The faculty of Highland Park Junior High School in Beaverton, Oregon, experienced the challenges that most other elementary and secondary schools experience today—to continually adapt to the needs of students, parents, and the community. To do so, they would have to learn flexible organizational problem solving to be aware of their current approaches and results, to understand the internal and external environment, to assess the gaps between their current and desired outcomes, and to cohesively develop action plans that they could agree to implement. The faculty and staff worked with organization development consultants over a series of workshops to improve communication and participation in faculty meetings, develop better problem-solving practices, take more initiative as a team to recognize and solve problems, and to develop better interpersonal relationships with increased openness and skills in giving one another feedback. The consultants designed sessions to maximize face-to-face interaction, first through simulation activities and then facilitating sessions where the team solved real organizational problems. The team identified and diagnosed their own problems, developed action plans, and tried out new ways of interacting as a team. As a result of the intervention events, cohesiveness and the quality of team relationships increased substantially. Turnover decreased to one fourth to one fifth of that of comparative local schools. Faculty began to take the initiative to call and run their own faculty meetings without the principal’s involvement, and they designed and facilitated the next intervention workshop on their own, without the use of consultants. Soon, other schools in the district began to adopt the approaches of the faculty (Schmuck, Runkel, & Langmeyer, 1969).

- Do you think this team’s problems are common to many teams? What other common problems do teams experience?
- How do you define a successful team?
Engagements where the target population is a team are among the most common applications of organization development (OD) interventions. The use of teams in organizations is not a new phenomenon, but use of and attention to work teams and their functioning has increased over the past several decades. Organizations have implemented new forms of teams, such as self-directed work teams, virtual teams, and cross-functional teams. These new types of teams, combined with the complexity of work today that frequently requires increased collaboration and problem solving in a global environment, mean that organizations rely heavily on teams for their success and must devote attention to the effectiveness of their teams (Buzaglo & Wheelan, 1999). Put another way, “The effective functioning of groups and teams is central to the effective functioning of organizations” (Woodman & Pasmore, 2002, p. 164). In addition, teams not only play a central role in an organization’s effectiveness, but they also play a central role in the accomplishment and implementation of organizational change, such as shifts in strategy (Coghlan, 1994).

Unfortunately, leaders often fail to pay much attention to team effectiveness, not knowing how to develop the team or assuming that the team will work things out on its own (Dyer, Dyer, & Dyer, 2007). When they do tackle team effectiveness, many leaders and change agents fall into the traps discussed in Chapter 9, directing interventions at the wrong issues, implementing the intervention at the wrong time, or failing to address substantive issues of concern to the team.

In this chapter, we will define what we mean by a team, identify different kinds of teams used in contemporary organizations, and consider the elements of effective teams as well as common points where teams struggle. We will then examine some of the more commonly practiced team interventions directed at improving team effectiveness on work tasks and team relationships, such as role analysis, work redesign, and Workout. Teams also frequently come into contact (and conflict) with other teams, so this chapter also describes intergroup interventions applicable when more than one team is involved.

Defining Teams

Many practitioners and scholars find it instructive to distinguish between a group and a team. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) define a team as “a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable” (p. 45). Others stress the importance of member interdependence on a team, noting that team members must rely on each other and feel accountable to one another in the accomplishment of their goals to be considered a team (Dyer et al., 2007; Levi, 2001). To account for this fact, Larson and LaFasto (1989) believe that “a team has two or more people; it has a specific performance objective or recognizable goal to be attained; and coordination of activity among the members of the team is required for the attainment of the team goal or objective” (p. 19). In other
words, a group might consist of a large number of individuals, all of whom perform the same general job task but do not count on other members in the accomplishment of individual tasks, so they are not a team by these definitions. Students in a class held in a large lecture hall are likely to be considered a group, but if they divide into smaller units to accomplish a task such as a class project (becoming interdependent and accountable to one another in the achievement of a common goal), they are forming teams.

Other commonly held characteristics of teams include the following:

- Members participate in decision making and setting goals.
- Members communicate frequently with one another in the accomplishment of team tasks.
- The team has a defined and recognized identity by others in the organization, outside the team.
- Members have defined roles and they recognize how these roles interrelate.

Barner (2006) writes that contemporary teams are very different from those of the past. Most people hold a model in their heads of a team as an intact collective of members who reported to a single manager, with egalitarian membership, located physically at a single work site, and made up of members from similar cultural backgrounds. Today, rather, teams are much more likely to be ad hoc, called together for a single purpose and a short period, perhaps self-directed without a single manager. Instead of being egalitarian, power relationships now intrude when members increasingly represent multiple functions and hierarchical levels. Teams may be geographically distributed, and thus may be comprised of members from different countries and diverse cultural backgrounds. Contemporary teams may demand that members perform multiple roles on multiple teams rather than specialized roles on a single team (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). All of these factors challenge our traditional assumptions about what constitutes a team, they introduce new complexities into the inner workings of a team, and they complicate our implementation of interventions to improve team effectiveness.

What Makes a Successful Team?

Much work has been done by researchers to identify the characteristics that distinguish high-performing, effective teams. In an extensive survey of different types of teams in different types of organizational environments and circumstances, Larson and LaFasto (1989) conducted detailed interviews of members of high-performing executive teams, project teams, sports teams, government, and military teams. They concluded that eight characteristics set the successful teams apart:

1. A clear, elevating goal. That is, the goal is understood and seen as challenging to team members.
2. **A results-driven structure.** Team members must have clear roles, effective communication processes, and an ability to use available data to evaluate progress and take corrective action when necessary. Members must also understand how their roles interrelate.

