



Team Building Leadership

A New Way to Think about Teams

Here is an overview of how we think about teams and organizations. When a team can look at itself, and regularly reflect on all four of the levels discussed here, getting its context, values, outcomes and practices aligned, they will have the makings of a top performing team of leaders from every chair.

I. The Context

Everything happens in a context. Organizations have a context typically referred to as corporate or organizational culture. And every organization exists within a larger frame, our shared socio-economic context. The “team” is a context embedded within both of those larger contexts.

Leaders create and invent context. This means that most teams exist within a context already created for them.

Team-Building Tip: Support your team to be awake to the contexts within which they are embedded. Offer them the opportunity to shape context. This sets up the individuals of the team as powerful actors in their team culture.

II. Insights & Values

Engaging team members directly allows the team to generate their own buy-in, building capital for the team and the organization. People like to feel connected to each other and to the purpose of the team of which they are a part. If you simply feed values to the team and try to get buy-in, you will get some compliance and some obedience, but you will not often get the real alignment that drives top performing teams to succeed.

Have team members speak about their values and core organizing principles, allowing the team to do the work of aligning around a cluster of shared values. Ask questions such as:

- What do we care about?
- What matters?
- What are our guiding principles?

Team-Building Tip: Give people the opportunity to grapple with their individual values and team values and you get them in the business of culture creation. You will get them leading!

III. The Outcomes

Where are you going? And what results are you playing for? Distinguishing outcomes seems obvious and many leaders and their teams spend the most time working in this domain. But that is like building the second floor of the house before pouring the foundation.

Team-building Tip: Establishing context and values first and you can play for big results with the wind at your back.

IV. Taking Action

We take action through practice: we are what we practice and we are always practicing something. It is just that so often we are practicing things that will not have us win the game we have declared. This is true individually, at the level of team, and at the larger socio-economic level.

Team-Building Tip: Integrate regular reflection into the team culture using the practice of inquiry:

- What habits do we have around communication, e.g. how we speak to each other, make requests, hold each other accountable, or other core practices?
- What assumptions do we have about each other – our competencies, limitations, etc.?
- How do we restore trust when it has been broken?
- What needs to be said to come back into re-alignment?

