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Total Quality Influence: Seven Steps To Successful Team Building

As we look toward the future of Information Technology, both the work environment and the attitudes of associates increasingly become critical factors for success. As a department, it is no longer enough to employ individuals who are technologically proficient and logical thinkers. The current work environment demands a team attitude, and the ability to communicate effectively with both fellow workers and users. A success story within the Administrative Computing Services Department at the State University of New York at Buffalo provides the essential elements in building both communication and teamwork in an IS department. Through the combination of TQM philosophies and Creative Problem Solving techniques, a novel approach to team building has been developed which enhances customer service. Participants will leave with a step-by-step method of how to improve teams in their own department including recognizing and overcoming negative attitudes and other common pitfalls.
SEVEN STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL TEAM BUILDING

University Introduction and Background

The State University of New York at Buffalo is SUNY's most comprehensive university center. The university's enrollment is the highest, and its range of academic programs the widest, of any public institution in New York and New England. In 1989, the university was accepted into the Association of American Universities, an association of about fifty of the nation's leading research universities, the first and only public university in New York and New England to be admitted. The undergraduate division awards the largest number of bachelor's degrees in the state each year.

Many of New York State's best students take their place here annually among a diverse community of 26,000 students, pursuing their interests from among 93 undergraduate, 112 master's, and 98 doctoral-level programs.

The university's wide disciplinary spectrum includes the arts and sciences divisions: arts and letters, natural sciences and mathematics, and social sciences. There are also twelve professional schools: architecture and planning, dental medicine, graduate school of education, engineering and applied sciences, health related professions, information and library studies, law, management, medicine and biomedical sciences, nursing, pharmacy, and social work.

UB has a distinguished faculty of more than 4,000 full-time and affiliated individuals. Among them are many scholars and educators who are nationally and internationally recognized in their fields. On the faculty are a Nobel Prize winner; several holders of prestigious Fulbright and Guggenheim awards; a number of winners of grants from the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, and other agencies that support first-rank scholarship; and an array of nationally published authors and scientists.

Because of its size and the variety of its programs, UB is a university in the richest sense. Along with graduate and professional education, it also displays remarkable breadth, diversity, and quality in undergraduate programs in the humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and fine arts, as well as in a variety of undergraduate pre-professional programs. In short, New York State's major public university provides unparalleled opportunities for learning, for career preparation, for developing a rewarding way of life. ¹

Departmental Background

Along with providing unparalleled opportunities for its students and faculty, the University at Buffalo also offers many avenues for involvement and recognition to its' staff. One of the many programs in place at the University is the Service Excellence program. This is the University's unique version of a Total Quality Management (TQM) initiative. The goal of this program is to recognize the outstanding efforts and achievements of employees of the University Services area of UB. The Service Excellence program is tailored by each area to meet a specific culture and its unique requirements. For some it's providing quality service to a front-line customer - the student. For others, it's opening lines of communication. For still others, it is including employees in making decisions, encouraging teamwork, and overall job ownership.

Using the concept of the Service Excellence program, Administrative Computing Services at UB developed its own unique quality service initiative. The Partnership for Service Advancement (PSA) group was established to allow

¹ This information comes directly from the 1995-96 University at Buffalo Undergraduate Catalog with permission.
http://wings.buffalo.edu/provost/ue/catalog/1995/ue/univov.html
the department to capitalize on TQM concepts, and at the same time allow the flexibility to customize the program. The goal of the PSA group is to promote continuous improvement in four areas: personal and professional development, interpersonal relations, managerial effectiveness, and organizational productivity. An effective way of achieving these goals was to use the fourteen points of management from W. Edwards Deming as a starting point, and adapt them to conform to departmental needs. The two points chosen to focus on initially were as follows: (a.) institute vigorous TQM program education and self-improvement and (b.) put everyone in the organization to work to accomplish the transformation.

a. Institute vigorous TQM program education and self-improvement

To familiarize the staff of Administrative Computing Services with the TQM concepts currently being employed, several different avenues of presentation were chosen. A number of videos were purchased and presented to the staff, including Implementing Total Quality Management and Team Building, both produced by CareerTrack Publications, as well as Teams That Work, Teams That Don't, produced by Computer Channel Incorporated. A PSA notebook was designed so that every staff member was aware of what the group was doing, and what was expected of them regarding participation. A guest speaker who is an expert in the area of Total Quality Management was also called in to further explain TQM to the department as well as give first hand accounts of its effectiveness.