3. **Competent members.** The team must be comprised of members with the right technical knowledge and interpersonal skills to contribute to the team’s goal.

4. **Unified commitment.** Team members must be willing to dedicate effort and energy to the team.

5. **A collaborative climate.** The team must develop a climate of trust in one another in order to collaborate.

6. **Standards of excellence.** High-performing teams have high standards for individual performance and members feel pressure to achieve.

7. **External support and recognition.** Teams need external rewards but also support in the form of resources necessary for the team to accomplish its work.

8. **Principled leadership.** Leaders provide the necessary motivation and alignment to complete the team’s work.

All too often, teams fail in one of these categories. Low-performing teams consistently demonstrate some of the characteristics listed in Table 11.1, missing one or more of these elements of high-performing teams. These can often be clues that a team would benefit from an intervention.

## Special Types of Teams

In addition to a new model of team being used today, many organizations employ special kinds of teams to accomplish tasks. Three of these worth noting in detail are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 11.1 Common Problems in Teams</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many observers have seen that low-performing teams experience a common set of problems, including the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confusion about the team’s objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ambiguity about team goals and how they will be achieved</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Missing handoffs or duplicating work between individuals who do not understand their unique roles or interdependencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unclear expectations from the leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lengthy decision-making cycles and an unclear authority for decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Mismatched expectations for communication and information sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Long and unproductive meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An inability to successfully manage conflicts</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
self-directed work teams, virtual teams, and cross-functional teams. Each of these teams solves a unique set of contemporary challenges in organizations, but also presents unique difficulties to overcome.

**Self-Directed Work Teams**

Self-directed work teams are also frequently referred to as self-managed work teams. Self-directed teams have a long history, but their major rise to popularity came in the 1980s when economic cutbacks resulted in the loss of a middle management layer in many organizations, forcing companies to look to new ways of organizing work. The result was the pushing down of decision making into lower levels of the organization, often into teams (Orsburn & Moran, 2000). A self-directed work team is described as follows:

A group of interdependent, highly trained employees who are responsible for managing themselves and the work they do. They set their own goals, in cooperation with management, and the team plans how to achieve those goals and how their work is to be accomplished. Employees on a self-directed team handle a wide array of functions and work with a minimum of supervision. (Ray & Bronstein, 1995, pp. 21–22)

A common myth is that a self-directed team can do whatever it wants, and many managers and leaders fear that if given authority, productivity will suffer and laziness will become the norm (Hitchcock & Willard, 1995). In fact, self-directed teams have a wide variety of responsibilities, from goal setting, organizing work processes and schedules, sorting out roles and responsibilities, monitoring results, and taking action when results do not meet requirements. Some teams take on roles that were formerly the sole province of management, such as hiring team members and conducting performance evaluations.

Making the transition to self-directed teams usually challenges individual and cultural models of work, such as how decisions get made and who is ultimately responsible for productivity and performance. As a result, significant learning is required for managers and employees alike, which involves “learning how to behave under an empowered management philosophy including the roles and skills required, and the unlearning of old habits and behaviors (e.g., waiting for managers to solve problems)” (Druskat & Dahal, 2005, pp. 204–205). Employees must take ownership of team processes and be motivated to manage them as a group. Without significant learning, practice, and attention to team development, self-directed teams and leaders can quickly revert to “old” habits where leaders direct the team's actions and make its decisions. Management behavior is an important factor in the transition to self-directed work teams, and their attitudes and actions have been called “the single largest threat” (Ray & Bronstein, 1995, p. 215) to successful implementation. Managers must shift from “paternalistic” behaviors of monitoring and supervision to acting as a coach or mentor to the team (Yeatts & Hyten, 1998).

Self-directed work teams require significant leadership commitment, mutual trust between management and employees, acceptance of new and sometimes
ambiguous roles, and willingness to invest in time and money for training and development of teams. Self-directed teams are also prone to special challenges, such as resistance from leadership, the need to manage conflict within the team, power and control, team decision making, and giving and receiving feedback. The most successful self-directed work teams also have a support structure that encourages their ongoing development and growth beyond the initial implementation period.

Virtual Teams

We have already noted how organizational teams are increasingly diverse and geographically distributed. These teams help organizations respond to the global customer environment and take advantage of expertise located throughout the world. Such teams are often referred to as virtual teams, defined as teams where members “work together through electronic means with minimal face-to-face interaction” (Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Rosen, 2007, p. 60). In a virtual team, team members from San Francisco, Denver, and London may all join a conference call and e-mail chat to solve a customer problem, perhaps pulling in an expert from Beijing when necessary. Virtual teams may hold few face-to-face meetings, conducting most team meetings through computer-mediated communications or other technologies. Thus, a distinguishing feature of a virtual team is the use of electronic tools to communicate and share information. This can involve not only very common and well-established technologies such as telephone conferences and e-mail, but many organizations increasingly use Internet-based chat and instant messages, social networking technologies, handheld communications devices, and Internet-based collaboration tools to facilitate easy and quick interaction among team members.

When members are not collocated, coordination of work across physical and time-zone boundaries is the central challenge. It is also a challenge to build and develop a team, to create “avenues and opportunities for team members to have the level and depth of dialogue necessary to create a shared future” but where “issues of cultural diversity, geographic distance and member isolation can increase the challenges to effective collaboration” (Holton, 2001, p. 36). It can be challenging for members to build trust or to get to know one another on a personal level through electronic technology. Many feel that e-mail creates easy opportunities for miscommunication and misunderstanding, increasing the potential for conflict that is difficult to resolve through the same mechanism.

