Week 1

Teaming Is a Verb

Benchmark goal: Understanding how teaming is different than teamwork.

Say the word *team* and the first image that comes to mind is probably a sports team: football players huddled in the mud, basketball players swarming in a full-court press, or baseball players turning a game-saving double play. In sports, great teams consist of individuals who have learned to trust one another. Over time, they have discovered each other's strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to play as a coordinated whole. Similarly, musicians form bands, chamber groups, and orchestras that rely on interdependent talents. A symphony falls apart unless the string section coordinates with the woodwinds, brass, and percussionists. Even when a soloist is featured on stage, the orchestral score has a part for every musician. A successful performance is one in which the musicians complement one another and play in harmony. Like all good teams, they display synergy. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The players understand that they succeed or fail together—they win or lose as a team.

In today's complex and volatile business environment, corporations and organizations also win or lose by creating wholes that are

greater than the sum of their parts. Intense competition, rampant unpredictability, and a constant need for innovation are giving rise to even greater interdependence and thus demand even greater levels of collaboration and communication than ever before. Teaming is essential to an organization's ability to respond to opportunities and to improve internal processes. Week 1 aims to deepen your understanding of why teaming and the behaviors it requires are so crucial for organizational success in today's environment.

Delving into Teaming

Sports teams and musical groups are both bounded, static collections of individuals. Like most work teams in the past, they are physically located in the same place while practicing or performing together. Members of these teams learn how to interact. They've developed trust and know each other's roles. Advocating stable boundaries, well-designed tasks, and thoughtfully composed membership, many seminal theories of organizational effectiveness explained how to design and manage just these types of static performance teams.

Harvard psychologist Richard Hackman, a preeminent scholar of team effectiveness, established the power of team structures in enabling team performance. According to this influential perspective, well-designed teams are those with clear goals, well-thought-out tasks that are conducive to teamwork, team members with the right skills and experiences for the task, adequate resources, and access to coaching and support. Get the design right, the theory says, and the performance will take care of itself. This model focused on the team as an entity, looking largely within the well-defined bounds of a team to explain its performance. Other research, notably conducted by MIT professor Deborah Ancona, showed that how much a team's members interact with people outside the team boundaries was also an

important factor in team performance. Both perspectives worked well in guiding the design and management of effective teams, at least in contexts where managers had the lead time and the run time to invest in composing stable, well-designed teams.

In these prior treatments, *team* is a noun. A team is an established, fixed group of people cooperating in pursuit of a common goal. But what if a team disbands almost as quickly as it was assembled? For example, what if you work in an emergency services facility where the staffing changes every shift, and the team changes completely for every case or client? What if you're a member of a temporary project team formed to solve a unique production problem? Or you're part of a group of managers with a mix of individual and shared responsibilities? How do you create synergy when you lack the advantages offered by the frequent drilling and practice sessions of static performance teams like those in sports and music?

The answer lies in *teaming*.

Teaming is a verb. It is a dynamic activity, not a bounded, static entity. It is largely determined by the mindset and practices of teamwork, not by the design and structures of effective teams. Teaming is teamwork on the fly. It involves coordinating and collaborating without the benefit of stable team structures, because many operations, such as hospitals, power plants, and military installations, require a level of staffing flexibility that makes stable team composition rare. In a growing number of organizations, the constantly shifting nature of work means that many teams disband almost as soon as they've formed. You could be working on one team right now, but in a few days, or even a few minutes, you may be on another team.

Fast-moving work environments need people who know how to team, people who have the skills and the flexibility to act in moments of potential collaboration when and where they appear. They must

have the ability to move on, ready for the next such moments. Teaming still relies on old-fashioned teamwork skills such as recognizing and clarifying interdependence, establishing trust, and figuring out how to coordinate. But there usually isn't time to build a foundation of familiarity through the careful sharing of personal history and prior experience, nor is there time for developing shared experiences through practice working together. Instead, people need to develop and use new capabilities for sharing crucial knowledge quickly. They must learn to ask questions clearly and frequently. They must make the small adjustments through which different skills and knowledge are woven together into timely products and services.

Why should managers care about teaming? The answer is simple. Teaming is the engine of organizational learning. By now, everyone knows that organizations need to learn—to thrive in a world of continuous change. But how organizations learn is not as well understood. Organizations are complex entities; many are globally distributed, most encompass multiple areas of expertise, and nearly all engage in a variety of activities. What does it mean for such a complex entity to "learn"? An organization cannot engage in a learning process in any meaningful sense—not in the way an individual can. Yet, when individuals learn, this does not always create change in the ways the organization delivers products and services to customers.