To focus on the self-improvement aspect, the staff of ACS participated in a Creative Problem Solving (CPS) course entitled "Creative Thinking and Creative Problem Solving", offered by the Creative Education Foundation, located in Buffalo, New York. The objective of the course was to teach the group how to use the CPS dynamic structure and guidelines for thinking, and how to apply the tools and techniques in problem solving. The techniques of the CPS process help individuals discover and develop new and more effective solutions to challenges.

There are many characteristics which describe a creative individual: the ability to generate a volume of thoughts or ideas, flexibility, originality, elaboration, sensitivity and freedom of expression. It has also been determined that an individual can learn to be more creative. The six step process of Creative Problem Solving allowed every person on the ACS staff, from the Director to the staff secretary, to further enhance their skills in the above mentioned areas.

b. Put everyone in the organization to work to accomplish the transformation

The first successful team building initiative taken on by the PSA group was to facilitate a departmental move from its current site at the Computing Center on campus to a building 2 miles away. This meant a physical distance from the Operations department, printing facilities, as well as other Computing and Information Technology associates. The move was not initially looked upon favorably by the staff of ACS. It was PSA's challenge to create a team-based project that was both enjoyable and rewarding. Throughout this paper, reference will be made to this move and how teams were built using the seven step process. To successfully accomplish the challenging task of creating a team based workforce, each of the following seven steps should be implemented in a timely manner. The order in which they are described does not indicate that they be implemented one after the other or that the ones listed early are the most important.

I. Sponsorship

Sponsorship has and continues to be a key element in the success of our team building process. Support, assistance, and encouragement are some of the benefits that the department can capitalize on after establishing and securing appropriate sponsorship. The first role of the sponsor, who in almost every instance is a manager, is to establish the team and to convey the charge of the group. It is also necessary for the sponsor to relate to the team any information the group needs to successfully complete their assigned task, such as guidelines, time frames and deadlines. From this point on, the sponsor does not take an active role in the team functioning, but rather assumes
a passive position. For example, if the team feels that they have a decision to make, but not the authority, it is their responsibility to approach the sponsor with the details and allow the sponsor to handle it from there. The sponsor should also be available as a sounding board for the group. If they come upon a roadblock during a certain task they can easily bounce ideas off the sponsor and solicit feedback. The team must remember to include the sponsor in team activities, not on a daily basis, but intermittently. They need to keep the sponsor abreast of the overall accomplishments of the group, but not every detail of the tasks performed.

In order for the PSA group to successfully coordinate the Administrative Computing Services departmental move, management’s involvement was necessary. Management got involved by acting as a steering committee to the PSA group. A steering committee’s responsibility is not that of becoming involved with diminutive issues, but rather stepping in at a higher level of authority to deal with augmented issues. One way which the management committee facilitated the sponsorship role was to meet with the director of Computer Operations to work out the schematics for restructuring the current printing process. Although the move group was able to set up and standardize the new way of printing, they needed the assistance of a higher authority to actually change the way the process worked.

Sponsorship is a vital role in the development of any team because it allows for one point of contact within management. The sponsor knows the overall direction of the department and has the ability to lead the team in the right direction, while at the same time allowing the staff at lower levels the ability to make decisions within the group, which can eventually affect the whole department. This then leads to a sense of accomplishment and belonging to the individuals, which further strengthens the team as a whole.

II. Attitude and Change

When it comes to coordinating a team-building effort, attitude is everything. Attitude will, in almost every case, determine how successful we are and how successful the outcome of a project will be. When the Administrative Computing Services staff learned of the departmental move the first reaction was that of resistance. Change is awkward and often when confronted with change people instinctively go into a defensive mode of thinking and reacting. However, Leo B. Moore, Associate Professor of Industrial Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, suggests that our reaction toward change is not so much resisting change as it is resisting being changed. He also suggests that given the opportunity to participate in the change, it is more likely that change will be accepted rather than rejected. Realizing the significance of these remarks and implementing a strategy at the beginning of a project, both departmental attitude and behavior can be positively influenced.