Dyer et al. (2007) identify four problems that seem to trouble virtual teams more frequently than face-to-face teams:

- **Lack of trust and mutual understanding.** Members may represent different cultures and develop conflicts, mistrust, or stereotypes when other members enact different cultural preferences.
- **Violated expectations.** Members may find differences in the use of different technologies, the expression of emotion through technology, or the time it takes one member to respond to another’s request.
Lack of training and effective use of communication technologies. More effective virtual teams make use of available technologies and know how to apply them in the appropriate situation.

Lack of effective team leadership. The authors note that leading a virtual team can require a significant investment of time. Malhotra et al. (2007) also identify special challenges of virtual team leaders, who must establish team trust, evaluate and measure progress, and ensure participation, all using distance technology.

To address these issues, some observers recommend several remedies (Connaughton & Daly, 2004), including creating opportunities to meet face-to-face to build relationships, creating opportunities for dialogue and “small talk” for team members to get to know one another on a personal level, holding team sessions to agree on team norms about the frequency and type of communications (such as frequency of and process for conducting meetings), and scheduling discussions or training sessions on cultural differences.

Cross-Functional Teams

Cross-functional teams are a response to the increasing complexity of operations in many organizations and the demand for rapid pace, focus, and problem solving (Parker, 1994). A cross-functional team is “a small collection of individuals from diverse functional specializations within the organization” (Webber, 2002, p. 201). Members are not usually part of the same department, but represent varied departments, units, or geographies, and are often brought together for a defined period to work on a specified project or problem. Team members usually report to a project team leader but also report to a functional unit “home” manager who directs their day-to-day work. An example of a cross-functional team would be a product development team where representatives from marketing, sales, customer service, finance, and product engineering all bring their unique experience to collaborate on a single team.

The same benefits of implementing cross-functional teams are also its major challenges. First, “functional diversity” of membership brings multiple perspectives together to enhance a team’s knowledge and problem-solving ability (Webber, 2002), yet it also means that teams can have trouble communicating and finding common ground as team meetings become organizationally “multicultural” experiences (Proehl, 1996). Members may use different points of reference or vocabularies and exhibit different values. Second, cross-functional teams can have the benefit of including members who can be brought together for a short time to work on a project and then disband. Yet dedication of time can vary among organizational members, causing team conflicts and mismatched understandings of commitment to the team. This is “largely because the projects are not directly related to the members’ immediate work, and members have many competing responsibilities and varying degrees of immediate management support for participating in organizational initiatives” (Proehl, 1996, p. 7). Third, having a single team leader
who brings the team together can provide a single point of leadership, yet it can create confusion and frustration for organizational members who now find themselves with two managers who may have conflicting demands. This can create ambiguity regarding decision making, such as which manager controls performance evaluations and rewards such as compensation or pay increases.

Studies of cross-functional team success point to the need to address some of these common challenges early on in the formation of a cross-functional team. Leaders can develop a common team mission and identity in the early stages so that team members who represent multiple functional areas can feel a common sense of belonging, commitment, and accountability to the success of the cross-functional team. Parker (1994) specifically recommends clear, overarching team goals to reduce ambiguity and confusion about the team’s authority and responsibility. Webber (2002) recommends both training for team leaders and that team leaders establish working relationships early with functional managers to explicitly negotiate time expectations for those members working on the team, and to agree on a performance appraisal and rewards process.

Team Development

Whether we are discussing a more traditional, intact, and collocated team, or one of the teams explored above, researchers have noted that most teams grow and develop in a common way.

One of the most well-known theories of group development comes from Tuckman (1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977), who proposed based on an extensive review of published studies that groups appear to experience a five-stage evolutionary process of development. Wheelan (2005) proposed a similar model with different labels. Table 11.2 reviews these two models of group development. Not all teams will develop according to these stages, and not all will move sequentially from stage to stage. Some teams may find themselves “stuck” in one stage, or they may revert back to a previous state. For example, if a team cannot resolve a team conflict, team members may become guarded and may exhibit more of the characteristics of the first stage. While these models are overly simplistic, they may be instructive for practitioners. For the change agent, being aware of stages of team development can help to pinpoint common team problems and suggest interventions to enhance the team’s effectiveness and ability to develop to subsequent stages of productivity.

Team-Building Interventions

Interventions to enhance team effectiveness can come from two general philosophies. Some researchers find it useful to distinguish between team development programs and team interventions (Barner, 2006).

Team development programs proactively encourage teams to develop as healthier groups. These programs “employ a training approach to team-building that
### Table 11.2  Stages of Team Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tuckman (1965); Tuckman and Jensen (1977)</th>
<th>Wheelan (2005)</th>
<th><strong>Stage Characterized By:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Forming</strong></td>
<td>Dependency and inclusion</td>
<td>Team members explore initial interactions with one another in an “orientation” period as they begin to build relationships. There is generally a low level of trust and high anxiety and confusion about the group's purpose and objectives. There are likely to be conversations about expectations, group rules, and structure. Communication may be guarded, exploratory, and cautious. Disagreement is rarely expressed. The group is generally highly dependent on the team leader, who is usually unchallenged, and members generally consent to what the leader says.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Storming</strong></td>
<td>Counterdependency and fight</td>
<td>Members begin to express disagreements with one another and with the leader as members feel more comfortable and safe with the team. Emotions may run high as members have conflicts over goals, roles, or group values. Group cohesion may give way to subgroups or coalitions. Previously agreed-to group norms or rules may be broken. Members may try to negotiate the conflicts, work through them and move on to the next stage, or they may become mired in unhealthy conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Norming</strong></td>
<td>Trust and structure</td>
<td>The group attempts to manage some of its conflicts by coming to agreement on group norms, roles, goals, and more. There is increased cohesion and a return to the harmonious climate of the first stage, but with increased trust, cooperation, and commitment. The team generally begins to focus again on task achievement with less dependency on the leader. Conflict management techniques are now used effectively, and individuals feel free to express their opinions.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

