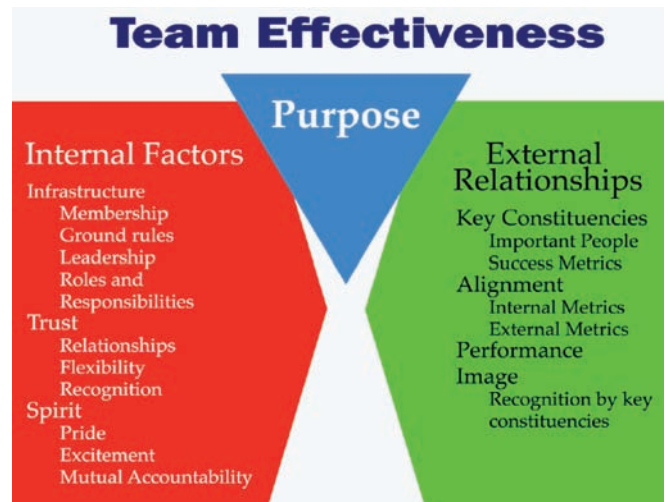


Creating and Leading High-Performing Teams

BY BUD BILANICH

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PRODUCT MANAGEMENT HAS BECOME A TEAM SPORT. SUCCESSFUL product managers know how to recruit and manage teams that will deliver the goods. You can drive a team's performance, even if you're not its formal leader. Like most things, creating and leading an effective team is simple in concept. However, the challenge is managing the elements well.

Effective teams share three characteristics: (1) They are driven by a clearly defined purpose or charter, (2) they manage internal team factors well, and (3) they manage their external relationships well.

TEAM PURPOSE

Your team's purpose or charter is its reason for existing and describes why the team is in business and what it will achieve. For example, a cross-function team comprised of product management, R&D, and supply chain professionals may develop a purpose statement such as: "This cross function team will bring product X to market, ensuring an optimal mix of indications, speed to market and manufacturability." Such a team would focus on creating a product with a set of indications that will make it easy to market, sell, and produce.

This purpose would guide the work of the team. Periodically, they must ask themselves, "Is this purpose a valuable way to be spending our time?" If the answer is "no," they abandon that activity.

INTERNAL FACTORS

Effective teams focus on three internal factors: (1) infrastructure, (2) trust, and (3) spirit.

A solid infrastructure prevents problems down the road. All effective teams address infrastructure questions such as: Who and what needs to be represented on this team? What

are our behavioral and procedural ground rules? How will we handle leadership? and What can the leader expect from team members?

Trust is based on relationships, flexibility, and recognition. The better the interpersonal relations on the team, the more trust will be developed. Also, team members who demonstrate flexibility and a willingness to give up on their points for the good of the team will foster team trust. Finally, recognition enhances trust; on effective teams, members recognize contributions to team success.

Spirit is the final internal factor. Most people enjoy being a part of an effective team and working for the team's purpose. There's always a spirit of pride, excitement, and mutual accountability on all effective teams.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

No team exists in a vacuum, so they must identify all of the constituencies who have an interest in the success of the team. They work to make sure their needs are met, often acting as a mediator between constituencies. So first, identify the constituencies who have a stake in the success of the team. Second, identify the important

people in each constituency. Third, discover the success metrics for your team that each of these people has in his or her mind.

Now, the team must align its internal team success metrics with those of the key constituencies. When this doesn't happen, it is called an expectation disconnect, which doesn't bode well for team success. Aligning team and constituent metrics prevents problems from arising down the road. Performance factors in here, too. Effective teams not only align their expectations with those of their constituencies, but they meet or exceed these expectations.

Finally, effective teams manage their image. Image is the flip side of spirit. Teams with high spirit feel good about themselves and their results. Teams with a good image have others feeling good about them.

Far too often, team leaders pay little attention to building a strong, high performing team. However, if you pay attention to the three factors that create successful, high performing teams, you'll be doing a favor for both the business and your career. ○