

## The Four Vital **Team Conditions**

While businesses often require people to work in teams, the team approach often fails. In this issue we will explore why this happens, and what can be done to prevent this problem.

Many assume that because a “team” is working on a project the outcome will be better than if one person did it alone. Not necessarily. In this issue of *The Viridiant Business Newsletter* we will discuss the “**Four Vital Team Conditions**” for teams to achieve optimal performance.

“The Team” has become king in the business world. So much so, that business schools generally require students to complete assignments as teams in order to prepare them for the “real world.” This makes sense, because many of today’s jobs in the business world, do in fact require a team of people to complete. While businesses often require people to work in teams, the team approach often fails. This issue of the *Viridiant Business Newsletter* will explore why this happens, and what can be done to prevent this problem.

The “Four Vital Team Conditions” are these:

1. **Competence**, including knowledge of the job, is required at all levels of the team.
2. **Communication** must be excellent within, and among, all members of the team.
3. **Checks and Balances** must be in place from the beginning through the end of the project.

4. The team must **practice** together.

So how and when does the team approach fail? The team approach can fail if any of the above “Four Vital Team Conditions” malfunction. We will examine malfunction of each of the conditions separately.

### Competence

Since competence is required at all levels, if the wrong individual is assigned to the wrong job, or one individual simply does a poor job, the entire project may fail. Think of the team approach as a “chain” and each member of the team as a link in the chain. If one link is weak, the chain breaks. So in fact, the team approach has an inherent weakness. For if any one of the team members is the wrong person for the job or simply does a poor job, the work of the entire team can come crashing to the ground.

Competence sometimes becomes a problem when a known member of the team is distracted by a personal problem, such as illness or divorce. In such cases, other members of the team likely know the circumstances and can stand by to assist as needed.

Competence is more often a problem when a new employee comes on board, and is either not known to the team or is fresh out of school. The issue could be one of true incompetence or simply that the individual does not know what is expected of them. In the latter case, **Team Conditions 2** (communication) and **3** (checks and balances), will ensure the project goes smoothly to completion. Similarly, if competence is an issue because a poor hiring choice was made, this will become apparent to the other members of the team, as long as com-

*(continued on page 2)*

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munication and checks and balances are built into the project.

#### Communication

Communication must be ongoing, open and complete. One reason interviews are important to conduct is that poor communication skills may be detected in a potential hire. More often, individuals in the workplace simply do not get along. Such problems may sabotage the work of an entire team. Communication focus groups can be used to improve communication among team members. (Viridiant provides communication-training groups. For more information see <http://www.viridiant.com/innovation/organizational-innovation.html>).

#### Checks and Balances

If one half of a team begins a railroad track from the west and the other half begins the track from the east, and they never meet to review their plans (“meeting” in today’s world can be assumed to include phone calls, e-mail and video-conferencing), it is not hard to imagine that in the end the two railroad tracks will not line up properly. A few minutes devoted to “Checks and Balances,” interspersed throughout a project, can save many hours of time, effort, and a great deal of money as well. Well-oiled chains, i.e. teams that have worked together on many projects, may require few checks and balances. They know each other’s strengths and weaknesses, know how to look over each other’s shoulders, and know who can be counted on for what. Still, even a team that has worked together for a long time must have checks and balances. It is just that they can spend less time on them.

#### Practice

No one would conceive of fielding a sports team that has not practiced together. In

many established businesses, practice is not an issue, as their staff has been working for years, i.e. they have been “practicing” in the real world of business. However, problems may arise if a new individual joins the team and does not know what is expected of him/her. It is wise to practice this individual’s role with him/her. If this is not feasible, Communication and Checks and Balances should ensure that the individual performs as a valued member of the team.

One method to bring a team member up to speed, is known as “on-boarding”, a technique whereby new hires are walked through their jobs by colleagues and/or superiors for a certain amount of time. Depending upon the type of job, on-boarding may be a very efficient way to bring new hires up to speed and to make them a valued member of the team as rapidly as possible.

The next issue of *The Viridiant Business Newsletter* will provide case studies of team successes and failures, and show how the above “Four Vital Team Conditions” were either enforced or violated respectively.

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