(Continued)
A team development intervention might help a new team with start-up needs. For existing teams, it might help them to move from stage one to stage two of the models discussed in Table 11.2 by encouraging forthright communication and the healthy expression and management of disagreement. Team development programs often work with groups throughout the group process so that the team develops in a healthy way. In other words, a development intervention can be useful even when the team is not “at war, dysfunctional, incompetent, or distrustful” (Byrd, 2000, p. 157). They are often opportunities to allow healthy groups to develop even more effective patterns.

By contrast, team interventions “employ a problem-solving approach to team-building that helps established work groups identify and address obstacles and constraints to high performance” (Barner, 2006, p. 48). These are likely to be more reactive than proactive, designed to address a problem that a team is experiencing. For example, members on a team may experience role conflict that impedes their performance, and they may need an intervention to sort through the confusion. “To use a seagoing analogy,” Barner (2006) writes, “team development programs take the form of redesigning boats when they are dry-docked, whereas team intervention engagements involve repairing leaky vessels while they are still at sea” (p. 49). These are likely to be situations in which a change agent is called in to correct an explicitly identified problem or barrier to the team’s effectiveness. The team is often stuck and needs the assistance of a change agent to get unstuck.

Whether they address development of a healthy team or team problems, most of these interventions go by the general label *team building*. As we will refer to it here,

### Table 11.2 (Continued)

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<tr>
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<th><strong>Stage Characterized By:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Performing</strong></td>
<td>Team members find synergy and begin to find repeated and successful ways of interacting to achieve group goals. Team members have clarity and agreement on goals, roles, and working processes. The team begins to see a period of high productivity and accomplishment of their objectives as energy is devoted to work tasks. The team monitors its own results and evaluates its own effectiveness, discussing problems and identifying opportunities for improvement. Team leaders more frequently delegate or leave routine decisions to the group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjourning</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>As the team’s work is completed, the team may disband or members may leave.</td>
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</table>
“Teambuilding is the activity of attempting to improve a work group’s effectiveness at doing its work, maintaining the relationships of its members and the team’s contributions to the wider organizational system” (Coghlan, 1994, p. 21).

Team building, however, has different meanings for different people. In some lay circles, team building has come to refer to fun, enjoyable, often relaxed activities in which team members may learn more about one another outside the work environment. To some, team building has come to mean any team-focused relationship-building event. Many consulting companies have been founded on this principle and now invite executives to learn scuba diving or sailing, or to work together to prepare a six-course meal with a top chef. Some clients request that OD practitioners build in team-building activities into a meeting agenda, suggesting that the team meet for dinner, drinks, or an activity after the meeting. Such events are often enjoyable for the participants and usually build camaraderie. However, as Wheelan (2005) puts it, “Research does not suggest that rock climbing, whitewater rafting, blind trust walks, or playing basketball on donkeys increases productivity in any way” (p. 16).

Others may hold an image of a team-building session as a time for members to “sit around and criticize one another, delve into personal matters, or just express their feelings about all kinds of issues, many not related to work” (Dyer, 1994, p. 15). Activities such as these are less effective at some of the more challenging and pervasive problems that teams experience, such as resolving interpersonal and role conflicts, improving communication patterns, enhancing the team’s decision-making ability, or correcting process confusion. It is this latter set of challenges to team effectiveness that better encompasses the issues to be addressed in a team-building intervention.

Team building has a negative connotation for some clients because it cannot be denied that team-building activities often fail to achieve their objectives. In fact, some researchers have found that team-building interventions have no resulting effect on team performance (Salas, Rozell, Mullen, & Driskell, 1999). Others have found that the team building–performance link is a highly complex one, in which the effect on team performance depends on the amount of time the team has been together, the amount of time the team spends working together, the duration of each unique task, and the timing of the intervention (Bradley, White, & Mennecke, 2003; Woolley, 1998). It may also be that team-building interventions appear to not have met expectations when we implement them as one-time “fix-all” efforts and not as a part of a longer term strategy (Boss, 1983). Building a high-performing team takes time. To think of a single team-building intervention as having “fixed” a team “conjures up pictures of OD consultants as magicians waving wands and curing all ills in the brief time that they have with the team—this is clearly naive” (Rushmer, 1997, p. 317).

Finally, Boss (1983) has observed a pattern of regression after team-building interventions, when team cohesion and unity, and energy for collaboration and trusting relationships, revert back to old traditions. This is especially true when there is little follow up after the intervention, no support structure for continuing the changes, no leadership support, and no associated changes in policies or processes. All of these postintervention factors should also be taken into account to ensure a successful team-building intervention.

