

# Facilitating Business Results

A Knowledge Share Article from:



Spring 2008 · Volume 1 · N° 1  
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## When is a team not a team?

Why many teams are not really teams and three things you can do to make your team more productive.

**Most companies have "teamwork" as a corporate value, although many do not have real teams. Their teams are more like groups of individuals.**

To understand the difference, think of a group like a track and field sports team. The performance of individuals within the group is paramount. The attention is on individual performance. There is no need to share information (a high jumper does not need to know the techniques of a sprinter) and the diverse skills present in the group are not shared across the whole team.

A real team is more like a soccer team. While individual performance is still important, best results are only achieved with cooperation, coordination and communication between team members.

In the business world, a group of individuals rely on a strong directive leader, which can be a good solution when time is short. This leadership style is seen often in China based teams. However this limits the maximum result to the summation of individual efforts.

A real business team shares leadership roles, is bound together by a common purpose and shared values and demonstrates high levels of collaboration and synergy. Unlike a group, a team has the potential to outperform its individual's strengths. A strong team can absorb the absence of a team member much better than a group.

### Case Study

A world leading fast moving consumer company has a diverse and multi-functional "team". However, the reality is that they function more as a group of individuals.

Expatriates and local Chinese have very different working styles. Expats direct, rather than mentor, their Chinese colleagues. Cooperation is low and the work atmosphere is "serious". Successes are never celebrated contributing to low morale and increased staff turnover. Team members



feel disconnected from the company's vision and values.

The result is a familiar. The team feels lost, and project deadlines are missed costing the company hundreds of thousands of dollars in the face of competitive market pressures.

### Solution: How to form a cohesive team

The company adopted a two track approach to address these issues. The first track used a more traditional approach demanding a continued focus on business results. The second track focused on team development by leveraging the skills, knowledge and wisdom of the whole team. This was completed over 18 months.

Three of the interventions were:

#### 1. Build social connections

The first step was to break the ice. Social occasions, like company dinners and monthly birthday celebrations, were held so that people could get to know each other in an informal setting. While everyone enjoyed these events, cooperation was not carried back as expats and Chinese colleagues still ate and socialized separately.

To overcome this, regular events were held to build team spirit and to bind more strongly to the company's values.

#### 2. Success Sessions

Work successes were celebrated in monthly meetings. Public recognition set a powerful incentive for repeated good performance. Over time the

team's focus shifted more to positive achievements and away from complaints.

At the same time, in order to build deeper ties and understanding, the team tackled business issues.

#### 3. Retreats

Getting a team together off-site is a major investment in time and money. Previously, opportunities were wasted to facilitate business results at away days. Now, effective quarterly retreats are planned around a company theme.

During these retreats, the whole team discussed strategy, targets and their connection to the big picture. Community activities were used to deepen team bond while working together on a worthwhile project.

Business results were seen through faster turnaround of projects, fewer missed deadlines and higher retention. Team results included higher motivation and increased commitment to the company's direction.

### Conclusion

While there is no quick fix to building a productive team, the price of inaction is clear. Increased turnover, missed project deadlines and lower morale all impact the bottom line. As productivity replaces cost as the main competitive driver in China, the ability to build and maintain high performing teams will be a strong advantage for companies that tap their team's real potential.

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