

Roles and Responsibilities for Launching Teams

Grace L. Duffy and John W. Moran

(Originally published in [*Applications and Tools for Creating and Sustaining Healthy Teams*](#), 2011)

Teams are not new to public health. Health professionals have long respected the knowledge and opinions of others within the organization and the community served. Scarce resources and reduced staffing have led many health departments to cross-train staff in a number of duties not part of their original performance plan. One way to reinforce new skills and work assignments is through teaming.

Types of Teams

A common type of team encountered is the **natural** team, or department. Individuals come together around the goals of the work unit. Responsibilities are assigned as part of a job description or specific program assignment.

A **process improvement** team (PIT) is focused on creating or improving a specific business process. A PIT may attempt to reengineer a process or work on incremental improvements. If attempting a process redesign, the team is usually cross-functional with representatives from a number of different functions and with a range of skills related to the process to be improved. Process improvement teams that are focused more on the overall process as it impacts many functions are **cross-functional** in the composition of its members, especially if the objective of the PIT is to develop a breakthrough improvement.

A **project** team is formed to achieve a specific mission. The project team's objective may be to create something new like a new facility, new program or service, or to accomplish a complex task such as implementing a quality management system or upgrading all measurement reports to use a common software application and database. Typically, a project team employs full-time members on loan for the duration of the project. The project team operates in parallel with their primary organizational functions. The project team may or may not be cross-functional, depending upon its objectives and competency needs. Often the project leader may be the person to whom the ultimate responsibility for managing the resulting project outcome is assigned.

Self-directed or self-managed teams are groups of employees authorized to make a wide range of decisions about how they will handle issues regarding safety, quality, work schedule, work allocation, goals, work standards, program maintenance, and conflict resolution. Often called high-performance work teams, these teams offer employees a broader spectrum of responsibility and ownership of a process. Often team members select the team leader; sometimes leadership is rotated among members. Due to the level of empowerment afforded, careful planning and training is critical to a successful self-directed team.

Virtual teams are groups of two or more persons usually affiliated with a common organization who have a common purpose but who are not necessarily employees. The nature of the virtual team is that they partly or entirely conduct their work by electronic communication. Virtual teams are a hybrid in that they may or may not be cross-functional. These teams may or may not

be partly or entirely self-managed. Typically the virtual team is geographically dispersed, often with individual members working from their home. Public health professionals find themselves involved in a number of virtual team assignments either through multi-state collaboratives, lack of travel funding, or the inability to disengage from other assignments during the life of the team project.

No matter what type of team is initiated, it is important to identify the role each member plays in achieving assigned goals. Members who are new to team work may need training on working collaboratively to achieve required outcomes. Seasoned team players may assume that their role is the same as their last assignment and fail to consider the needs of others on the team. Careful planning must be done before choosing team members and assigning roles within the team in order to balance skills, working styles, personalities, and expectations across the diverse set of knowledge, skills, and abilities available.

Choosing Roles for Team Members

The most critical roles for launching successful teams are Team Leader and Facilitator. Table 1 identifies seven major roles required for high-performing teams, along with the basic responsibilities of each role. All seven roles should be assigned, although they may be combined within one individual with the exception of leader and facilitator. It is important that these two responsibilities be kept separate to allow for the difference in focus of these two roles. Timekeeper and Scribe are optional roles about which the authors do not agree. Staying on time and task is the basis of an effective team. Documenting and archiving the content of team meetings, work sessions, or other discussions are crucial requirements of successful teams and projects.

Team members are the heart of the team. Without the knowledge and experience of people who actually do the work, a team cannot be successful. Supplementing the team with subject matter experts for focused periods of time can compensate for a lack of knowledge or skill on segments of project analysis. Team members must willingly share their expertise, listen attentively, and support all team decisions.

The Quality Council or Champion charters a project based on priorities related to critical success factors identified by external or internal customers. One of the first actions in chartering a project is to identify the team leader. The Team Leader is responsible for the content of the work that is produced by the team. This individual needs excellent communication skills and must have a trusted reputation within the organization.

Very frequently, a team must function in parallel with daily assigned work. Rarely does the health organization have the luxury of removing other responsibilities from an individual when he or she is asked to participate on a process improvement team. An important early activity for the team is to establish guidelines for group behavior, set expectations for working together, and receive clear direction from the Project Champion on outcomes and timelines. The project management activities necessary to keep the team on schedule and focused on goals are the responsibility of the Team Leader.