As you might expect, team-building interventions start with a data gathering methodology (using one or more of the methods described in Chapter 7) to determine the focus area for the intervention. Two widely used data gathering
methods specific to teams are the team diagnostic survey and the team diagnostic meeting. Team diagnostic surveys vary significantly, but usually ask team members to individually rate the team on such items as “Members are clear about group goals,” “Members are clear about their roles,” “The group uses effective decision-making strategies,” and “The group uses effective conflict management strategies” (Wheelan, 2005, pp. 49–51). Many practitioners design customized surveys of this sort, depending on the team’s current needs. A more formally tested empirical team diagnostic instrument has been designed by Wageman, Hackman, and Lehman (2005) and consists of a 15- to 20-minute survey designed to assess such areas as team structure, goals, leadership, and cohesiveness. Use of a designed and tested instrument such as this one can increase validity and allow comparisons to other high performing teams.

A second data gathering method, a team diagnostic meeting, allows the group itself to assess its own functioning, usually face-to-face. In an open environment of self-evaluation, with or without a facilitator, team members discuss the team’s strengths and weaknesses, and they design their own action plans to address them, which may involve one or more team-building interventions. (Some possible diagnostic discussion questions are listed in Table 11.3.) In one variation of a diagnostic setting, team members write down the issues that inhibit the team’s effectiveness, small subgroups sort the issues by theme, and the team discusses and prioritizes the problem areas, which are then the focus for problem-solving meetings on another occasion.

The chief advantage of this method is that the group itself owns and chooses its own categories of analysis without relying on the predefined categories of a survey. Use of data gathering or diagnostic methods such as these can help to narrow the team-building intervention to the highest priority areas of concern to the team. Once the data gathering or diagnostic activity is completed, a team-building intervention may be appropriate if the data show any of the signs listed in Table 11.4.

**Table 11.3 Questions to Ask During a Team Diagnostic Meeting**

- What are this team’s strengths?
- How are we doing against our group goals?
- What factors have contributed to our success?
- What is getting in the way of our goal achievement?
- How well do we solve problems?
- How well do we make decisions?
- How effective are our team meetings?
- How well do we understand our unique roles and responsibilities?
- How well do we collaborate in our work together?
- How well do we communicate with one another?
- How well do we work with other teams?
- How do we handle disagreement or conflict?
- How well do we work with the team leader?
- What problems should we be working to address?
There are a wide variety of team-building interventions, and most change agents are prone to highly adapt them based on the needs of the team. The next sections describe six common team-building interventions that relate to common needs of a high-performing team, such as team formation and change, job design and work process analysis, roles and responsibilities, and problem solving:

1. Team start-up and transition meetings
2. Confrontation meetings
3. Role negotiation and role analysis
4. Work redesign
5. Workout
6. Appreciative inquiry

Some of these interventions work well for new teams, while some work best for existing teams with work history. Table 11.5 compares these six team intervention approaches.

### Team Start-Up and Transition Meetings

In many organizations, teams are frequently formed, and then they work, evolve, and disband, with team members moving on to other projects. This, in fact, is one of the major advantages of teams, because members’ skills and experiences can be combined to tackle a problem or situation and then move on to...
another team and another problem (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Teams can struggle through the start-up process, however, often failing to devote the time and energy to forming the team effectively and instead the team will quickly jump in to performing work or solving problems. This is especially true for temporary or ad hoc teams who may see little need to invest time in the team's initial forming stages. Even when leaders transition or team members join (or leave) the team, there is a period of adjustment that will require attention to get the team back to its formerly productive ways. Team members may use the transition to stop and wonder whether the goals and processes that the team has depended on to date will remain in place. Roles may need to change as team membership changes. Without conscious attention to the initial stages of team formation, many teams will flounder for an extended period until they sort out the team's purpose, team member roles, and working relationships on their own through trial and error. During this time, without much attention to the team, team members can become disengaged and withdrawn, and productivity can suffer.

Team start-up (for new teams) or transition meeting interventions (in the case of a new leader) can both be effective interventions to start teams off quickly. West (2004) writes, “The beginning of a team’s life has a significant influence on its later development and effectiveness, especially when crises occur. Start-up interventions can help create team ethos, determine clarity of direction, and shape team working practices” (p. 77). A well-structured team start-up and transition intervention can also do the following:

- Quickly establish agreements and norms so that the team can begin to function more quickly
- Provide opportunities to surface team member disagreements and misunderstandings earlier rather than later
- Clarify basic team functions such as goals and operating methods
- Allow team members to begin to develop interpersonal relationships
- Provide team members with clear and well-defined roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>New Teams</th>
<th>Existing Teams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team start-up</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confrontation meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role negotiation and role analysis</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Work redesign</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workout</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciative inquiry</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11.5 A Comparison of Team Intervention Approaches
Golembiewski (1979a) offers several instructive design guidelines for working with new groups or those in transition. Because the teams are new, start-up and transition intervention designs generally emphasize developing structure versus “unfreezing” groups out of any previous agreements. It may be necessary to design sessions that limit the amount of information that a new team tries to process at any one time, instead providing boundaries for discussions to avoid the team becoming overwhelmed. Frequent breaks away from team development or team building may be useful to allow the team to have a chance to work and experiment, and then return to the team development session with fresh knowledge.

A sample start-up or transition meeting outline is listed in Table 11.6.