In spite of the obvious need for change, most large enterprises are still managed according to a powerful mindset I call *organizing to execute*.

Organizing to Execute

If you stood on a main street in Detroit around 1900, you would have seen electric trolleys sharing the streets with horse-drawn carriages.

A mere decade later, cars had arrived in force. Though inefficient and unreliable, these increasingly popular cars brought with them the promise of a new, exciting world. For a short time, however, both horse and mechanical horsepower tried to share the streets, sometimes with devastating consequences. Many people found the collision of old and new worlds difficult, especially when those streets became even more crowded with young men from the countryside drawn to the city by the promise of manufacturing jobs.

In this transitional period, it was not obvious to the average worker how much the new industrial era would disrupt the social order by calling for new forms of obedience, unprecedented conformity to routine, and a new mindset that revered systems of control. Self-sufficient farmers and shopkeepers, who had for generations confronted vicissitudes of weather and illness and found ways to survive, would subtly but inexorably be transformed into order followers collecting paychecks from impersonal enterprises.

Organizing to execute found its seminal momentum in Henry Ford's invention of the assembly line: workers focused on fitting cog to component and component to cog. Emphasizing routine procedures, Ford's approach made the working life of employees menial and tedious. Reliable and predictable, Ford's assembly line process was as much a novelty as its product. With the new century, age-old structures for self-reliance were being replaced with the small, repetitive steps that made mass production possible and brought about the modern world of products and services we know today. Ford's success was contingent on a high level of managerial control over employee practices known today as command-and-control management, or top-down management. The practice of top-down management is one component of a broader organizational methodology known as scientific management.

15

Teaming Is a Verb

Scientific Management

Ford's intellectual partner as a pioneer in mass production was management expert Frederick Winslow Taylor, who complemented Ford's assembly line with his efficiency methods and scientific measurement. Taylor and his followers devised ways to transform unpredictable and expensive customized work into efficient, economical systems of mass production. Long product life cycles enabled ample payback for the time invested in designing near-foolproof execution systems like the machine-paced assembly line. Periods of stability could be counted on. Products, processes, and even customers were mercifully uniform, minimizing the need for real-time improvisation to respond to unexpected problems, technological changes, or customer needs. Promoting the use of empirical methods, Taylor advocated his model of management and production in two influential monographs, *Shop Management* and *The Principles of Scientific Management*.

As managers today well know, an advantage of these new small, repetitive tasks was their transparency. Small, repetitive tasks are easy to monitor. They make the performance of the individual worker easy to measure. The assumption that firm performance was the cumulative result of thousands and thousands of well-designed and well-executed individual tasks dominated managerial theory and matched the economic reality. Even today, when it comes to issues like efficiency and productivity, most managers and corporate leaders are driven by taken-for-granted beliefs that were first promulgated by Ford and Taylor. For example, many consider the ability to measure and reward the specific, differentiated performance of individuals crucial to good management—a belief that is inaccurate and unhelpful in certain settings.

Ford and Taylor's Legacy

Devotion to efficiency and productivity resulted in two major workplace changes. First, it spurred a demand for professional managers who could oversee a vast complex of work activity. Second, it instilled a basic distrust of the worker. To ensure that workers did their jobs according to specified procedures, objective measurements of individual performance were relatively easy for managers to develop and implement. And, for the most part, workers who tried harder performed better. In mass production settings like the one designed by Ford, opportunities for worker decision-making or creativity were nonexistent. With this transparency, fear worked reasonably well to motivate employees. Whether through a fear of supervisor sanction or loss of material rewards, managers were able to coerce and intimidate workers to ensure high productivity. If there were costs to this approach for the enterprise or corporation, they were not in plain view.

The primary problem this legacy creates for managers today is that these systems produced an overreliance on fear in management practice. As Taylorism gained a foothold in factories across the country, the corporate mood became dour. Taylorism was ruthless. The individual's worth was measured by their contribution to enterprise gains. A history of the United Auto Workers union described factory life in these early days as follows: "Every Ford worker is perfectly aware that he is under constant observation—that he will be admonished if he falls below the fast pace of the department." Even in 1940, decades after the early days of the Ford miracle, a worker could be fired for smiling.

Fear in the Modern Workplace

Unfortunately, draconian management practice is not relegated to the distant past. Consider the rash of employee suicides that brought Foxconn's factory conditions to the public eye in May 2010.

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Said one employee interviewed, "Every day, I repeat the same thing I did yesterday. We get yelled at all the time. It's very tough around here." Reports surfaced of 12-hour standing shifts, having to ask permission to go to the bathroom, and relentless pressure to meet daily manufacturing quotas.