Role Name	Responsibility	Definition	Attributes of Good Role Performance
Champion	Advocate	The person initiating a concept or idea for change/improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> dedication to see it implemented belief that it is the right thing to do perseverance and stamina
Sponsor	Backer, Risk Taker	The person who supports a team's plans, activities, and outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> belief in the concept/idea sound business acumen willingness to take risks and responsibility for outcomes authority to approve needed resources trust of upper management
Team Leader	Change agent; Chair; Head	<p>One who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -staffs the team or provides input for staffing requirements -strives to bring change/improvement through the team's outcomes -has the authority for and directs team efforts -participates as a team member -coaches team members in developing or enhancing necessary competencies -communicates with management about the team's progress and needs -handles the logistics of team meetings -takes responsibility for team records 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> commitment to the team's mission and objectives experience in planning, organizing, staffing, controlling, and directing capability to create and maintain channels that enable members to do their work capability to gain members' respect; a role model firmness, fairness, and factuality in dealing with a team of diverse individuals discussion facilitation ability to listen actively empowerment of team members to the extent possible within the organization's culture support of all team members equally respect of each team member's individuality
Facilitator	Helper; Trainer; Advisor; Coach	A person who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -observes the team's processes and team members' interactions and suggests process changes to facilitate positive movement toward the team's goals and objectives -intervenes if discussion develops into multiple conversations -intervenes to prevent an individual from dominating a discussion or to engage an overlooked individual -assists team leader in bringing discussions to a close -may provide training in team building, conflict management, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> trained in facilitation skills respected by team members tactful knowledge of when and when not to intervene focus on the team's process, not content respect of the team leader, not overriding his or her responsibility respect of confidential information shared by individuals or the team as a whole ability to decline the facilitator role if expected to report to management information that is proprietary to the team adherence to the ASQ Code of Ethics
Timekeeper	Gatekeeper; Monitor	A person designated by the team to watch the use of allocated time and remind the team when their time objective is almost met.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> capability of assisting the team leader in keeping the team meeting within the time limitations predetermined assertiveness to intervene in discussions when the time allocation is in jeopardy capability of participating as a member while still serving as a timekeeper
Scribe	Recorder; Note taker	A person designated by the team to record critical data from team meetings. Formal "minutes" of the meetings may be published to interested parties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> capability of capturing on paper or electronically the main points and decisions made in a team meeting and providing a complete, accurate, and legible document or formal minutes for the team's records assertiveness to intervene in discussions to clarify a point or decision in order to record it accurately capability of participating as a member while still serving as a scribe
Team Members	Participants; Subject Matter Experts	The persons selected to work together to bring about a change or improvement, achieving it in a created environment of mutual respect, sharing of expertise, cooperation and support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> willingness to commit to the team purpose; ability to express ideas, opinions, suggestions in a non-threatening manner capability of listening attentively to other members receptiveness to new ideas and suggestions calm; handles stress and copes with problems openly competent in one or more fields of expertise needed by the team favorable performance record willingness to function as a team member and forfeit "star" status

Table 1: Roles, Responsibilities, and Performance Attributes

¹Bauer J., Duffy G., Westcott R. Ed. *The Quality Improvement Handbook*, 2nd ed. Milwaukee, WI: Quality Press; 2006.

The other critical role in the team is the Facilitator. The Facilitator is responsible for ensuring that the process affecting the work of the team is the best for the stage and situation of the team. When launching the team, the Facilitator must assess the entry-level skills of each member and design learning opportunities to fill in the gaps so that the team is able to move forward quickly to address desired outcomes.

A trained facilitator is a valuable partner to the team leader. The Facilitator has experience and training to support situations that might severely disrupt normal project activities such as:

- Team members holding conflicting perspectives on data, problem resolution, or general responsibilities
- A new member joining the team and upsetting established relationships
- A core team member leaving
- Adequate resources not being forthcoming from process owners or champions, threatening the future of the team or the project

Several of the roles such as Scribe or Timekeeper may be combined depending upon the size of the team and its purpose. Examples of when combining team roles may be appropriate are:

- A three-person team self-selects the person who originated and sold the idea to management (the Champion) as Team Leader.
- A cross-functional, performance improvement team chooses to rotate the Team Leader role at specific intervals.
- A departmental work group (natural team) rotates Timekeeper and Scribe roles at each meeting to eliminate perceived discrimination based on gender, job held, age, schooling, etc.
- The process owner serves as the Team Leader because the project is confined to his or her area of responsibility only.
- Specialists, as needed, are periodically requested to join the team temporarily, e.g. epidemiologist, inspector, grant specialist, or internal auditor.
- After the team has begun to function smoothly, and the Team Leader has become more skilled under the guidance of a Facilitator, then regularly occurring team meetings may dispense with a separate Facilitator.

For some team missions where very formal documentation is required, the Scribe or note taker becomes critical. Organizations just beginning their quality improvement (QI) journey must identify long-term operating guidelines for the QI program as a whole. Minutes of team meetings, quality council decisions, and key measurements will provide an initial baseline for the strategic structure of the program. The documentation role can be distracting for a member whose full attention may be needed on the topics under discussion. For this reason, an assistant, not a regular member of the team, is sometimes assigned to take the minutes and publish them. Care should be taken not to select a team member solely on the basis of demographic characteristics or position in the organization.