### Table 11.6  A Sample Start-Up or Transition Meeting Agenda

1. **Introductions of each team member**
   - Career history and background, education, family, personal interests or hobbies
2. **Talk with the leader**
   - The leader’s vision of and expectations of the team
   - Leadership style, “hot buttons,” work preferences, values
   - Personal, “getting to know you” interview with the leader
   - Team member expectations and needs of the leader
3. **Exploration of team charter, mission, and purpose**
4. **Exploration of team goals and objectives**
   - Priorities
   - Timelines and milestones
   - Metrics (type, number, frequency of updates, targets, communication of results)
5. **Exploration of team member roles and responsibilities**
   - Team member roles, titles, job functions, interdependencies among members
6. **Agreement on team norms and guidelines for work**
   - How will we make decisions?
   - What will be our basic method for work (individual tasks, subcommittees, the whole group considers all topics)?
   - How do we make sure that everyone gets a chance to discuss issues or raise concerns?
   - How will we communicate and resolve differences?
   - How will we ensure the completion of work? How will we change things that are not producing results? (Dyer, 1994, pp. 132–135)
7. **Agreement on team meetings**
   - Expected attendance
   - Frequency
   - Length
   - Location
   - Usual topics
   - Agenda
Confrontation Meetings

The confrontation meeting was first outlined by Beckhard (1967). It consists of a half-day to daylong session of any type of team (though it was first outlined as a session specifically for executive teams) and is in many respects a kind of team diagnostic meeting as described earlier. It is more effective with intact teams that have worked together for some period versus new teams that do not have an extended history. The name of the intervention might suggest that it is intended to address or expose team conflict, but what is “confronted” are the team’s obstacles, broadly defined. In a confrontation meeting, the team examines its own effectiveness and health, and it develops action plans to address major areas of ineffectiveness and dissatisfaction. Beckhard writes that the confrontation meeting is appropriate for the following situations:

- There is a need for the total management group to examine its own workings.
- Very limited time is available for the activity.
- Top management wishes to improve the conditions quickly.
- There is enough cohesion in the top team to ensure follow-up.
- There is real commitment to resolving the issues on the part of top management.
- The organization is experiencing, or has recently experienced, some major change (Beckhard, 1967, p. 150).

Beckhard writes that “in periods of stress following major organizational changes, there tends to be much confusion and energy expended that negatively affects productivity and organization health” (1967, p. 153). The rapid nature of the confrontation meeting allows for an effective gathering and sharing of data without the extended time and expense of an organizationwide survey.

The confrontation meeting is structured in seven phases (Beckhard, 1967):

**Phase 1:** Climate setting (45 minutes to an hour). The session begins with the leader setting expectations to encourage an open and honest discussion.

**Phase 2:** Information collecting (1 hour). The group is divided into subgroups of seven to eight people, usually representing a broad cross-section of levels and functional specializations. Each subgroup lists obstacles to productive goal achievement and suggestions that would improve the organization.

**Phase 3:** Information sharing (1 hour). A representative from each subgroup reports back to the larger group. A facilitator begins to group the contributions into categories.

**Phase 4:** Priority setting and group action planning (75 minutes). Groups are reformed into functional units, sitting with others in their normal work team. Each group prioritizes the problems that had been shared in phase 3 and identifies the issues that they believe should be given the most attention.
Phase 5: Organization action planning (1 to 2 hours). Subgroups share their priorities with the larger group.

Phase 6: Immediate follow up by top team (1 to 3 hours). The confrontation meeting ends and the top management group holds a private meeting to discuss the nominated priorities and to agree on what follow-up actions they will support. Within a few days they report back to the attendees on which actions they have selected.

Phase 7: Progress review (2 hours). A follow-up meeting is held with all attendees to review progress 4 to 6 weeks after the confrontation meeting.

The confrontation meeting can have the advantage of encouraging participation and ownership by team members. Beckhard notes that this approach can fail if team leaders do not listen to or accept input from team members, if they do not follow up on the team’s priorities, or if they set overly aggressive goals that do not get met.

Role Negotiation and Role Analysis

Because team members are, by definition, interdependent with interrelating work activities, they can often find themselves in the frustrating position of not knowing how the various pieces of work fit together to achieve the overall team objectives. Whether team members have worked together at length or are just starting, member roles are a frequent area of confusion. Consider the following common situations:

- Members may not be clear about one another’s assignments, so they do not know who to approach with a question or problem.
- There may be overlapping work, with multiple team members performing the same activities.
- There may be work necessary to accomplish that no team member is performing.
- There may be confusion about how the work contributes to the team’s goals.
- The team may have evolved a new vision, purpose, or strategy, but old roles still remain.
- The team may have no process for assigning the work to a new team member.
- There may be frustrations about the equitable distribution of work (who gets the good assignments, who gets too many/too few assignments).
- The team leader may assign multiple people to similar activities, leading team members to wonder who is truly responsible for the task, or whether the tasks relate at all.

The result can be team members who fight for the same work while other work gets lost, and inevitable last-minute crises that come about because of the confusion (Dyer, 1994). These role-related challenges can be categorized into several types of role problems that often occur in teams (Adair, 1986):
1. **Role conflict** (one team member). Occurs when one team member holds two mutually incompatible roles. For example, a member leading a project team who is expected to discover the best possible solution but whose manager expects her to advocate a single solution at the same time.

2. **Role conflict** (multiple team members). Occurs when team members hold the same role, and these are in conflict with one another. An example might be two salespeople who are given the same territory with the same customers.

3. **Role incompatibility.** Occurs when there are incompatible expectations about a given role. For example, some may expect the operations manager to facilitate the meeting while other members expect him to quietly take notes.

4. **Role overload.** Describes the situation when a person has too many roles to fulfill, such as sitting on multiple committees and being expected to act as the liaison between all of them, or to participate on the project team and all subteams.

5. **Role underload.** When a role is not fully developed with enough significant work or responsibilities.

6. **Role ambiguity.** When the role owner and/or team members are unclear about the responsibilities of a given role.

Having well-written job descriptions can address some of these challenges, but tends to still leave some role issues unresolved. A role negotiation exercise and a second related intervention called “responsibility charting” can help teams resolve the confusion, conflict, and frustration about roles.

