5 Essentials to Project Team Success

~ By Andrew Cox

To maximise the contribution of project teams, a number of essentials need to be recognised. The good news is that the essentials to team success aren’t expensive, don’t require the expenditure of large amounts of capital or expense money, and don’t require new bricks and mortar. The further news and biggest challenge is that the only change needed to be made to implement the essentials to project team success is behaviour.

What are the 5 essentials for successful teams?

1. Team Composition and Roles
2. Team Goals and Expectations
3. Team Resources
4. Team Sponsorship
5. Team Recognition and Rewards

Let’s look at each of the five essentials in more detail to develop a checklist of what needs to be done:

1. Team Composition and Roles

The single most important element about team composition is having a team that is effective working together. Collaboration and communication skills are two of most critical personal skills demanded of all members. The ability and willingness to recognise and value the different roles and contributions of team members is essential. Every team needs problem solving, influence, process and compliance behaviours and values if it is to be successful. People possessing those different requirements for group success have very different behaviours and conflict can be one of the products of their interactions. Team development at the very start of the project should include training in communication skills, and the recognition and valuing of the different behaviours, values and personal skills needed for team success.

How many people should be in a core team - the nucleus of the group? No more than five to seven key members. Co-ordination and communication issues grow exponentially if more people are added to the core team. When additional resources are required, apply them on an as needed basis. If you have a requirement demanding more than five to seven people, reduce the individual team goals to a scope that can be covered by five to seven - or have more teams.

Roles that must be present include champion/sponsor, leader, facilitator, technical expert, co-ordinator, chronicler, communicator/presenter and someone to ensure the team keeps it collective eyes on the goal. One person may fulfil more than one role, or roles may be rotated or shared, but they must be done - absent any one of them, the team suffers in its performance.
2. Team Goals and Expectations

The establishment of specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time framed goals for teams are absolutely essential to their success. If goals are not set for the team at the outset that meet those five criteria, then the first goal of the team is to develop goals and gain approval of their goals from their sponsor. Failure to do this is the single biggest reason that teams fail. Establishing the goals and making them known is the single best way to define and manage expectations, and provide the basis for measuring progress and contribution.

3. Team Resources

This is where the saying “actions speak louder than words” really means something. The resources a team needs to meet its goals vary widely, based on any number of elements. The two resources that tell a team - any team - just how important their goals are to the organisation are time and talent.

If team membership is simply layered on top of existing duties, if meetings are constantly delayed or cancelled because of other issues, if expertise cannot be made available by functional areas because the expertise is too busy working on other things, if briefing meetings with sponsors and leadership are difficult to schedule or keep getting changed, if team questions or concerns do not get quick review and response, then team goals aren’t that important - regardless what is said.

4. Team Sponsorship

The sponsor needs to be highly placed, actively engaged on a regular basis with the team, able to make things happen so the team can move forward to its goals, must have personal “skin” in the game, and has to have access to the very top leader on a routine basis. If those criteria are met, team performance is given a real chance to succeed - without it teams may be successful, but it will take longer and introduce a real chance for ineffectiveness and lack of enthusiasm.

5. Team Rewards and Recognition

Studies have shown that top two things people in their work want are, being recognised as a contributing member of a worthy enterprise, and recognition and reward for their accomplishments.

A contributing member of a worthy enterprise. People want to identify with the enterprise. They want to know that what they do has value in the marketplace, and has value to the success of their organisation. The organisation has to communicate that every position adds value - some may be more obvious than others, but the “we are all in this together” approach and philosophy of work leads to high performance.

Recognition and rewards can come in many forms. Accomplishment on team projects needs to be publicised, and individual accomplishment within teams should lead to actions that make it clear that team participation and success lead to opportunities. One other thing about rewards and recognition - they can be lost in the helter-skelter of getting everything done. Schedule regular review times - at least monthly, to determine who should be recognised and rewarded, and make it a very public ceremony. If you find you cannot name - quickly - people to reward, you really need to look at how the team is performing.

Review the essentials and compare them to your own organisation, then change what you need to change to improve success - or to implement teams in your company. Doing so will ensure that you are accessing the collective genius of your organisation - and that's like money in the bank - for everyone!
Andy Cox is President of Cox Consulting Group LLC. The focus of his work is on helping organisations and their people increase their success in the hiring, developing and enhancing the performance of leaders and emerging leaders. Cox Consulting Group LLC was started in 1995, and has worked with a wide range of organisations, managers and leaders - helping them define success, achieve success and make the ability to change a competitive advantage. He can be reached at www.coxconsultgroup.com