

Intentional Team Formation = Successful Team Results



WRITTEN BY ROBERT PORTER



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How to Increase Success when Creating a New Team

The process of designing and deploying any disruptive change is challenging and must overcome the natural human resistance to change. This is even more challenging when the charge to lead the change process is given to a team made up of members who have no history with one another or, as is often the case between physicians and hospitals, a history that has bred distrust. One key to the success of such a team is care in how the team is assembled, formed, and launched.

Taking time in the front end to select the right team members and build a cultural foundation prior to embarking on substantive work is an investment that pays off in accelerating the process of team formation and increasing the probability of a positive outcome. It is matter of going slow at first to go fast later, leveraging the "speed of trust." Building a foundation of trust enables groups to work through issues efficiently and effectively, avoiding the blowback and rework that often occurs when trust does not exist.

While there are certain core principles and models at the heart of team development, each group and setting are different. It is critical to work closely with the sponsor/team leader to develop a deep understanding of any history or dynamics among team members to fashion an approach specific to the group.

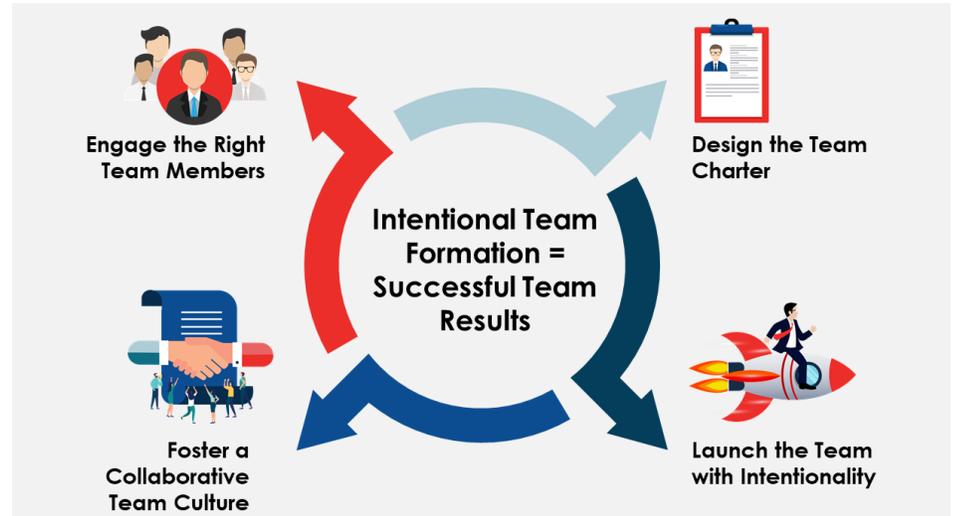
This article provides a few simple tips to keep in mind to accelerate movement through the stages of team formation.

Team Design & Formation Requires Intentional Focus

Find and Engage Team Members

It is certainly important to get a good cross-section of representation of the key constituencies or functions essential to the team's endeavor. Equally important is ensuring that the individuals representing those constituencies have a mindset that is open to the possibilities of this effort, a collaborative spirit capable of engaging with others to seek common ground, and a level of credibility with their peers so that they can act as "key influencers" to bring others along in support of the work of the team.

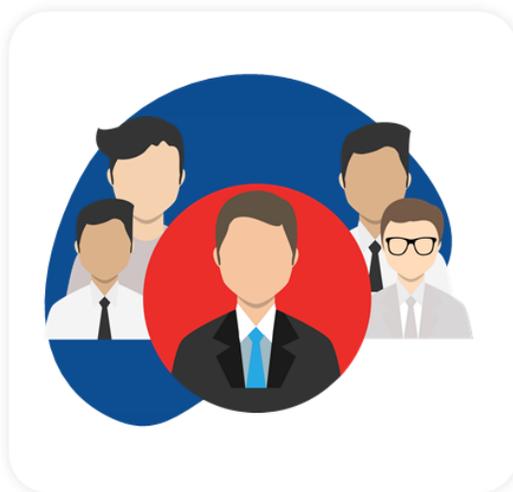
Those individuals may, or may not, be the ones holding current, formal leadership roles. They should not be people who are brought in to support the organization's position and "sell" it to get "buy-in" from their colleagues. Team members like that are quickly seen as tools of the organization. Instead, good team members should be credible individuals who have shown themselves to be open to change, capable of seeing the potential of the



initiative and willing to engage creatively and collaboratively with others in that pursuit. These key influencers play a critical role in the "diffusion of innovation," using referent power to build support from those not in the room.

It is important to keep from having a toxic voice in this kind of effort. A small number of cynics or naysayers who make it "unsafe" for people to offer creative ideas and suggestions

can destroy the character and work of the group. Organizations often feel they will do well to bring their loudest critics, those most resistant to collaboration and change, in the hopes of bringing them around. More often what happens is those negative voices prevent the group from ever getting traction. Take care not to pack the jury with "yes people" or engage the naysayer who will obstruct progress. Look for the "possibility thinkers," those with an independent but open



Engage the Right Team Members

-  Make certain a cross-section of representation
-  Identify constituents with a mindset open to possibility
-  Seek those with a collaborative spirit, with skills to engage and find common ground
-  Ensure participants hold a level of credibility to act as key influencers

mind and willingness to explore something new.

Another important consideration is how you address the dynamics around those who are not selected to be part of the team. It is often helpful to build forums or mechanisms to provide periodic updates on the work of the design team to a broader group of stakeholders. It is particularly helpful if those key influencers play a role in the communication effort through those larger forums (see below).