**Role Negotiation Exercise**

The role negotiation exercise (also called role analysis technique) puts team members in the position of negotiating responsibilities amongst themselves without needing a leader to make the decision for them. As a result, it is highly participative and can build team consensus about responsibilities. It results in each member having a documented and agreed-upon role description, with an understanding of the preferences and needs of other team members. As an intervention, it is relatively simple to implement, can be done in a short time, and requires no special training of team members to carry out. The four steps of a role negotiation are these (Dayal & Thomas, 1968; Dyer, 1994; Golembiewski, 2000; Harrison, 1972; West, 2004):

*Step 1:* Privately, each team member takes a piece of flip chart paper and writes down the activities and responsibilities of his or her role. “This means sharing all information about how the focal person understands the job—*what* is expected, *when* things are expected to be done, and *how* they are expected to be done” (Dyer, 1994, p. 120).
Step 2: Next, the completed flip charts are placed around a room and every team member reads each flip chart. Clarifying questions may be asked of the author about how that author has defined the role.

Step 3: Each team member writes a list on a separate piece of notebook paper with what he or she wants any other team member to do (a) more of, (b) less of, or (c) keep doing the same. Every team member comments on every other team member’s role.

Step 4: The lists are sorted so that each team member has a list completed for his or her role (with each of the three categories listed in Step 3) by every other member. These may be written on flip charts and posted publicly for all to read or they may simply be handed out to each person. Team members can then meet in pairs or as a whole team to discuss their lists and negotiate what they would like each other to keep doing or to do differently. It is in this step where the value of the exercise becomes most meaningful, with members usually needing to compromise and be willing to change in at least some small degree. As Harrison (1972) puts it, “Unless a quid pro quo can be offered in return for a desired behavior change, there is little point in having a discussion about it” (p. 90). Members will thus learn how to express their own needs from one another and negotiate how or whether those needs can be fulfilled. Harrison also suggests that following a role negotiation exercise, team members try to keep to the negotiated agreements they have made for at least a short time, but that if they do not work, they should try to renegotiate them. Over time, he believes, the team will learn how to do this negotiation as part of its ongoing work activity.

Role negotiation requires an environment of openness and safety, comfort in expressing disagreement and getting beyond disagreement, the ability to express one’s wants and needs, and mutual commitment to each other and to the group. Lest it sound too simple: The analysis, charting, and negotiation of member roles on a team is not simply a matter of documenting who will do what, as this process intervention may appear. Complex identity matters and political struggles are at play when members negotiate responsibilities. If I used to be responsible for reviewing all mechanical engineering designs for the company’s products, and the team decides that everyone will share that action and I now will begin to work more closely with suppliers only on designs I reviewed, I may feel that I have lost a part of my professional identity. I may feel like I have been demoted or that I am no longer as significant a contributor as I once was. Consequently, change agents who implement role analysis and clarification interventions will be more successful if they are aware of and sensitive to the complexities of managing personal impacts and transitions.

Responsibility Charting

The responsibility charting technique (Beckhard & Harris, 1977) can help a team with its decision-making processes so that members understand who is responsible and involved with what actions and decisions. It can reduce conflict by
specifying up front, before the situation occurs, what involvement is necessary in what ways by which team members. Like role negotiation, role analysis is deceptively simple: It consists of the development of a chart or grid on which are written the team’s major activities and which members are given the responsibility of completing them. The simplicity of the design belies its power, since completing the chart can be a focal point to pull a group out of a conflict or confusion and surface unexamined difficulties. An example of a role analysis chart is provided in Table 11.7.

Team member names are listed at the top of the grid, and down the left-hand column are listed the team’s major activities. One of the following letters is placed under each team member name, in the row for each activity, representing that team member’s responsibility for the activity (or it may be left blank if the member is not involved):

- **R**: Responsible. This person is responsible for ensuring that this action is carried out.
- **A/V**: Approval or veto. This person has authority to approve or veto actions and decisions for this item.
- **S**: Support. This person supports the activity with time or other resources.
- **C**: Consulted. This person should be consulted or included in the action.
- **I**: Informed. This person should be communicated to or informed about the status of the activity.

Variations exist among practitioners in which letters should be included. Some, for example, call a role analysis chart a “RACI” chart, and leave out the S. Golembiewski (2000d) advocates adding a D (for example, R-D and A-D) to signify responsibility or authority for a decision, and Imp to signify responsibility for implementation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Member</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Member 1</th>
<th>Member 2</th>
<th>Member 3</th>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 11.7  A Role Analysis Chart
Beckhard and Harris (1977) advocate a number of useful constraints or “rules” to the use of responsibility charts. First, they recommend that every activity line must have one and only one person responsible—only one $R$. If more than one person must be responsible, the activity should be segmented so that the boundary of each member’s responsibility is documented clearly. Second, a large number of approvals—$A$s—might be an indication that there are too many approvals, and team activity might be streamlined by reducing the number of necessary approvers. Similarly, having too many people consulted on an action may be unnecessarily involving team members and inviting input, which can lead to those consulted becoming surrogate or informal approvers, again slowing down team implementation.

**Work Redesign**

Hackman and Oldham (1980) describe work redesign as the answer to the question, “How can work be structured so that it is performed effectively and, at the same time, jobholders find the work personally rewarding and satisfying?” (p. 71). When jobs are designed well, people find them more motivating and contribute more effectively to the outcomes that the team seeks. Thus, work redesign can be both an individual intervention and an intervention into the effectiveness of a team.

