

Tips for Successful Teamwork

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by Jill Burrington-Brown, MS, RHIA, FAHIMA

AHIMA's e-HIM work groups have had great success in bringing together groups of HIM professionals to explore and create guidance on cutting-edge e-HIM practices and technology. These groups also teach us lessons about the factors of successful teamwork that we can apply to our own work situations.

How to Begin

Teams get off to good starts when they have well-defined, achievable goals. They get the best results when they are composed of members who contribute diverse perspectives and can commit the necessary time and energy.

Choose the right project. According to *The Team Handbook*, a project should:

- Be important to the organization and its customers
- Not be undergoing major change or study by another group
- Have clearly defined starting and ending points¹

Draft a clear charter. The charter should define the project, including its importance to the organization's customers and its boundaries. A clear charter helps the team understand the key measures and milestones related to the project. The charter should be a guide to the work to be accomplished.

Appoint a facilitator or coach. A facilitator or coach should be experienced in working with groups, understand the use of statistical processes, and able to lead the group in group process. He or she should have the ability to keep the team on course and move it away from dysfunctional processes. It is often best if the facilitator remains neutral to the solutions proposed for the process and focuses only on making sure the team functions well together.

Find the right team members. Team members should bring a perspective to the project that no one else has, providing the group with a variety of points of view. A team of diverse points of view will be more challenging to manage but will likely achieve a more complete and successful solution due to those diverse perspectives. Team members should also be willing to commit to attending and participating in all meetings, helping with administrative tasks such as minute and note taking, and performing assignments between meetings. Using the right people with the right amount of commitment will bring about a good end result.

Understand the problems of managing by results. Managing by results or objectives can cause issues of coordination in organizations. When groups set their objectives without input from other departments, problems occur, including the creation of work or information silos, internal department conflicts, short-term thinking, fear in reporting problems, and blindness to customer issues.

According to the authors of *The Team Handbook*, the alternative to managing by results is process excellence, which incorporates customer focus, a scientific approach, and teamwork.

Holding Productive Meetings

Teams can keep the momentum of their good starts by running efficient, effective meetings that result in clear next steps.

Hold efficient meetings. Every meeting takes time that the attendees could spend doing something else. When you multiply that time by the number of persons in the meeting, it is clear why meetings need to be an efficient and effective use of that

time. The Team Handbook states, "Overly ambitious agendas, no agendas, out-of-control discussions or no clear direction can make even the most ardent members seek solace under their desks."²

Have an agenda. An agenda is not merely a list of the topics to be discussed, it is also a guide to the meeting. The agenda should list the topic, the person leading the discussion for each topic, and the time allotted for each topic. If the team has difficulty staying on topic, the facilitator or appointed member should redirect the team.

Start and end on time. Starting and ending on time respects the time constraints of your team members and forces the group to be productive within the time limits of the meeting. Groups should start meetings even if all are not present and end so the members can go on to their next commitments.

Keep notes of the meeting. The note taker should record key topics and points raised, as well as decisions and action items (both who is responsible and by what date). The note taker should also keep a record of items to be discussed at future meetings so they are not lost to the group. The notes should be distributed to all the members as soon as possible.

Evaluate the meeting. At the end of each meeting team members should spend a few minutes discussing what worked well during the meeting and what did not and make suggestions for improving the meeting process.

When multidisciplinary teams are used in achieving goals and objectives, the results can be exponentially more successful, profitable, and complete than the more traditional methods of work delegation.

Notes

1. Scholtes, Peter R., Brian J. Joiner, and Barbara J. Streibel. *The Team Handbook*. Madison, WI: Oriel Incorporated, 2003, page 2-10.
2. Ibid, page 3-1.

Jill Burrington-Brown (jill.burrington-brown@ahima.org) is a professional practice manager at AHIMA.

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