Using the Team Charter to Establish Role Expectations

Elsewhere, we discuss in depth the value of developing a comprehensive team charter at the beginning of the project. The charter is either created by the project sponsor and team leader before assigning team members or as an initial activity for the team. The authors recommend that team members be involved as early in the development of the charter as possible. The discussion required to identify the information contained in the charter is an excellent vehicle for orienting team members to customer requirements, outcomes, and organizational expectations for the project.

A formal team charter includes:

- Purpose
- Sponsor name
- Champion name
- Team member names and areas of expertise
- Scope
- Problem Statement
- Goal or AIM Statement
- Process Owner
- Objectives
- Resources available and required
- Actual and perceived barriers to project success
- Stakeholders impacted by project outcomes
- Communication plan for both internal and external stakeholders

Roles and Responsibilities May Vary Throughout Project

Teams move through five stages of growth as they develop maturity over time. Each stage may vary in intensity and duration. The stages² are:

Stage 1: Forming

The cultural background, values, and personal agendas of each team member come together in an environment of uncertainty. New members wonder: “What will be expected of me? How do I, or can I fit in with these people? What are we really supposed to do? What are rules of the game, and where do I find out about them?”

Health Departments often work at breakneck speeds due to reduced headcount, feast or famine activities based on grant funding and resultant deadlines, or changes imposed by newly appointed local, county, and state officials. Sometimes fear is part of a new member’s approach to a team assignment. Fear may be about personal acceptance, additional workload, possible inadequacy for the assignment, or consequences if the team fails its mission. These fears and other concerns manifest themselves in dysfunctional behavior such as: jockeying for position of status on the team; undercutting the ideas of others; disrespecting another member; forcing one’s point of view on others; bragging about academic credentials; objecting to any suggestion but one’s own; abstaining from participation in discussions; distracting the work by injecting

² Tuckman B. Developmental Sequence in Small Groups. *Psychological Bulletin*, 1965; 63:(6): 384-399.

unwanted comments or taking the team off subject; and retreating to a position of complete silence.

Due to the diversity of some teams, a wide variety of disciplines, experience, academic levels, and cultural differences may exist among the members. This variety can result in confusion and misunderstanding of terminology and language difficulties.

A technique for moving the team through this stage is to state and understand the purpose of the team clearly, identify the roles of the members, and establish criteria for acceptable behavior as norms. The team charter, described in Chapter 3, is the vehicle for setting expectations for outcomes and team behavior.

Stage 2: Storming

In this stage, team members still tend to think and act mostly as individuals. They struggle to find ways to work together or sometimes belligerently resist attempts to combine purpose. Each member's perspective remains founded upon his or her own personal experience rather than based on information from the whole team. Uncertainty still exists, defenses are still up, and collaboration is not yet the accepted mode of operation. Members may be argumentative. By this stage, team members know enough about their peers to "push each other's buttons." Disagreements arise over small issues because individuals are not yet invested in the goals and outcomes of the project. They frequently test the leader's authority and competence. Members often try to redefine the goal and direction of the team and act as competitors rather than compatriots.

Stage 3: Norming

At this stage, true teamwork begins. Members change from dwelling on their personal agendas to addressing the objectives of the team. Competitiveness, personality clashes, and loyalty issues are sublimated, and the team moves toward willingness to cooperate and openly discuss differences of opinion. Conflict becomes an opportunity for discovery, not a barrier to forward progress. The leader focuses on process, promoting participation and team decision-making, encouraging peer support, and providing feedback. A potential danger at this stage is that team members may withhold their good ideas for fear of damaging newly formed relationships.

Stage 4: Performing

Now functioning as a mature and integrated team, the members understand one another's strengths and weaknesses. The leader focuses on monitoring and feedback, allowing the team to take responsibility for solving problems and making decisions. The team has become satisfied with its processes and is comfortable with its working relationships and in resolving team problems. The team is achieving its goals and objectives; however, reaching this stage does not mean that the team journey is over.

Typically a team moves through these stages in sequence. However a team may regress to an earlier stage when something disturbs its growth. Adding a new member may take a team back to Stage 1 as the new member tries to become accepted and the existing team members test the newcomer. Loss of a respected member may shift the apparent balance of power, so that the team reverts to Stage 2. A change in scope or threat of cancellation of a team's project may divert a team to an earlier stage to redefine direction. An individual team member's exposed manipulation of the team can cause anger, retrenchment to silence, or a push to reject the offending member, and a jump back to Stage 1.

