: What determines team performance on a project?

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Some project teams perform better than others? Why? A project team is a group of people assigned to work on a project. Team member attitudes and abilities, skills, team processes, tools, and team leadership determine team performance. Also, the project environment can hinder or support project success. Overall, team performance on a project depends upon developing an environment of trust, learning, collaboration, and conflict resolution within the team and with stakeholders. Such a work environment promotes team self-organization, enhances relationships among team members, and cultivates a culture of high performance. Performance is better when striving for excellence is the primary goal of the team. During project delivery, it is important for members to continue developing their skills and knowledge.

Research suggests that the more a team develops as a cohesive group, learns together, and collaborates, the better the performance of the team on a project. Motivated, competent teams have better performance than mediocre, demotivated teams. Leaders should strive to develop the competencies of people on a team and ensure the most competent people have the most influence on a team's actions and decisions. Collaborative leaders are important to team performance. A collaborative leader is a person who seeks out a diversity of opinions and ideas among teammates to build strategies and solve problems. Projects fail for many reasons including 1) lack of efficient and effective communication, 2) lack of responsive decision making, 3) lack of needed technical skills and 4) lack of effective teamwork.

Teams that have worked together on other projects have developed behaviors and relationships that influence performance in both good and bad ways. One should consider prior experiences and successes of people when assembling and creating project teams. Successful teams are "highly cohesive", members are committed to each other, and the project. On a committed team, the members often strive for excellence. Striving for excellence improves performance and outcomes. Also, effective communication within a team is crucial to developing a high performing team. A stable, manageable group of skilled people is also important to team success. A team committed to self-organizing process management and agile principles also contributes to project excellence and success.

Many factors can affect how well groups and teams perform. People, their attitudes, skills, and processes especially determine project success. Talented individuals on an engaged and highly motivated team are the key to achieving project objectives. A high-performance project team is composed of members who know each other well and understand each other's strengths and weaknesses. The members genuinely respect and care about each other. Each member believes in the project's objectives and strives for excellence. On a "good" team, members hold each other accountable and work to continuously improve skills and performance. Finally, members of great

teams celebrate big and small wins and learn from failure.

A study of teams at Cisco found there are three key areas that distinguish the best teams: 1) teammates perform tasks that play to their strengths, 2) high-performing teams have high levels of trust and safety, and 3) team members share a sense of "how they can win together", cf., Hammett (2019). Research participants in the Cisco study (Bradley, et al, 2013) expressed the opinion that the collective intelligence and diverse perspectives of people working together creates better overall results.

According to a study by Pentland (2012), the ideal team player circulates "actively, engaging people in short, high-energy conversations. They are democratic with their time—communicating with everyone equally and making sure all team members get a chance to contribute. They're not necessarily extroverts, although they feel comfortable approaching other people. They listen as much as or more than they talk and are usually very engaged with whomever they're listening to. We call it 'energized but focused listening'. The best team players also connect their teammates with one another and spread ideas around. And they are appropriately exploratory, seeking ideas from outside the group but not at the expense of group engagement."

Hansen (2016) asserts "adopting an Agile methodology allows your team to quickly adapt when project plans change instead of panic. It also forces your team to communicate constantly and focus on quality over quantity". Becoming agile will improve team performance on a project.

Committed people, appropriate processes, leadership, and adequate resources determine team performance. Good teams want to win and they do so more often than poor teams. Important factors determining team performance include: 1) cohesiveness, 2) collaboration and communication, 3) independent thinking, 4) heterogeneous team composition, 5) team stability, 6) manageable team size, 7) task structure and 8) effective leadership. External, less controllable, factors also influence team performance including the reward system, training or technical assistance, the information system, and finally, the organizational culture, cf., Harris (2010).

Teams are the building blocks of an organization. An agile organization requires that teams become agile. Agile teams help managers achieve performance objectives and innovate in a complex, fast-paced, global, uncertain, and technology-driven economy. Managers who want to adopt and encourage agility should recognize that teams are the elemental building blocks of an organization's agile journey.

Teams must collaboratively make trade-offs. Evaluating priorities while dealing with constraints is

known as the trade-off space. The four key variables that can be adjusted are: 1) time, 2) project scope, 3) cost/expenses, and 4) quality. All four of these variables are interdependent, changing one variable has implications for others. It is important to recognize that there are natural trade-offs among them. For example, if you want faster completion, then you will need to do less, or spend more money/resources, or produce a lower-quality product. If you want to spend exactly X dollars, then the team will have to work a specified number of hours, perhaps do less work, or change the quality of the project output. Teams make choices with stakeholders that determine project outcomes.

Overall, a successful collaborative team leader invests time to build relationships, handles conflicts in a constructive manner, and he/she shares control. A collaborative, agile or servant leader is a key to team performance.

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