One of the things that PSA did to positively influence behavior and attitude was to hold a departmental brainstorming session early into the move project. This provided the staff with the opportunity to express their concerns about the move in a positive and non-threatening forum. Each concern from the brainstorming session was passed onto the move groups in an effort to convey to the staff that each and every idea was a worthy one. PSA also held frequent move group update meetings to positively influence behavior and attitude. During the meetings each group had a chance to let the staff know what they were working on and what accomplishments had been made. This is also an excellent forum for getting feedback or soliciting votes.

Although many organizations are faced with changes and challenges outside their range of influence, it is important to realize the outcome is not. Understanding more clearly how much influence we have over any situation and the value of planning ahead we can move forward with an attitude of positive expectancy. "Give people a chance not just to do a job but to have some impact, and they’ll really respond, get on their roller skates, and race around to make sure it happens," Robert Hauptfuhrer, Chairman and CEO, Oryx Energy.

2 “Getting to the Heart of Creativity Development Processes.” (Parnes 1992)
III. Tool-Box

During the departmental move project a number of Creative Problem Solving tools and techniques were used by PSA and the various move groups. One of the CPS techniques that PSA used was the technique of brainstorming. Brainstorming can be described as the process of generating as many creative ideas as possible in a specified amount of time. However, in order for brainstorming to be successful it is necessary to know both the process and rules for brainstorming, as well as being equipped with the right mix of apparatus. Although Administrative Computing was aware of the brainstorming process and rules from their involvement in the two day CPS workshop, PSA made it a point to reintroduce the CPS process at the beginning of the move. They also provided the staff with the right mixture of equipment to insure the successfulness of brainstorming.

As was just mentioned, in order to get the full benefit of brainstorming certain rules must be followed. For example, no one should be permitted to criticize an idea while brainstorming. Likewise, participants should not judge the value or worth of an idea. A non-threatening atmosphere that encourages creativity is essential to effective brainstorming. Participants should focus on generating a large quantity of ideas rather than quality and the wilder the idea the better. There are a number of different ways to brainstorm in order to generate a volume of ideas. One way is to have participants just shout-out ideas and have them recorded on a flip chart. A second technique is the "Stick-em-up" brainstorming method. In this procedure, people not only shout out their responses, but also write them down on post-it note paper. The paper can then be passed to another participant so they can add to the idea or hitch-hike on it to come up with a completely different idea. The post-it notes can later be grouped together and combined on a wall or chart to facilitate the process of narrowing down to a workable solution. A third technique is for participants to list 10 or 12 ideas on a sheet of paper in silence and then to read the ideas to the group before a second round of silent idea finding. In this manner, participants use verbal input to stimulate their own next session of idea finding. However, no matter what type of brainstorming method is performed, it is essential that participants defer judgment, eliminate criticism and withhold internal and external assessments. Explaining the rules at the beginning of each brainstorming session, and displaying illustrated posters defining the rules, will reinforce appropriate behavior essential for establishing and maintaining a creative atmosphere.

As well as knowing and following the rules of brainstorming, a non-threatening atmosphere encourages creativity and is essential for effective brainstorming. In an effort to create this kind of atmosphere, staff should be provided with a mixture of different creative process thinking tools. Building a "toy-box" that contains small items to stimulate creative thinking can be used. Items may include; Slinkies, Play-Doh, super-balls, spinning tops and other little gadgets of this nature. Along with a toy-box and rules, a more complete utensil box for brainstorming should be available. The utensil box should contain markers, masking tape, pens and pencils, post-it notes as well as pictures and be made available to any facilitator who holds a brainstorming session. This convenience will demonstrate a commitment to the long term application of brainstorming as a problem solving tool.

Along with CPS tools and techniques, a tool-box for successful team building may also consist of Total Quality Management methodologies. TQM methodologies were used throughout the departmental move and played a major role in its success. Although an organization may not participate in a full TQM program, it can however, employ a number of its principles and concepts. One component of TQM that PSA initiated was the establishment of work teams to tackle the move project. An important TQM element in the establishment of work teams, is to ensure that all employees at all levels are involved and empowered to make decisions. A second component of TQM that PSA followed was to communicate the vision of the move to all groups along with the groups' goals and objectives. In addition to employing these TQM components, PSA supplied each move group with a TQM self-directed team functioning document. The document describes the characteristics of differing team structures, team behavioral models, stages of team development, and organizational environment. Team missions and goals, roles and responsibilities, procedures, relationships and the steps of team development are some of the elements included in the document. Although it may have not been fully utilized by each move group the document was a source of information, reference and clarification.

