

The Five Levels of Teams

Part Two of Six

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In the first of our series on teams, we looked at the six basic elements of what constitutes a team. Now we'll move into understanding the five levels of teams.

Using the questions in the first article will help a group determine if it is a team or has the potential to become one. The next step is to understand the degree of teamwork to which a group of people can aspire.

The five levels of teamwork can be plotted on an X-Y axis to form what Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith call the team performance curve. It's essentially a J-shaped curve, starting on the Y (vertical) axis, then sloping down to touch the X (horizontal) axis, and then bending back upwards to the right. The five levels of teams are located along the curve. (See the diagram at the end of this article).

1) The Working Group

The members interact mainly to share information and best practices and to make decisions. There are no common purpose or performance goals that require mutual accountability. The purpose of this group is only to specify the roles of its members and to delegate tasks.

Its members only take responsibility for their own results. Therefore, the focus is on *individual* performance. The key here is there is no significant, incremental performance need or opportunity that requires the group to become a team. Working groups are found throughout organizations, whether in business or government.

2) Pseudo Team

There's a potential for significant, incremental gain here. The team has not, however, focused on collective performance. The members don't want to take the risks necessary to become a potential team. They are not interested in creating a *common purpose* or setting performance goals.

The pseudo team resides at the bottom of the performance curve and is the weakest of the five levels. What is especially dangerous about the pseudo team is that the members believe that they are a real team, yet they produce inferior results.

3) The Potential Team

There is a significant, incremental gain in performance with this type of team. The members are working hard to achieve a higher level of performance. However, the members must work on developing a clear purpose, goals, and common approach. The members must also agree on mutual accountability. This form of teamwork is very common in organizations. This is also where the greatest gain in performance comes, from being a potential team to a real team.

4) The Real Team

This consists of a small group of people who *share a common purpose*, goals, and approach to work. The members have complementary skills. They hold themselves mutually accountable for their results. The performance impact and results of the real team are much greater than the potential team and working group.

5) The High Performance Team

This has all the characteristics of a real team, but the members are *deeply committed* to one another's personal growth and development. They far out-perform all other teams. The members form powerful relationships. Moving from a real team to a high performance team requires a very strong personal commitment. In effect, what is needed is a leap of faith.

Team Performance Curve