As you launch the group, it may be wise to let the stakeholders know that this is the first stage of building a structure in which there will be numerous opportunities for leadership and engagement. You may want to share that you will be looking to provide training and support, as well as participation opportunities, for many others as the structure unfolds.

The charter should define a clear and compelling vision of the desired future state.

Design the Team's Charter

One of the most important elements in team formation is the charter, or the shared purpose, of the team. The charter should define a clear and compelling vision of the desired future state, specific enough to cultivate a shared understanding of the nature and scope of the transformation that lies ahead. The probability of obtaining a shared vision increases when definitions are attached to the words used in the charter, minimizing potential future conflict.

Include an honest examination of the

types of changes that may be necessary to achieve the desired future state. The effectiveness of the team will be inhibited if the team members are "sold" on a vision without an understanding of the disruption that achieving the vision will entail.

It is also important that the team understand any parameters, financial or otherwise, within which their work must be accomplished. While the goal is to give the team broad, creative latitude, there are few things more demoralizing than having the recommendations of an enthusiastic team rejected because their proposal falls outside parameters and cannot be supported.

Finally, teams cannot flourish if those who comprise it do not understand and believe that what can be accomplished together is better than what the disparate parts can do on their own. Foster a belief that the long-term individual interests of the team members are best served by advancing the shared purpose of the team.

Design the Team Charter



Draft a clear and compelling vision



Attach definitions to minimize conflict



Examine changes required to be successful

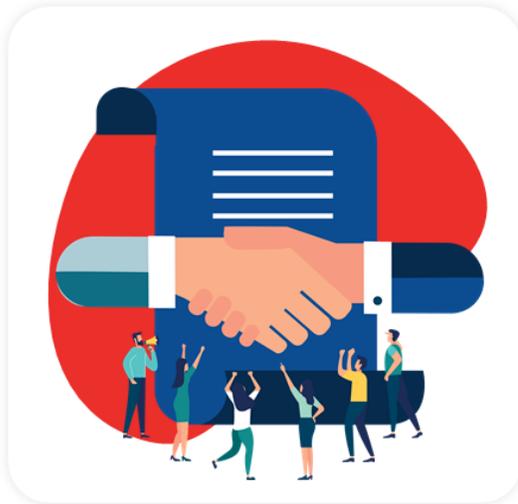


Educate team on financial and other parameters



Foster belief of benefits of advancing team purpose





Foster a Collaborative Team Culture



Set clear definitions of role expectation



Communicate time commitment upfront



Empower team members to be the voice of their constituents



Ensure accountability clarity around gathering constituent input



Gain commitment on ownership of team decisions

Foster a Collaborative Team Culture

One of the most difficult and important steps in any collaborative effort is building a shared culture. There are likely to be significant differences in the cultural attributes of the entities from which the team members are drawn. It is not necessary or desirable to extinguish all aspects of those various individual cultures provided they do not stand in the way of the shared vision. And in building that shared culture, you want to bring forward and “weave together” the best of those disparate cultures to create a new, shared culture that defines how the group will act together.

This is more than writing statements to put in frames on the wall. It is an examination and definition of explicit team commitments and role expectations. Often, team members don’t fully understand their role expectations and their impact as key

influencers is left unleveraged. The typical scenario is that the participating individuals see themselves as “providing input” to decision makers rather than partners in the design process. They show up, give their personal opinion, and leave without taking ownership of the decisions made by the group.

It is vital to make it clear to members of the team that their role is that of a “co-architect” of the design. In that capacity, they are asked to bring the voice of their “constituent” into the room and take back to that “constituent” what happens in the room and how their interests were addressed in a manner compatible with the other interests at stake. In return for the opportunity to be part of shaping the group’s decisions, team members must understand that they will be expected to “own” and

support those decisions, and help develop understanding among their constituent group. With empowerment comes accountability, and the success of the group will greatly depend on how well the members understand and embrace this role.

One other issue about which it is important to gain clarity is the expectation around the time commitment of participation. For physicians in particular, especially at the outset of endeavors like this, they often see the time spent as an opportunity cost even if they are compensated for their participation. It is best to address this up front. Hopefully, over time, team members come to appreciate that there is a return on the investment of their time measured by the impact they can have on an issue or process that affects them and their work life.

Launch the Team with Intentionality

Taking steps at the front end to lay a foundation of trust for a newly formed team can have a material impact on the speed and success of the team's efforts. Building that trust starts with the individuals involved becoming more self-aware of their own style, preferences and mental models. With that knowledge, they can be more

intentional about leveraging their strengths, and moderating tendencies that negatively impact their effectiveness. It is also helpful for the team members to spend time getting to know one another more deeply than role or title, including development of an understanding of those differences in style, preferences and motivation

that can easily be misinterpreted and cause unproductive conflict. Taking time to develop that layer of trust, build a set of team commitments, and learn critical team skills, most importantly constructive conflict management, can accelerate the transformation of a group of individuals into a true, high performing team.

Launch the Team with Intentionality



Develop a foundation of trust



Build a set of team commitments



Learn critical skills and styles



Enable Constructive Conflict management



About MEDI Leadership

Transformational healthcare cannot happen without transformational leadership. A focused collaboration between executives, physicians, and other clinical leaders is required to thrive in today's healthcare environment. MEDI Leadership is the catalyst for accelerating the development of exceptional leaders, teams, and results. We empower executive and clinical leaders to drive meaningful transformation and improve performance throughout the organization. MEDI Leadership was founded in 2000 and is the largest executive coaching firm dedicated exclusively to healthcare. Our coaches bring a blend of extensive healthcare experience and leadership coaching.

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