Through the combination of Total Quality Management philosophies and Creative Problem Solving tools and techniques, an organization can be successful in creating a unique tool-box of ideas and concepts. Through the
combination of these tools and the formation of work groups, with participation by each employee, an atmosphere can be created through CPS, that encourages creativity, openness and risk taking. Investing the time and energy into fostering a healthy and positive attitude can be achieved through the planning and implementation of different strategies. The benefits from these types of projects will be evident in employee morale, and the positive attitude inherent in taking ownership of an opportunity and positively affecting the outcome of it.

IV. Empowerment

In "Thriving On Chaos" (1987), Tom Peters wrote that "the chief reason for our failure in world-class competition is our failure to tap our work force's potential". In building a department of "world-class" participants, the idea is to create an environment that encourages total involvement. Individuals need to feel as though they are valued members of a team to provide the initiative and fire that is necessary to serve customers effectively and to create an environment that is stimulating for the staff.

Empowerment can be defined, according to A Diagnostic Approach To Organizational Behavior by Judith R. Gordon (1993), as "the act of strengthening an individual's beliefs in his or her sense of effectiveness; it is a process of changing the internal beliefs of people". For that to become a departmental reality, the corporate culture needs to allow individuals both the resources and the environment to think creatively and to make decisions. Individuals will rise to the challenge of solving critical problems when they are afforded both the luxury of freedom to make their own choices and the power to implement their own solutions. Performance is enhanced when people understand that they are valued and have impact on the final result of their efforts. Large university settings often lean toward an atmosphere of bureaucracy and stagnation. To combat that, the University at Buffalo Administrative Computing Department developed a strategy to allow for the growth of individuals and for emerging leaders to become proactive.

In early 1996, the PSA group (Partnership for Service Advancement) choose to invite the entire department to participate in task-specific work teams, developed for the purpose of facilitating a departmental move from one location of the campus to another which was announced one year earlier. This move would cause much of what was previously "routine" to now become a challenge. Many of the current staff members had worked for the department for over 10 years and had negative feelings toward the new location. For those individuals, it was particularly important to present the current activities as both enjoyable and worthwhile.

Individuals were led through a Creative Problem Solving exercise to brainstorm possible move-related issues. Those issues were later grouped into similar categories and work groups were formed. Groups were formed according to people's interests. The staff was reminded that though group choices were self-determined, participation was not. They would be assigned to a group if they did not choose one by a certain date. This was considered necessary to impress upon the group that this was a critical effort and was fully supported by the director and managers. By the close of the exercise, which took place over a 6 month period, a new sense of control and energy was evident. People appeared to have a positive, expectant attitude about their role in the new situation. Empowerment, as defined earlier, has been realized. The internal beliefs of many people had obviously been changed. They recognized their own ability to change outcomes and have a strong influence on decisions. A departmental gain was that a new sense of camaraderie was developed as each understood that individual efforts were being made for the good of the whole group.

V. Team Structure

The composition of each work team is an important element of success. Management and non-management personnel should be equally mixed on work teams and supervisory personnel not given authority or responsibility over the actions of their respective groups. Team composition should not delineated by length of service, race, gender or age. The diversity of the individuals involved serves to strengthen the work team. Optimal team size is approximately 6 members each, which allows a team to take advantage of the individual assets of various members.
without the bureaucracy of a group too large to operate effectively. Senior staff members should be involved because they may have more contacts and a greater working knowledge of specific systems. Newer employees might ask more thought provoking questions that lead to creative solutions simply because they do not know "how it's always been done". Even problem solving and decision-making skills vary with a highly diversified group and some members will improve in those areas as they observe and model their peers.