Source: http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-06-02/foxconn-workers-in-china-say-meaningless-life-monotony-spark-suicides.html.

Fear and routine have never been limited to blue-collar work. Ford's factory worker can be seen as the precursor to the 1950s' *organization man*, a term coined by sociologist William Whyte. Deindividuating labor was not all that different from deindividuating white-collar work. Much like the assembly line worker, the office-bound organization man was bound by rules, processes, hierarchical structures, and fear. Moreover, the image of the organization man wasn't just promulgated by sociologists. Novelists and writers have portrayed work in large organizations as replete with both monotony and anxiety. American literature has long presented bankers and other managers as organization men, experiencing the same cog-in-the-machine dehumanization as their blue-collar counterparts.

As a society, we are still largely inured to a fear-based work environment. We believe (most of the time, erroneously) that fear increases control. Control reinforces certainty and predictability. We don't immediately see the costs of fear. In fact, many managers believe that without fear people will not work hard enough.

Thriving in the Face of Uncertainty

As customer expectations continue to shift and competition becomes increasingly global, many companies struggle to succeed in a drastically

changing landscape. Rapid developments in technology and changes in the legal environment greatly reduce the barriers to entry in a variety of industries, thus introducing new, nimble competitors. Now you see supermarkets, department stores, and funeral homes offering financial services that were formerly the exclusive purview of banks and banking institutions. Likewise, telephone companies offer television service, while television companies offer phone service. Heightened competitive pressure means that even in previously stable industries unexpected changes are occurring in a compressed period of time and creating new, unprecedented challenges.

Consequently, as management and system dynamics expert Peter Senge put it, "The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization."[1] Learning new skills in an uncertain environment where knowledge is a moving target is now a competitive imperative in most industries. Consider the astonishing expansion of medical knowledge. If you were practicing medicine in 1960, you could subscribe to a few leading professional journals and most likely keep up with the literature in your field. In 1960, there were just 100 articles published on randomized control trials, the gold standard for best practices in medicine. Today more than 10,000 articles reporting on randomized control trials are published annually. An average engineer today sports a wristwatch with more computing power and memory than was available to the team of engineers working in the Apollo program at NASA in the 1960s.

Good-Bye Taylor and Ford . . . Hello Complex Adaptive Systems

The point is that knowledge in fields related to health care, technology, science, and engineering, as well as a host of others, is growing at such

a pace that today's workplace is significantly different from that of the industrialized manufacturing era of Ford and Taylor. By now, most leaders and managers recognize that organizations that don't learn are left behind their more innovate and adaptive competitors. In this dynamic environment, successful organizations need to be managed as complex adaptive systems rather than as intricate controlled machines.

The term *complex adaptive system* describes systems that are dynamic and adaptable, much like those found in nature. A system is complex when it has many interacting parts. Feedback loops are a hallmark of complex systems. Feedback loops mean that part A has an impact on part B, which may then affect part C, which feeds back in turn to have an impact on part A. Taken together, these interactions create unpredictable dynamics. Trying to understand, much less predict, what happens in such systems when one is expecting linear, unidirectional relationships—where A influences B, which may influence C, and that is the end of the chain—will produce flawed results.

Complex adaptive systems self-regulate. Not always in preferred ways, mind you, but they change in response to both external and internal triggers. Examples of such systems range from an embryo to an ant colony to a hospital. What these systems have in common is that they encompass a number of similar elements (cells, ants, people) and they self-organize in reaction to external and internal disruptions (often called *perturbations*).

The learning imperative requires relinquishing control as the ultimate goal. It requires embracing the creation of adaptive capabilities as a fundamental organizational competence. It requires flexibility and judgment. It requires a managerial approach that works when organizations face uncertainty created by new technologies, shifting customer preferences, or complex systems. Success requires a shift from organizing to execute to a new way of working that supports collaboration, innovation, and organizational learning.

Learning to Team, Teaming to Learn

Simply put, *teaming* is a way of working that brings people together to generate new ideas, find answers, and solve problems. But people have to learn to team; it doesn't come naturally in most organizations. Teaming is worth learning, because it is essential for improvement, problem-solving, and innovation in a functioning enterprise. The complex interdependencies involved in learning and innovating require the interpersonal skills necessary to negotiate disagreements, overcome technical jargon, and revisit ideas or problems until solutions emerge—all activities supported by teaming. Learning in today's organizations involves what's called r*eciprocal interdependence*, where back-and-forth communication and coordination are essential to getting the work done.

