

Attributes of a high-performing team

How do you know you are building a good team?

After all, from what you see, everyone attends, shows up on time, and participates in your meetings and team events. Each of the team members seems to get on OK and you are achieving your tasks. So you must be building a good team – right?

Here's a checklist of things that should exist in a good team environment. Does your team exhibit the following characteristics?

- A high level of inter-dependence among team members
- Team members have developed mutual trust
- The team is clear about goals and establishes targets
- Team member roles are defined
- Each team member is willing to contribute
- There's an environment of healthy contention and communication
- Team members can examine failure without slipping into personal attacks
- The team has a capacity to create new ideas
- Each member knows he can influence the team agenda
- The leader has good people skills and is committed to a team approach.

When asked to explain the differences between an effective team and a dysfunctional team, people tend to observe the following:

In effective teams	In less effective teams
There is a common purpose to which each team member is committed. The team meets regularly and they use team meeting agendas as a guide for discussion rather than as a fixed process.	There is no common purpose. Meetings are not held regularly, and the meeting agendas are not clear.
Members are clear about the rules of engagement and are committed to some form of team charter.	Members are not clear about the rules of engagement and there is no written guide/protocol or team charter.
Team members listen, pay attention to one another and discuss the subject at hand.	People do not listen and everyone tends to talk at the same time.
Each team member has a chance to state his or her views.	Some members' ideas don't seem to count, so they feel undervalued or as if they don't belong. As a result they check-out or disengage from the process. No one summarises or checks to see if everyone

	who wants to speak has actually spoken. Discussions go on and on until people get tired. One or two people do all the talking.
Each member commits to group decisions and is held accountable.	Decision making is muddy and people are not committed to the plans.
Team members are aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses, and take these into account.	Team members don't know much about each other.

Proactive approach

When the team resources are focused and members are all working to accomplish the same purpose, teamwork can be very rewarding and productive. This is best accomplished when team members use a proactive rather than reactive approach to accomplish their purpose (adapted from Adams, 1987).

The proactive approach manifests the seven characteristics described below.

- The team members take a very positive approach in jointly determining the way they are going to work together as a team and what they want to have happen. When individuals and the entire team choose to operate this way and are willing to set petty differences aside, unbelievable results become possible. When individuals adopt this attitude and commit to use their resources, knowledge, and skills to contribute to the goals of the team, alignment with the team's overall purpose comes about. This will not happen unless both the team leader and the rest of the team choose to do so.
- Having a well-defined purpose or vision of what the team will accomplish is a very powerful force for the team leader and members. Goals are aligned with the team purpose, and team members are empowered to accomplish the goals. This process leads to a high level of team productivity.
- Team members have a positive attitude towards change and are willing to accept and allow change to occur as needed in order to accomplish desired results.
- Team members understand that patience is required and that, for some goals, a long- term commitment is needed to accomplish the desired results.
- The interests of both the team leader and team members are focused on desired results rather than on short-term problem-solving activities. If people learn to focus simultaneously on both the current situation and the desired results, problems that arise will be solved as part of the total process of achieving the desired results.
- Team members have a strong feeling of control within the team. They are able to establish priorities and then commit time and resources to accomplishing these tasks.
- Team members verbally and publicly support each other. They recognise that negative comments about others tear the team down.