In "The Wisdom of Teams; Creating The High Performance Organization"(1993), Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith delineate several points that are critical in achieving high caliber team performance. The group members should be small in number, have complementary skills and be committed to a common purpose. For the Administrative Computing Services department, due to the nature of the aforementioned move situation and the size of the department, these criteria were easily met. The department of 37 individuals formed 7 work teams. Most people participated on one team but some worked on two teams or more. The common purpose was to make the transition from one physical location to another as smooth as possible for all concerned. That common purpose patterned an easy translation into specific performance goals.

Team leadership is a much argued concept. Most team building literature posts the requirement of an assigned leader to each group. Theoretically, this leader provides focus, motivation and facilitates gaining input from each group member. Formal choice of the leader can be by assignment or vote. Other documentation, however, points to the value of "shared leadership" where different individuals lead the team at different times, depending on the issue at hand. At Administrative Computing, individuals had both the positive attitude and the flexibility necessary to take charge in various situations so that shared leadership was possible. This form of leadership also allowed individual growth as the leadership role was not awarded to the same people who always have it. The PSA group allowed maximum structural flexibility in group set up so that each work team was given the opportunity to choose a leader or operate without one. The criterion of effectiveness was used to judge whether or not to intervene in group dynamics. If the work team appeared to be making progress on various projects (status reports were solicited by the PSA group) and regular meetings were held, the groups were left to their own devices. By contrast, if no visible progress was evident and meetings were unproductive or non-existent, the PSA group was obliged to step in. Fortunately, it did not prove necessary. Even when a group's primary tasks did not begin until after the move was completed, activities took place to facilitate the change. For example, many challenges were associated with the new office environment (e.g. noise level, climate control, lighting and such). The department was moving from individual offices to a large open area with cubicles. For this reason, the group conducted surveys on related issues such as the use of radios in an open cube area and investigated items such as the budgetary allowances for the purchase of plants for common areas. Though many issues were not resolved until after the physical move occurred, the team worked through issues and provided constructive aid to the department.

The benefits of this exercise were numerous and not the least of which was to provide a working model for team behavior in problem-solving. Over the past several months, work teams have been formed to address various departmental issues. There is a Unix support group, groups supporting Windows95 and WindowsNT, various software support groups and even a social committee that coordinates parties and outside activities for the department. Each group plays a role in keeping the department running smoothly and making this an excellent place to work. Due to the efforts of the work teams, resources are available when there is a question or problem with hardware or software. Team members answer questions and solve issues quickly and with goodwill. The department also participates in group volunteer activities such as the Day of Caring, where volunteers from the department take a vacation day to assist the needy in Western New York as part of a regional volunteer effort coordinated by United Way. The work team ACES (Assisting the Community through your Effort and Support) spurs the department on to more community involvement and coordinates activities to generate moneys for United Way and other charities throughout the year. Though to some, these activities may sound like frivolity, they actually illustrate an attitude of cohesiveness and enthusiasm. As organizations begin to realize the importance of a positive work environment, the team concept becomes even more critical in the continual struggle to attract and keep the right people. Monetary rewards and consistent large raises are no longer an option for most institutions. It is critical then for people to feel valued, important and to work in an atmosphere of acceptance. The long term effects of having well run teams in place accomplishes the realization that when the team members have the freedom to make choices and the resources to implement them, people view themselves as valuable and commit to the team.
VI. Rewards

Have you ever met a person who doesn't like to be recognized and rewarded for a job well done? Have you ever gone out of your way and put all your effort into a project to have no one acknowledge your efforts? Today more than ever, due to a competitive job market and so many personal demands, employees need to know their efforts have not been overlooked. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources found that in a recent study 68 percent of respondents said that it was important to believe their work was appreciated and 63 percent agreed that most people would like more recognition. Instead of making excuses for not acknowledging the contribution of employees, let's focus on the benefits of recognition and alternative rewards.

The benefits gained from recognizing and acknowledging one's contributions are endless. Think about how you felt the last time someone acknowledged your contributions. Now think about the last time you felt that someone should have acknowledged your contributions but did not. What a completely different feeling. If someone has done a good job take the time to tell them. What a simple way to encourage and motivate higher levels of performance. You will also be building and reinforcing appropriate behavior and practices. People take pride in their work and satisfaction in their accomplishments. Why not share it with them?