Although teaming can help any enterprise improve, it is absolutely critical to success when any of the following conditions are present:

- The work requires people to juggle multiple objectives with minimal oversight.
- People must be able to shift from one situation to another while maintaining high levels of communication and tight coordination. This situation literally defines the practice of teaming.
- It is helpful to integrate perspectives from different disciplines.
- Collaborating takes place across dispersed locations.
- Preplanned coordination is impossible or unrealistic due to the changing nature of the work.
- Complex information must be processed, synthesized, and put to good use quickly.

Though teaming refers to a dynamic activity rather than to a traditional, bounded group structure, many of its purposes and benefits are grounded in basic principles of teams and teamwork. Among the benefits of teams is their ability to integrate diverse expertise as needed to accomplish many important tasks. Historically, the focus of team research and project implementation was on reorganizing production processes. Increasingly, however, teamwork extends beyond the factory floor.

Using teams to solve problems or shape new strategic directions has been popular in organizations since the early 2000s. In 2003, the Census of Manufacturers from the Manufacturing Performance Institute (MPI) reported that 70 percent of respondents used teams to accomplish their business goals.

Yet all is not perfect with teams and teaming. Despite the fact that team use is steadily increasing, team effectiveness is not keeping up at the same pace. In the previously cited MPI report, only about 14 percent of organizations surveyed rated their teaming efforts as "highly effective," while just over half (50.4 percent) rated their teams as "somewhat effective." Thus, over a third of teams were rated as ineffective. This, in addition to scores of other reports and studies, indicates that although using teams to get interdependent work done can be valuable, achieving the tremendous potential of teams is far more challenging than many expect—and successful teamwork is thus still elusive in many organizations.

Organizing to Learn

Staying competitive, as we have seen, requires learning. Organizing to learn is a way of leading that encourages critical teaming behaviors to promote collective learning. It supports the collaboration needed to solicit employees' knowledge, apply it to new situations or challenges,

and to analyze outcomes. Organizing to learn is a way of moving forward in spite of uncertainty. Taking action without certainty can be a daunting prospect in organizations where stability and success are valued over variance and experimentation.

Collective learning includes such activities as collecting, sharing, or analyzing information; obtaining and reflecting on feedback from customers or others; and active experimentation. Individual learning behaviors within a collective learning experience include the following:

- Asking questions
- Sharing information
- Seeking help
- Experimenting with unproven actions
- Talking about mistakes
- Seeking feedback

These learning behaviors enable groups to obtain and process the data needed to adapt and improve. Through collective learning, organizations can detect changes in the environment, learn about customers' requirements, improve members' collective understanding of a situation, or discover the consequences of their previous actions. They require a willingness to take interpersonal risks such as discussing mistakes. This requires leaders who work to create environments that support and encourage sharing, experimenting, and learning.

The old mindset, organizing to execute, has been a century in the making, so it's no wonder that many leaders adopt it by force of habit and training. Organizing to execute has many strengths, especially in its emphasis on discipline and efficiency. However, it also has many risks, particularly when used in highly uncertain or complex contexts.

In these settings, organizing to learn is critical to success. Table 1.1 highlights key differences between the approaches and identifies two distinct mindsets, and the corresponding management practices that leaders can adopt when they are responsible for guiding people and organizations.

Table 1.1 Organizing to Execute Versus Organizing to Learn

Management Approach	Organizing to Execute	Organizing to Learn
Hiring	Conformers, rule followers	Problem-solvers, experimenters
Training	Learn before doing.	Learn from doing.
Measuring performance	Did YOU do it right?	Did WE learn?
Structuring work	Separate expertise	Integrated expertise
Employee discretion allowed	Choose among options.	Experiment through trial and error.
Empowerment means	Employees can deviate from the script if special circumstances make it necessary.	There is no script. Improvise!
Process goal	Drive out variance.	Use variance to analyze and improve.
Watercooler conversation	About the weather	About the work
Business goal	Make money now.	Make money later.
Works when	Path forward is clear.	Path forward is not clear.

Teaming to Learn

The ability to learn is critical for organizations operating in today's fast-paced business environment. Relying on existing knowledge and skills succeeds only if you know exactly what should be done in a job and you expect the process to remain relatively fixed for a significant amount of time. In today's environment, that's the exception, not the rule. In this activity, you delve into teaming and how it works with today's business climate.

Activity

Reflect on the following questions:

How do you define the difference between teaming and teamwork?

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_____

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What conditions make it necessary to team (as opposed to simply working as a team)?

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Do you think teaming is necessary for your organization? If not, do you still think it will be beneficial?

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Do you feel fear is a good motivator in the workplace?

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