

Team Building

Best Practices, Tips & Resources

An important part of leadership is helping teams reach higher levels of performance. This involves being aware of which phase the team is in its development by paying attention to team dynamics and adjusting your approach to provide guidance and support needed.



FORMING A NEW TEAM

Leading the formation of a new team generally involves helping the team get organized and enabling team members to begin working together. This includes clarifying the team's purpose, setting measurable goals, determining assignments, and providing opportunities for team members to get to know each other.



ESTABLISHING TEAM STRUCTURE/PROCESSES

As teamwork gets underway, the leader's focus shifts to putting a supportive structure and processes in place as well as helping the team address problems encountered. It's common for communication breakdowns and conflicts to occur as team members learn about each other's work styles and set expectations for working together.

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- **Goal Setting:** Develop goals that are SMART, few in number, and prioritized by importance. Document and share goals with the team. See Sample Goal Process: <https://bit.ly/2InPz6c>.
- **Roles and Assignments:** Document roles and assignments so everyone knows what they are supposed to do and how their work contributes to the team's goals. Ensure team members have the skills and resources to complete tasks.
- **Build Trust, Mutual Respect, and Support:** Create opportunities for team members to get to know each other better as a starting point for building trust. Develop a habit of asking for and giving help. Show appreciation for team members' skills and contributions.
- **Team Charter:** This organizing document describes the team's purpose and explains how it will function. See team charter article: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_95.htm.
- **Team Work Plan:** This document serves as a guide for planning and carrying out projects. It details the scope of the project. See "How to Write a Work Plan" for more information: <https://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Work-Plan>.
- **General Tip:** To increase buy-in and collective ownership, involve team members in creating goals, roles, team charter and work plan.

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- **Expectation Setting:** Minimize upsets by creating an agreement for working together that includes commitments team members are willing to make, how commitments that are fulfilled will be recognized, and consequences of not keeping commitments.
- **Develop Teamwork Processes:** Minimize breakdowns by determining how and how often team members will communicate with each other, share information, make decisions, and solve problems. Document and share teamwork processes, such as in a team charter.
- **Run Effective Meetings:** Make the best use of the team's time by scheduling meetings well in advance or having set meeting times, discuss the most important topics first, and manage the discussion to result in clear decisions and action steps with deadlines. See Meeting Checklist: <https://bit.ly/32R8gZ8>.
- **Manage Conflict:** Re-frame conflict as part of improving team performance instead of something to be avoided. Encourage debate about ideas and expressing different opinions as part of making informed decisions. Help team members resolve disagreements by focusing on common interests and values. See *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*: <https://bit.ly/3cAHyIU>.

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MONITORING TEAM PERFORMANCE

As the team gains momentum in its work, the leader's focus transitions to ensuring that the overall progress of the team stays on track towards reaching its goals and continuing to support team members in developing collaborative competencies, which includes continuous learning.

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- **Set Metrics and Standards of Performance:** Involve team members in measuring performance. Use metrics (indicators) that are clearly defined and accurately measure progress towards achieving team goals.
- **Performance Development Plan:** This is used to guide teams in planning, monitoring, and reviewing performance. It includes information about the project or initiative the team is working on, such as the goals, metrics, standards of performance, participation of team members in the performance management process, and steps for assessing performance. See sample Performance Management Plan: <https://bit.ly/2InylFU>.
- **Assess Task and Relationship Performance:** Schedule periodic performance reviews to review progress towards achieving results and the team's accomplishments as well as address problems and act upon ideas for improving the team's performance. Keeping the team's performance on track attention also involves reviewing the quality of relationships among team members. See Guidance for Creating a Project Dashboard: <http://bit.ly/2IzQuR7> and Team Effectiveness Questionnaire: <http://bit.ly/2TEf5cA>.
- **Develop a Culture of Continuous Learning and Improvement:** This includes making time for team members to share lessons learned, encouraging team members to experiment with new ideas and approaches, and incorporating improved practices into team operations. See Project Debriefing Template: <http://bit.ly/2VMTv8g>.
- **Adapt to Change:** To continue to be effective over time teams need to be able to adapt to new circumstances, such as changes in team members, availability of resources, or project scope. This involves leveraging the team's strengths to creatively address challenges as well as minimizing weaknesses by improving performance.