Recognition and rewards can come in the form of many shapes and sizes. Although some people might say that money is the number one motivational reward, others may disagree. Unfortunately, monetary rewards tend to be scarce in many establishments but that should not be an excuse for abandoning the idea. After Administrative Computing moved to its new location the PSA group was confronted with the challenge of rewarding the staff on a limited budget. Since the group was committed to rewarding all thirty-seven people who participated in the move, PSA had some creative award thinking to do. First, teamwork awards were designed for each move group member. The awards were printed in color with the participants name on it, in addition to a teamwork motivational phrase, picture and a message of appreciation. Each move group award was a little different in nature to make it more personalized. To secure the effectiveness of the award, the PSA group was careful in its planning to distribute the awards in a relatively close time frame after the move had occurred. A pizza party was thrown days after the move where the awards were distributed individually with the entire department in attendance. Even today the awards don the cubicles of most employees. Recognizing and rewarding employees for their contributions does not require a large budget, just good planning and some creative thinking. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, author and management consultant sums it up best: "Recognition is so easy to do and so inexpensive to distribute that there is simply no excuse for not doing it."

VII. Communication

As critical as each step is, perhaps the most critical is this, to flood each aspect of the process with communication. This is not to say that one person continually talks or that unceasing meetings are held daily but rather that an exchange of information occurs on a regular basis. There needs to be as much emphasis placed on information dissemination as there is on the acquisition of it. In short, listening is critical. Much of what is described as a lack of communication can often be attributed to a lack of listening. To enhance departmental listening skills, programs were and are periodically offered to interested staff by the Professional Development Committee. Information sharing meetings are encouraged and the director has formed a second committee devoted to enhancing internal communication.

When information is not equally distributed to individuals in a department, people can begin to feel "out of the loop", unimportant and unappreciated. The Partnership for Service Advancement group felt that it was important for all staff members to have any new information communicated to them immediately. This was particularly important regarding the status (specifically the time frame) of the move and all related items that various groups were working to resolve. The specific dates of the move were influenced by the renovation of the new office space.

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3 "Informal Rewards." (Nelson 1994)
4 "Informal Rewards." (Nelson 1994)
Funding had to be approved. The location had to be designed, altered and fitted with new furniture. The departmental staff members were permitted to view the site at various times during the construction period to get a sense of the new space. Just as in the construction of a new house, that action caused people to focus forward on gain rather than backward on loss. Regular update meetings were held to communicate progress to the staff from each work group.

To further communication, a newsletter was created to spread progress reports to the staff. For any individual who was on vacation or unable to attend update meetings, the newsletter ensured the global distribution of relevant information. It was important for ALL staff members to be informed of each development. This eliminates possible feelings of inferiority or favoritism based on length of time in the workplace or political connections. Each newsletter contained recent move related news and various quotations or paragraphs regarding the positive aspects of change. In November 1995, the newsletter contained a segment on the myths & realities of change from John Kettle's FutureLetter. FutureLetter was published in the January 1995 issue of TQM in Higher Education (see appendix A). Writings of this type served as a reminder that the upcoming change needed to be addressed with positive expectancy. One's attitude is certainly the most critical aspect in achieving a positive outcome to challenges, and attitudes can be changed with communication.

Summary

To gauge the effectiveness of group activities after the completion of the project, PSA developed a survey. All staff members completed the survey and they were returned anonymously to the PSA committee. The intent was to gain unbiased opinions and candid responses. The survey questions (see Appendix B) emphasized the initial set up of the groups and group dynamics. PSA solicited these responses to guide the structure and set up of future work teams. According to the survey results, most people felt that they received enough up front information to complete their assigned tasks. On average, people felt that it was somewhat difficult to fit group tasks into the daily work load. One significant area of interest for PSA was the motivation level of the staff. Many group members viewed the relocation sight negatively. For that reason, there was an initial concern regarding the willingness of staff to participate in the exercise. The possible answers ran from 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest). The graph below shows that better than half of the group rated their motivation levels at either a "4", "5" or "6". This indicates a high level of energy and direction within the teams. Upon review, those responses are due to the fact that people had the opportunity to provide input as to relevant issues and had the freedom to develop solutions.

