

Leading Teams #1: Introduction¹

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Introduction

Organizations, including Extension, face increasingly complex problems that cannot be solved by a single person. As a result, organizations are using teams more often. Teamwork can lead to several benefits—more innovative ideas, increased employee engagement, improved learning, and tasks accomplished more quickly (West, 2004, as cited in Franz, 2012). However, teams need leadership that facilitates their success. As teams and teamwork continue to evolve in a changing environment, so must team leadership (Tannenbaum et al., 2012).

In this first publication in the *Leading Teams* series (Appendix A), we provide an overview of what teamwork is, its benefits and challenges, and the differences between groups and teams. In addition, we preview teamwork concepts that will be expanded on in the remaining publications in the series. The intended audience of this publication and series is anyone who works in or leads teams within or served by UF/IFAS Extension.

What Teamwork Is and Why It Is Necessary

As global challenges and opportunities change, businesses and individuals must capitalize on chances to thrive. Evolving organizational structures and advancements in technology provide new opportunities for diverse groups of people to work together. These groups have greater collective

expertise and experience to develop solutions (Hall et al., 2018). The need for teamwork will only continue to increase as our world becomes more interconnected; but we cannot simply assemble groups of people and expect them to become an effective team.

Some people may use the terms “group” and “team” interchangeably. However, teams have a few key features. Teams are often considered a special type of group (Levi, 2014). According to Katzenbach and Smith’s (2005) classification, teams should include:

- Shared leadership;
- Individual and mutual accountability;
- A team-determined specific purpose;
- Collective rather than individual outputs;
- Meetings focused on open-ended discussion and active problem-solving;
- A system of team-performance measurement assessed by collective work products; and
- Discussions that lead to group decisions followed by real work completed together.

While groups of people might be bound together by common interests, communication, and interaction, one of the distinguishing features of a team is the interdependence of teammates when working toward a shared goal. Another important feature is that teams have task-specific functions

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that require certain roles and responsibilities of the members (Levi, 2014).

Consider a county Extension office, for example. It is important to recognize that while all the members of a county office are part of a group, they may or may not be considered a team depending on the work they are doing. If a group of county Extension employees are working together to assess a local need and assist constituents in implementing a research-based solution, it is likely that group would be classified as a team. Extension specialists located somewhere other than the county Extension office may provide additional expertise as members of this team. This scenario illustrates more than just a group of employees working toward their individually assigned duties. Together, the employees have identified a specific task, for which they have shared responsibility and accountability. Each member of the team has a specific role and responsibility they fulfill in order to accomplish the team-identified purpose; this is teamwork.

Benefits and Challenges of Teamwork

One expectation of teamwork is synergy (Franz, 2012). Teams reach the synergistic threshold when their “collective effort accomplishes more than the sum of individual abilities or efforts” (Zaccaro et al., 2009, p. 83). To achieve synergy and unlock the benefits of teamwork, teams must enact processes that effectively combine diverse knowledge, skills, and experience. The remainder of this EDIS series on leading teams describes effective teamwork processes along with strategies for implementing them. Although an often-noted benefit of teamwork is more complete understanding of a problem or situation, it can be difficult to pool knowledge and experience from a diverse group of team members (Levi, 2014). Additionally, if teams do not recognize differences in skill sets and access to resources that exist among members, the team may fail to reap the benefits of those skills and resources.

Performing collaborative work can be especially difficult when team members do not trust each other (Lencioni, 2002). Building trust by overcoming differences and developing positive relationships can prepare teams for healthy task conflict. Many people are uncomfortable with and view conflict negatively (Griffith & Dunham, 2015; Levi, 2014). While interpersonal conflict can be detrimental to teams, task conflict can be valuable and enhance team productivity (Levi, 2014). The *Leading Teams* series will provide insight

to help team members and leaders anticipate challenges and apply strategies to achieve success.

Teamwork Concepts and Models

This series is guided by the stages of group development model proposed by Tuckman and Jensen (1977). The model describes five stages groups experience during their life cycle: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). These stages are not always linear. In some cases, groups might return to earlier stages before continuing to the next stage (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Understanding these stages can help leaders improve team outcomes (Wilson et al., 2010).

Another useful model is Fisher’s model of decision emergence (1970). This model includes four phases: orientation, conflict, emergence, and reinforcement. Fisher’s model (1970) is cyclical, depicting how teams revisit previous phases whenever the team or project changes.

Finally, Lencioni (2002) proposed a model of the five dysfunctions teams must overcome to be their most productive. Lencioni (2002) suggested that teams must address absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results—in that order.

Team success can be measured in terms of three outcomes: task accomplishment, team member relationships, and individual team member growth (Levi, 2014). The stages of group development, model of decision emergence, and five dysfunctions of a team together provide team leaders with a broad understanding of teams, team development, and team processes. The concepts in each present various strategies for teams and leaders to overcome challenges and propel their team toward success. In this series, we outline how UF/IFAS Extension and other stakeholders can use these models and concepts.

Summary

Second only to communication, teamwork is one of the top five cognitive competencies in demand across all occupational groups (Carnevale, Fasules, & Campbell, 2020). Although teamwork can produce positive outcomes, teams may struggle to overcome the challenges of diverse people working collaboratively. Understanding models of team development can provide leaders with a well-stocked toolbox to move their teams toward synergy and success.

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Appendix A: Leading Teams Series Overview

Leading Teams #1: Introduction

A description of teams that discusses the benefits of and challenges faced by teams, how teams are different from groups, and a brief review of models and concepts to be expanded on through the series.

Leading Teams #2: Stages of Development

An in-depth description of the stages of group development model by Tuckman & Jensen (1977).

Leading Teams #3: Forming

An explanation of the forming stage of group development, accompanied by strategies to effectively lead teams through the forming stage. This publication provides tactics to help clarify team purpose, establish team culture, and guide team member socialization.

Leading Team #4: Storming

A description of the storming stage of group development. This publication supplies strategies for conflict management, communication, and decision-making approaches.

Leading Teams #5: Norming

An outline of the norming stage of group development. Publication #5 discusses approaches to defining roles and responsibilities, establishing an ideal team climate, and building organizational culture.

Leading Teams #6: Performing

An explanation for team performance and the performing stage of group development. Publication #6 provides tips for leading effective meetings, supporting collaboration, enhancing team cohesion, and using proper evaluation and feedback procedures.

Leading Teams #7: Other Considerations for Leading Teams

This publication concludes the series with a short overview of adjourning and other suggestions and considerations for leading teams, including working with virtual teams, encouraging motivation, and managing team adjournment and team member termination.