

Team Tools



Introduction to the Team Tools

The tools described in the following pages are designed to help develop teamwork within a team. These tools can also be used to help spark discussions about how team performance might be improved.

Strategic Partners

Description

This exercise is designed to closely examine a team's relationship with those outside the team environment (stakeholders, customers, suppliers, other departments, other teams, etc.). This activity helps team members discover the importance of each relationship, the barriers to an effective relationship, and a plan to develop positive relationships.

Setup:

Provide a list of the questions on a flipchart, white board, poster, or handout.

Special Supplies:

- Paper
- Pen/pencil

Steps

1. Break up the team into subgroups.
2. Ask each subgroup to consider a person, department, team, or other stakeholder that your team would like to develop a relationship with and respond to the following questions:
 - What are the common objectives you share?
 - What specific types of help do you need from this member of the operating environment?
 - What type of assistance or input does this member need from your team?
 - What barriers and obstacles might prevent your team from working with the member of the environment effectively?
 - What type of contact do you need to establish?
 - What specific action steps are needed to help develop a positive relationship with this member of the team's environment?
3. Reassemble the team and ask each subgroup to present its findings, reactions, recommendations, etc. Discuss your findings as a group.
4. Based on the information discovered, come to an agreement on a plan of action.

For more information on Strategic Thinking or Strategic Leadership visit <https://cmoe.com/products-services/strategy/>.

Listen First Exercise

Description

The Listen First Exercise is designed to encourage the free flow of information from and between innovative individuals and create an organizational culture where people are genuinely listened to and allowed to express their ideas during brainstorming sessions, completely and without interruption. Using this method creates an environment that fosters the delicate thinking process, promotes respectful interchange between group members, and results in an overall improvement in the quality of ideas that come from the group.

Steps

1. Remind your team members that the purpose of this exercise is to encourage the free flow of information between members of the group while minimizing interruptions.
2. Explain that interruptions act like mental roadblocks, cutting off thoughts before they're allowed to mature. Interruptions derail ideas that could have a lot of merit if they are allowed to be heard through to completion.
3. In collaboration with the members of your team, establish the ground rules for speaking freely in a group setting. Questions you may need to consider when establishing your team's ground rules may include the following:
 - How do we show respect to our fellow team members?
 - What are we especially notorious for doing when we work together as a group?
 - What does it say to the people around us when we interrupt them?
 - How can we signal to one another that we are finished speaking?
 - What are the triggers that cause us to interrupt others?

Setup:

- No formal setting is required for this exercise, although it may work better with people sitting in a circle.

Special Supplies:

- Flipchart and markers for writing down ground rules.
- Visual reminder of whose turn it is to speak (if appropriate).

-
- How should we decide whose turn it is to speak, and when?
4. Collectively decide whether your team will need a visual reminder of whose turn it is to speak (i.e., a wand, stick, ball, koosh, hat, pendant, etc.) that the speaker holds/wears until he/she is finished speaking.
 - Until the members of your team become used to listening and thinking before speaking, they may need to rely on this behavioral crutch. However, once listening becomes a habit, using a visual reminder should no longer be necessary.
 5. Once you have decided upon your team's ground rules, define the subject that is currently under discussion.
 6. With respect to the team's ground rules, encourage every person of the team to candidly volunteer his/her ideas as they relate to the current subject of conversation.
 - If necessary, gently remind the group that ideas need to be shared one person at a time.
 7. When one speaker has finished his/her thought, he or she signals that fact to the group. Other members of the group may *not* speak before being given this signal.
 8. Once the first speaker has finished sharing his/her thoughts (but not before), other members of the team are allowed to respond to the idea, offering their opinions, interpretations, and various combinations of the thoughts being presented.
 9. Other speakers must be responded to by the group in the same way as the initial speaker.
 10. The group continues this exchange until all members of the group feel satisfied that their ideas have been represented fairly, shared completely, and considered fully.

For more information on leading innovation visit <https://cmoe.com/products-and-services/leading-innovation/>

Strength in Numbers Exercise

Description

The Strength in Numbers Exercise is designed to help team members become more familiar with their peers' strengths, skills, talents, and interests so all team members have a comprehensive picture of the team's abilities, as well as an understanding of the areas where the team could improve or expand their capabilities. This exercise will help members of new teams become better acquainted with one another and will give members of established teams a formal opportunity to learn more about the collective abilities and underused capacities of the team.

Steps

1. Ask each member of your team to individually respond to the following questions. Be sure to explain that their answers do not need to be related to their responsibilities at work.
 - a. What are you passionate about?
 - b. What talents do you have that your coworkers may not know about?
 - c. What is your greatest strength?
 - d. What do you like to do in your free time?
 - e. How do you learn best?
 - f. What are your hobbies?
 - g. Who is the most-influential person in your life? Why?
 - h. When you take a vacation, where do you like to go?
 - i. What is your biggest flaw?
 - j. Which subjects would you like to learn more about?

Setup:

- This exercise requires a room with enough chairs for every member of your team to sit down at the same time (a break room might be a good option).
- You will also need enough wall space to hang several large sheets of paper.