When asked about the participation level of all group members, 75% of respondents answered "5" or "6" on a scale of 1 to 6, where 6 indicated participation from every group member. Often, groups run into the difficulty of having a few people who always take action and a few stagnant people who never take action with the remainder falling somewhere in the middle. The survey reflected the fact that the majority of team members were active participants. The optimum departmental situation is when a group of highly motivated, active people willingly
volunteer for tasks. In reality, this might be a rare occurrence and the key is to find what environment encourages people to behave in that positive way. The answers are in the next section of questions.

In response to the questions, "What worked well? What didn't work well?", the team members offered largely positive answers. Examples of those follow...

"Everyone volunteered for a portion & then followed up to completion"
"Letting people choose their own task worked well. No leader worked poorly."
"Everybody pitched in; Had some role; Not so well -- degree of complexity of tasks was uneven; Too much time devoted to some tasks"
"Only meeting when necessary (using Email as alternative) and empowering the groups to set their own specific objectives worked well; the evolving budget for the move was not communicated very well to our group"
"Each member concentrated on one (or two) items, that worked well."

After review of the various comments, the group felt that better communication was essential and that closer observance be made when leaders were not put into place. The role of sponsorship discussed earlier handles this objection.

Finally, the survey asked "In what ways can team involvement be strengthened within the department?". The reason for including a question of this type is to focus on the next instance of team involvement and find ways to eliminate obstacles to teamwork. Some of the department's answers follow...

"Make it mandatory; Keep it fun; Have a group of the year award"
"Limit teams to significant projects"
"Construct teams to work on specific goals, in a short time frame and on something that really matters."
"Let everyone see the results rather quickly"
"Give everybody an opportunity to lead in different situations"
"Give teams the ability to make decisions"
"Encourage ideas from all"
"More management support & rewards."

The responses again point to the significance people place on being in charge and being valued for their ideas and input. Individuals want to work on significant projects and to have a voice in the outcome of that project. There is a certain amount of respect generated when people have ideas both solicited and implemented. Without that, people tend to feel unappreciated and unfulfilled in the workplace. These are the situations when good people look for other opportunities and departments run the risk of losing valuable resources. It can be the most seemingly inconsequential actions that have the most impact on people.

Fundamentally, the implementation of team building in a department must begin with a commitment from management and the designation of sponsorship. Step two is to access the prevailing attitude toward change. If the environment produces fear and hesitancy, people will not take the necessary risks or make the decisions needed for positive impact. If that attitude is not where it needs to be, the department might address this issue first, with initiatives designed to break down barriers and improve trust. The attitude toward change must be positive and enthusiastic. This relies heavily on the leadership of management personnel. If the group at the top is not proactive and energetic, the staff will not be either. If individuals do not communicate effectively or listen actively, they will have a difficult time achieving the goals necessary to succeed in this arena. Clearly, these are foundations on which to build a team atmosphere.

The third step is to provide a tool box of techniques to stimulate creative thinking and focus efforts in the right direction. A tool box of problem-solving techniques and leadership skills such as the ability to run an effective meeting is critical for success.
Empowerment is the fourth step for success in team building. The teams must be empowered to make their own choices and have the authority to implement decisions. Granted, this does not have to be a blanket policy, however groups must feel that they have some impact on outcome or they will remain stagnant. Individuals need to have the power to make decisions. Departmental leadership must be willing to let go of some bureaucratic processes to allow that to happen. Positive repercussions of this include faster implementation of new ideas and fewer people spending valuable time in redundant activities.

Step five is to set up the teams correctly. Team structure can be created so that the number of group members is small and that those individuals have complementary skills. The important issue is for the sponsor to continually monitor progress and group dynamics so that changes can occur as necessary. Important elements include defining objectives, placing a limit on the number of persons per group and working out group dynamics. Team leadership can be assigned, voted or implemented as situational to assure proactivity. Group leadership needs to be defined in advance. Will the leader be chosen by the sponsor or elected by the group? Will the mantle of leadership change based on the situation facing the group? Will seniority be a factor in choosing a leader? All of these variables must be carefully considered and decisions made based on departmental structure and past experiences.

Step six is to implement a reward structure to provide recognition and positive reinforcement of effort. As in the implementation of all reward systems, the assessment must be unbiased and not politically motivated. People need to feel they are congratulated for good work and valued for their accomplishments. Rewards and recognition need to be built into the process so that individuals are continually reinforced positively regarding the importance of their contributions.

