, values--established?
- Do we have an action plan for the next six months to one year?
- Does each individual know what he or she is accountable to achieve?
- Does each individual have a development plan?
- Are weekly production schedules in place?

Share

- Have we set aside time to discuss our feelings and concerns?

- Do we openly discuss our expectations?
- Are we setting up an environment that allows learning?
- Do we have norms in place about how we will work together?

Learn

- Do we review our performance and learn from our successes and mistakes?
- Are individuals developing new skills and talents so we can operate more effectively?
- What competencies do we need to develop so that we can produce better products and services in the future?
- Are we taking risks?

Administer

- Are we managing our financial resources effectively?
- Are we hiring the right kinds of people?
- Do we deal effectively with poorly performing team members?
- Have we established meetings and other forms of communications so we operate with greatest amount of information?

Produce

- Are we achieving the production/service targets we have established?
- If not, which of our production processes are deficient?

Process Champions

Once the team has developed its capabilities in each of the process areas and has sensed which process is currently critical to its success, the next step is to find the leadership to ensure appropriate follow-through. One approach is to use "process champions." A member can assume responsibility for assuring team accountability for one or several of the processes. This member may delegate his or her responsibility, but will ultimately retain accountability for delivery of the tasks within their processes. The designated team leader works closely with the process champion to ensure that he or she has the skills, the capability, and the confidence to execute the task. The benefits of using a process champion are two-fold: not only are the specific processes accomplished, but also team leadership responsibilities are disbursed among its members.

Making time for the processes

A major lament of teams responsible for producing is that there is simply insufficient time to complete all what might be expected of them. Indeed, given decreased resources and higher production demands, time may be scarce. However, if the team uses the time it does have more effectively, the problem can be reduced. The framework provides a road map to help team members see what they must do to achieve the intended result. It helps teams allocate their time. When the team members know they need to plan, share, learn, and administer, they can allocate time each week to build their team capabilities.

Allowing time and space for process activities will help the team speed its transition from one stage of team development to the next.

Establishing norms

Team-members interaction with one another need not conform to a single set of norms. Teams should have different norms for different activities. For example, when the team is in a planning process, members need permission to dream and to say what they wish. When the team is in a sharing process, it is important that each member feels heard. When in the producing process, team members have less time to dream or to do what each individual feels like or to complain. When they are producing, team members need to follow established procedures and to do what they agreed to accomplish. Teams may establish the norms they wish to follow for each of the five processes.

Summary

The advantages of acknowledging and using the five team processes are as follows:

- They have strong face validity so that employees do not need to be "sold" on the processes.
- They define the full scope of team tasks.
- This model helps team members better understand the rationale for those activities for which they previously may not have been responsible for accomplishing, but are now critical to their success.
- They help members understand why they may have different needs for time, leadership and environment.
- They indicate opportunities for helping with leadership tasks and consequently develop leadership skills amongst more than one team member.
- They speed up the team-development process.

A number of articles and books in the recent business press decry teams as not living up to expectations. They suggest that perhaps organizations should think twice before instituting this organization structure. No doubt, there have been many instances where self managed teams have been inappropriately installed. Often however, the team structure may fail not because it is inappropriate, but more likely because those responsible for team leadership and development do not have the appropriate tools to help them flourish. The straightforward approach outlined in this paper provides a powerful method for ensuring that teams undertake the necessary activities to insure their success.

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