Indicator: All teams operate with work plans for the year and specific work products to produce. (38)

Explanation: Teams provide a structure to share and build leadership, make decisions, learn together, and produce work more efficiently than is possible with individuals acting alone. Teams are called by many names, but a typical structure includes a Leadership Team, teacher Instructional Teams, and a School Community Council that includes parents. Of course, a school may have other teams, but these three teams are a basic structure for school improvement. Teams need regular and sufficient time in the schedule. As this indicator makes clear, teams also need a stated purpose and a work plan that outlines the team’s responsibilities and work products.

Questions: Do all of your teams operate with work plans and clear expectations for the work products they are to produce? Where are these plans and expectations recorded? How are they communicated? How are work products reviewed?

Finding regular dedicated time in a busy school schedule for people to come together and meet as a team is not easy. Teachers need time to meet together as instructional teams to plan instruction and review student progress. The principal and other key leaders in the building need time to meet together as a leadership team to review the overall health and direction of the school. Redding (2006), writes that “decision-making groups must be organized and given time to plan and monitor the parts of the system for which they are responsible” (p. 45) It is imperative for these teams to feel as if what they are doing in that carved out time is important. That it is productive. That there is a well-thought out plan and direction for what they are doing in their time together. In the world of business, teams are a big deal. There are books written on the teaming process and how to conduct team meetings. Triaxia, (an organization built around working with teams in the workplace) writes “We are quick to assume than any activity is a process, with little thought about which might be the best activities and what might be the best sequence. The result is often a lot of activity but little accomplishment” (http://www.triaxiapartners.com/corp/team/learning-solutions/designing-effective-team-processes).

To avoid the “activity but little accomplishment” pitfall, teams need to have work plans and specific products to produce. Turning Points (2001) has a list of seven characteristics of an effective team. Number two on the list is “Have a clearly defined purpose that guides their work and specific, measurable goals that they achieve” (p. 19). Hattie (2012) also emphasizes the need to use team time wisely:

So often, in schools when time is created for teachers to be out of their classes, teachers want to spend the time marking, preparing, and seeking resources. There are not unimportant activities—but what is asked for here is a culture in which teachers spend more time together pre-planning and critiquing this pre-planning, and working in teacher groups to interpret and evidence about their effect on students…. What is asked is not a restructuring, but a recapturing, of schools to optimize and esteem the positive impacts that all can have on student learning. It is not a ‘one size fits all’ solution....
DEVELOPING A PRODUCTIVE TEAM

Team-building is an effort in which a team studies its own process of working together and acts to create a climate that encourages and values the contributions of team members. Their energies are directed toward problem-solving, task-effectiveness, and maximizing the use of all members’ resources to achieve the team’s purpose. Sound team-building recognizes that it is not possible to fully separate one’s performance from those of others.

Team-building works best under the following conditions (Francis and Young, 1979):

- There is a high level of interdependence among team members. The team is working on important tasks in which each team member has a commitment and for which teamwork is critical for achieving the desired results.
- The team leader has good people-skills, is committed to developing a team approach, and allocates time to team-building activities. Team management is seen as a shared function, and team members are given an opportunity to exercise leadership when their experiences and skills are appropriate to the needs of the team.
- Each team member is capable and willing to contribute information, skills, and experiences that provide an appropriate mix for achieving the team’s purpose.
- The team develops a climate in which people feel relaxed and are able to be direct and open in their communications.
- Team members develop a mutual trust for each other and believe that other team members have skills and capabilities to contribute to the team.
- Both the team and individual members are prepared to take risks and are allowed to develop their abilities and skills.
- The team is clear about its important goals and establishes performance targets that cause stretching but are achievable.
- Team-member roles are defined, and the team develops effective ways to solve problems and communicate.
- Team members know how to examine team and individual errors and weaknesses without making personal attacks, which enables the group to learn from its experiences.
- Team efforts are devoted to the achievement of results, and team performance is frequently evaluated to see where improvements can be made.
- The team has the capacity to create new ideas through group interaction and the influence of outside people. The team pursues good ideas and rewards innovative risk-taking.
- Each member of the team knows that he or she can influence the team agenda. There is a feeling of trust and equal influence among team members that facilitates open and honest communication.

A FOCUSED TEAM

When team resources are focused and members are all working to accomplish the same purpose, teamwork can be very rewarding and productive. This is best accomplished when team members use a proactive approach rather than a reactive approach to accomplish their purpose (Adams, 1987).

The proactive approach manifests such characteristics as:

- The team members take a very positive approach in jointly determining the way they are going to work together as a team and what they want to have happen. When individuals and the entire team choose to operate this way and are willing to set petty differences aside, unbelievable results become possible. When individuals adopt a positive attitude and commit to using their resources, knowledge, and skills to contribute to the goals of the team, they align with the team’s overall purpose. This will not happen unless both the team leader and team members choose to do so.
- Having a well-defined purpose or vision of what the team will accomplish is a very powerful force for the team leader and members. When goals are aligned with the team purpose, team members are empow-
• Team members have a positive attitude toward change and are willing to accept and allow change to occur as needed in order to accomplish desired results.

• Team members understand that patience is required and that, for some goals, a long-term commitment is needed to accomplish the desired results.

• Interests of both the team leader and team members are focused on desired results rather than on short-term problem-solving activities.

• Members of the team must have a strong feeling of control within the team. They should be able to establish priorities and then to commit time and resources for accomplishing these tasks.

• A well-functioning team is characterized by team members who verbally and publicly support each other. They recognize that negative comments about others tear the team down.

Team leaders and members that make a conscious, sustained effort to make these characteristics a part of their mindset will find that both creativity and accomplishment of desired results will be much higher than they would be otherwise.

Source: Academic Development Institute, Effective Team- ing Manual

References and Resources


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