The final step, communication, must be in place from the beginning. It is last on the list and at the same time the first step that must occur. This illustrates the fact that the process is cyclical and always evolving. People must know from the start what is being asked of them and why. They should be allowed the freedom to ask questions regarding both the objectives and the process. Active listening must occur at all levels of the both work groups and the department. Communication must remain open at all levels. Groups should communicate with each other, with the sponsor and with departmental management. Both informal communication and formal communication such as meetings, need to be stressed and encouraged. When communication breaks down, the entire team building process suffers. Without a strong communication network, trust withers and people begin to question the motives of others. Each step is a critical part of the whole process. The team building initiative does not end with the completion of a project but continues on to become a part of departmental culture.

The furthering of team building at Administrative Computing Services included an outdoor team building course for the staff, facilitated by the Creative Education Foundation held in December 1996. Working closely with the Professional Development Committee, PSA has initiated several programs for 1997 that involve staff training in enhanced communication skills and leadership. The department works as a cohesive unit and individuals know that they are valued for who they are as well as what they contribute. For a team dynamic to work in any organization, the seven steps must be implemented over a relatively short period of time. It is important to begin with a success. Working on insignificant projects, or on complex projects where positive solutions are years away can sour a group on the team concept. For that reason, a sponsor designated for each team formed can take a leadership role in guiding the group without becoming either the leader or the chief facilitator.

Finally, groups need to feel a sense of importance about their task. All the tools mentioned above will not matter if the challenge the group is given to address is insignificant, even if that insignificance is only in their eyes. The challenge must be important and have objectives that are tied to departmental goals. A high performance culture can evolve when people do not need to look over their shoulder at every action from above and can dissipate the "it's not my job" attitude among themselves. In conclusion, each element described above can be put into place with planning and forethought. The resulting positive environment and group cohesiveness will more than compensate for the effort.
Appendix A.

MYTH

Change has to hurt.
Change is a one-time thing.
Change is radical.
Change must be imposed.
Everyone wants to buy into change.
Everyone likes change, so it's easy.
Change doesn't cost a lot.
Change is for the better.
Others have to change; not me.
Change is fast; we can't fail.
Change won't be resisted.
People know how to change.
Change goes in a straight line.
People like to be the first to change.
You can gradually wear down resisters.

REALITY ABOUT REAL CHANGE

Real change should be fun.
Real change is continuing, unfolding.
Real change happens in small steps.
Real change is self-motivated.
Real change has to be sold.
Real change is hard.
Real change is expensive.
Real change can make things worse.
I must change if I want them to change.
Real change is slow; some failure is inevitable.
Real change is resisted.
People need skills to really change.
Real change zigs and zags.
No one is comfortable pioneering.
You try harder, resisters get tougher.

Appendix B.

(Rate on a 1 through 5 scale where 1 = lowest and 5 = highest)

1. How effective do you feel your Partnership Based Improvement Team was?

2. Was your PBIT group given enough up-front information?
   Ex: Time frames, Group expectations...

3. How difficult was it to make the time to spend on this project?

4. If your group used the "Problem Solving Worksheet" how would you rate its usefulness?

5. If your group used the "Team Functioning" document how would you rate its usefulness?

6. How would you rate the experience of working with other people that aren't in your "work" group?

(Answer the following with a Yes or No)

1. Did you have set task within your group (Y/N)?
   Ex: Did a certain person take minutes?

2. Did your group use the "Problem Solving Worksheet" (Y/N)?

3. Did your group use the "Team Functioning" document (Y/N)?

4. Would having a group sponsor have improved the functioning of your group (Y/N)?

5. Do you feel that the project was extended too long (Y/N)?

6. Would it have been easier to complete the project if a specific deadline date was given (Y/N)?
(Answer the following questions by filling in the blanks)

1. What documents if any did your group use? _________________________________

2. Write the name of the person if any who took the leadership role within your group?
   Leadership Role _________________________________

3. Name of your group _________________________________

4. Your name _________________________________

5. Additional Comments _________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________

Which type of group format do you prefer:
   Structured - time lines, pre-defined leader, etc.
   Un-structured/open - group decides all aspects
References

Footnotes


4. Ibid.

Bibliography