Special Supplies:

- Enough copies of the list of ten questions for each member of your team
- Pencils or pens
- Flipchart pad
- Markers
- Tape or pushpins

-
2. While they are working, transfer these questions to several large sheets of flipchart paper and hang them at, or towards, the front of the room.
 3. Once all of your team members have finished responding to these questions individually, ask them to share their responses.
 - You may either ask them to come up to the front of the room and write down their responses or have them call out their responses as you write them down for the group.
 4. Create a comprehensive list of answers to the ten questions listed above.
 5. Invite them to spend a few minutes reading and reflecting on the answers given by each member of the group.
 6. Engage them in a group discussion about what this means for them as a team by asking questions like the following:
 - What matters to us as a team?
 - What do these answers say about us as a group?
 - What are we really good at?
 - In what areas do we lack?
 - How does this information help our team?
 - Why is it important for our teammates to know the forces that drive each one of us?
 - How can/will we use this information going forward?

For more information on High-Performance Teamwork visit
<https://cmoe.com/products-and-services/high-performance-teamwork/>

Risk vs. Reward Exercise

Description

This exercise helps teams realize the importance of weighing the risks against the potential value that could come from pursuing opportunities that the team or its individual members have identified.

Steps

1. The team leader should ask the team for 1–3 volunteers who are willing to be a part of a fun game.
2. As the entire group listens, explain to the volunteers that each person will be given three containers into which he/she will try to toss the beanbags.
 - One container is close enough to the volunteer that he/she has a 100% chance of being able to toss the beanbag into it
 - One container is far enough away that the volunteer has a 50–80% chance of being able to toss the beanbag into it.
 - One container is so far away that the volunteer has only a 5–10% chance of being able to toss the beanbag into it.
3. Next, explain the scoring procedure for the beanbag game:
 - Beanbags that are tossed into the closest container are worth 2 points
 - Beanbags that are tossed into the second-closest container are worth 10 points.
 - Beanbags tossed into the container that is furthest away are worth 25 points.
4. Give the volunteers 5 minutes to try to score as many points as possible with the 10 beanbags they have.
 - Each volunteer will approach the goal (scoring as many points as possible) differently, and their strategies will often differ significantly as well.

Special Supplies

- 10 small beanbags or balls per volunteer
- Three containers (bucket, garbage can, coffee can, etc.) per volunteer
- Masking tape
- Flipchart pad
- Flipchart markers

-
- Some volunteers will take a less-risky approach to the game by aiming for the closest container for all 10 beanbags.
 - Others will throw caution to the wind and take a great risk by using up all of their beanbags trying to score 25 points, regardless of whether they are successful or not.
5. The next step is to debrief the risk vs. rewards approach the volunteers took to score their points. This should be a team discussion.
- Invite the volunteers to share why they chose the strategy they did, and ask the observers what they might have done differently.
 - Be careful that the volunteers don't feel attacked if they chose a high-risk strategy.
6. Then, compare this game and the approach the team members said they would take to win, to how the team approaches projects and opportunities.
- Remind them that for businesses, the best approach is to seek opportunities that have high potential value for the organization and low potential risk.

Finally, use a flipchart to write down the potential opportunities or projects the team is facing at this time. Have the team rate the potential value and the potential risk of each item using the same scoring system as in the beanbag game. The team will then be better able to make strategic decisions about which opportunity or opportunities to pursue.

For more information on Problem Solving and Decision Making visit <https://cmoe.com/products-and-services/problem-solving-and-decision-making/>

Time to Talk Exercise

Description

This exercise helps team members have effective conversations with others, while minimizing interruptions and ensuring that the message is accurately received. This exercise can be especially useful during periods of research and development, planning meetings, and brainstorming sessions.

Special Supplies

- No formal setting or special supplies are required for this exercise.

Steps

1. All members of the team will jointly decide the topic of conversation for the group.
2. The team will then be split into pairs and each pair will have 10 minutes total (five minutes for each individual) to discuss the topic fully.
 - One person will play the role of the speaker and one will play the role of the listener. The individuals in each pair will then switch roles once five minutes has elapsed (or halfway through the time allotted).
 - Depending on the situation, this time period can be extended, but the timeframe for the conversations must be agreed upon before the conversations begin.
3. During the two halves of each conversation, the following rules must be respected:
 - Eye contact is to be maintained between the speaker and the listener.
 - The listener may not interrupt, make comments, or ask questions during the time allotted to the speaker.
 - The listener must focus on the speaker and listen as effectively as possible.
4. The team leader or exercise facilitator can then opt to allow the conversing pairs a few more minutes. The pairs can use this extra time ask their partners questions and receive answers about what was said during their five minutes.

-
5. The team leader or exercise facilitator will then debrief the exercise. The debrief questions may vary, depending on the topic under discussion. The following are some suggestions for debrief questions you might use:
- When you were the speaker, was it difficult to speak for the amount of time allotted?
 - When you were the listener, was it difficult to listen for the amount of time allotted?
 - What made this conversation effective for you?
 - As the listener, what new information did you learn that you may not have if you weren't forced to just listen?
 - As the speaker, what new information did you learn that you may not have if you weren't forced to just talk?

For more information on Communication Skills visit <https://cmoe.com/products-and-services/communication-skills/>