Some teams find it difficult to maintain Stage 4 and will bounce between Stages 3 and 4. This difficulty may be a matter of unskilled team leadership, an unsupportive sponsor, unprepared team members, external factors threatening the viability of the project, or a host of other factors. The authors use a number of approaches to maintain team member confidence in their role within the project. Some of these approaches are:

- Using techniques and tools of project planning and management to provide structure for the team.
- Tracking, measuring, and reporting procedures for both project and team success.
- Establishing risk assessment criteria, identify contingency plans, and conducting periodic assessments of both the team and project progress.
- Recognizing, reinforcing, and rewarding the team for work done well.
- Using the team communication plan to keep stakeholders, customers, and team sponsors informed of progress.

Stage 5: Adjourning

Bruce Tuckman's final stage, *adjourning*, added to the original four-stage model in 1977, involves the termination of task behaviors and disengagement from relationships. When a project has met its stated objectives, it is time to close it down and celebrate.

A planned conclusion usually includes recognizing participation and achievement and providing an opportunity for members to say personal goodbyes. Concluding a group can create some apprehension—in effect, a minor crisis. The termination of the group is a regressive movement from giving up control to giving up inclusion in the group. The most effective interventions in this stage are those that facilitate task termination and the disengagement process.

Many QI teams use the adjourning stage as a time to document lessons learned, identify opportunities for continued improvement, and provide general feedback for process sustainability. Six Sigma³ recommends the development of a Control Plan, including a monitoring and measurement checklist to keep the project gains in place. Figure 1 shows the progression through the five stages of team development with a feedback arrow closing the loop from the end of one team project to the initiation of another either with information or actual team members from the earlier activity.

What Makes a Team Work?

A team is much more than a group of professionals thrown together to complete a set of tasks. A team is a very valuable combination of individuals who choose to contribute skills, knowledge, and attitudes toward the achievement of organizational goals. Fortunately, public health professionals frequently work in teams to maximize resources both within the department and

³ iSixSigma Dictionary, <http://www.isixsigma.com/dictionary/control-plan/> accessed on February 6, 2014.

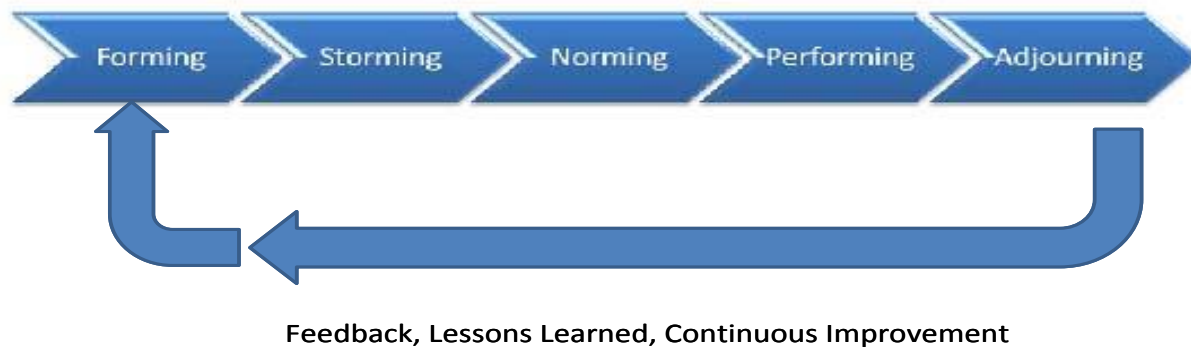


Figure 1: The Five Stages of Team Development with Feedback Loop⁴

across the community. The same commitment to meet and exceed requirements that these professionals exhibit in traditional health support activities drives success in process improvement teams. The roles and responsibilities of teams provide the structural support upon which team members achieve success. Setting expectations and communicating clearly and frequently provide a foundation for the characteristics of teamwork listed below:

- All team members agree on the expected outputs and outcomes of the team.
- Each member is committed to the goals and objectives of the team and understands why he or she is on the team.
- Each member fully accepts the responsibilities assigned as well as an overall commitment to help with whatever needs to be done to ensure the team's success.
- Members agree to ask questions and share their opinions and feelings with no hidden agendas and with respect for other team members.
- Information is not hoarded or restricted. Each member has access to what is needed, when it is needed to get the work accomplished.
- Building and maintaining trust is of paramount importance to the team's successful achievement of its purpose.
- Every member feels that he or she can make a difference with his or her contribution.
- Management is committed to support the team's decisions, as is each team member.
- Conflict within the team, when properly managed, produces a win-win outcome.
- The team maintains a dual focus: its process as a team and its anticipated outcomes.
- Serving on the team can increase a member's expertise and reputation but should never be a detriment to a member's personal development (e.g., promotional opportunities, compensation increases, training to maintain job skills).

⁴ Tuckman B. Developmental Sequence in Small Groups. *Psychological Bulletin*, 1965; 63:(6): 384-399.