

Dattner Consulting, LLC

How to Accelerate Team Learning

Team Learning

- Definition
- Why team learning is important
- Why team learning is challenging
- Factors that constrain or enhance team learning:
 - Team design
 - Team composition
 - Team resources
 - Team norms
 - Team learning strategies
- Conclusion

Definition

➤ Definition

- Why team learning is important
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The process of team learning involves asking questions, seeking feedback, discussing mistakes, evaluating results and using this information to explore and experiment with new ways of organizing and working on an ongoing basis*

* This presentation is largely based on the work of Amy Edmondson at Harvard Business School

Why team learning is important

- Teams are increasingly common and important in all kinds of organizations
- An organization's capacity to learn is one of its most important competitive advantages
- Team learning is a key component of organizational learning

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Why team learning is challenging

- It is difficult to unlearn old habits
- Learning is stressful, costly and time-consuming
- The time pressures of performance often take precedence over team learning
- It is often difficult to establish a causal link between learning-oriented team behaviors and performance outcomes
- Rewards are usually geared to individual performance, not team performance

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Why team learning is challenging (continued)

- Team members may resist changes
- New ways of working:
 - Entail risk
 - Threaten status hierarchies
 - Change interaction patterns

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Factors relevant to team learning

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Team design

Teams are best able to learn when:

- The task is well specified
- Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined
- The team includes members with the right knowledge and experience
- The team is representative of any relevant functional areas

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Team composition

- Team members have worked together or share some common frame of reference
- There is a good balance between homogeneity and heterogeneity
- The team collaboratively selects new members
- Members are selected for:
 - Enthusiasm for learning
 - Willingness to speak up

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Team resources

- There is a clear rationale for learning and change
- The team has access to information, feedback, training, and coaching
- The organizational culture encourages experimentation and innovation and provides material and informational support
- Team members have mutual respect and trust

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Team norms

- Team members solicit and give candid and constructive feedback
- The team experiments with doing things in new ways and takes prudent risks
- Individuals admit and learn from mistakes
- Learning accomplishments are celebrated

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Team norms (continued)

- Team members speak up by:
 - Saying what hasn't been said
 - Contradicting what has been said
 - Asking questions
 - Seeking help
- Without fear of appearing:
 - Ignorant, incompetent, intrusive or negative

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Team norms (continued)

- Status differences are minimized to support openness and a learning orientation
- Mutual supportiveness is a top priority, and the team:
 - Creates a safe, though not necessarily comfortable, zone for learning
 - Minimizes blame and embarrassment
 - Uses humor to defuse tension and reframe situations
 - Develops a sense of team efficacy

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Team learning strategies

- Upfront preparation lays the foundation for more rapid learning
- Time to practice is scheduled thoughtfully
- The team conducts “dry runs” with the goal of learning as much as possible rather than simply “getting it right” the first time around
- The team stops for periodic process checks and debates alternative strategies and tactics
- The team approaches learning as a complex adaptive challenge, not as just a simple technical problem

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➤ **Conclusion**

Learning how to learn more efficiently and effectively is among the most important challenges that teams face

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