Hackman and Oldham write that some tasks are best done by individuals, but that especially complex tasks are usually best performed by a team. This is true only if the team and task are well-designed. Yet the authors write that “it turns out that designing work for groups is not merely constructing a ‘team version’ of a good individual job design. . . . For groups, one must consider person-job, person-group, and group-job relationships, as well as how these components fit together” (p. 67).

The Hackman and Oldham model of work group effectiveness defines three criteria to look for in an effective work group. Team membership, goals, and individual jobs on a team can be assessed on these three dimensions.

1. **Level of effort brought to bear on the group task.** How well the group’s task is designed will affect how much effort team members can or will put toward the task. Well-designed tasks have the following:
   a. **Skill variety.** Team members bring a number of their skills to bear on the task.
   b. **Task identity.** The work is a “whole and meaningful piece of work” (p. 171).
   c. **Task significance.** The work matters to others internal or external to the team.
   d. **Autonomy.** Team members have some freedom in designing the work, such as the order and priority of subtasks to be accomplished.
   e. **Feedback.** The team gets adequate and truthful information about its performance.

These five design criteria about the properties of the job itself can be diagnosed in a number of ways, including a Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) created by Hackman and Oldham (1975). If any of them is significantly missing, there are likely to be motivational problems on the team toward the task, as team members are likely to see the work as less meaningful and personally satisfying.
2. **Amount of knowledge and skill applied to task work.** The composition of the group is an important design feature that will contribute to or inhibit a group's effectiveness. Team members must have appropriate competence to perform the skills and tasks needed by the team, and the team must have enough members to handle the amount of work needed but not so many that extra members actually contribute to a decline in the team's productivity. Team members should have the interpersonal skills to manage conflict and work with a wide variety of work styles and personalities. If team members are not trained for the tasks they are asked to perform, they will be frustrated and productivity will decline, and if the team has too many members, each member likely will not have a significant enough task to perform to find the task motivating.

3. **Appropriateness of group norms about performance processes.** This category concerns such items as team agreements about the consistent use of team processes, how the team will measure its progress, and how changes will be made when processes and results do not meet expectations. Teams must have enough standardization that they do not waste time continually deciding how routine tasks are to be performed, yet they must have enough flexibility to recognize when alterations of standard processes are needed.

The challenge in designing a work group, then, is to help members develop norms that reinforce the use of strategies that are uniquely appropriate to the group task, and that are amenable to change when task requirements or constraints change. (Hackman & Oldham, 1980, p. 181)

Several principles can help change agents to work with teams to design tasks more effectively (Hackman & Oldham, 1980):

1. **Combining tasks.** Skill variety can be increased by combining work tasks so that team members do not always perform the same routine tasks over and over, but have an array of activities to reduce monotony and make use of different skills.

2. **Form natural work units.** Task identity and significance can be increased by forming work units so that the same person performs related activities. These might be organized any number of ways, for example, by geography, customer account, or industry.

3. **Establishing client relationships.** Work can be made more meaningful when team members have contact with their customers or clients. They begin to see the impact of their work on their customers, and they get direct feedback about how customers use their work and feel about it.

4. **Vertically loading the job.** Autonomy increases when jobs are vertically loaded, that is, when team members take a greater responsibility for both a larger number of process steps as well as the authority to decide when and how the work will be accomplished.
5. *Opening feedback channels.* Managers often have feedback or data about a team’s performance that they do not share, for whatever reason. Making this information available to the team can increase motivation. For example, if a team has immediate access to a monthly customer survey, they can begin to see connections between that month’s work and the customer satisfaction feedback.

Finally, Hackman and Oldham note that very little impact will be achieved to individual jobs and group performance if the group is not supported in the context of the whole organizational system. There should be an appropriate compensation and rewards system in place to recognize excellent performance, a training and education system that can help team members to learn effective interpersonal and task skills, and clear communication from management about the constraints on the group (such as budget or timelines).

**Workout**

Workout is a problem-solving methodology that was originally developed at General Electric, but has now been adapted for use by teams in many organizations. General Motors has labeled the process a “GoFast,” Unilever has called it a “Cleanout,” and it goes by the name “Trailblazing” at Armstrong (Ulrich, Kerr, & Ashkenas, 2002, p. 286). The process is for use by single teams, cross-functional teams, or multiple functions. As originally designed, it can involve dozens or even hundreds of employees from across an entire company. For this reason, it can also be called a whole organization intervention, more examples of which are discussed in the next chapter. As described here, it is also appropriate for teams in a mini-Workout scenario, where team members use it as a problem-solving methodology for their own internal processes. On a team, a Workout can be a powerful intervention to encourage participation and willingness to initiate an organizational change.

The purpose of a Workout is to identify and eliminate unnecessary work, work that might be taking up extensive time or resources but which is adding little value, work that is bureaucratic in nature, or work not meeting expectations because of process errors or other deficiencies. In the Workout process, it is not solely the leader’s responsibility to identify these team problems. Team members that actually do the work are considered to understand it best, so their input is most important. For example, a team member might identify two meetings that have the same agenda and only a few different participants, and propose that these meetings be combined to save time and reduce duplication of effort. Another member might note that she is required to produce weekly reports that are only read rarely and suggest a different frequency for producing them. Team members both propose improvement opportunities and take responsibility for designing solutions and proposing changes to senior management.

As designed, the process is relatively simple:

Small groups of managers and employees, cross-functional or cross-level or both, address critical business issues, develop recommendations, and present them to a senior leader at a Town Meeting. After open dialogue, the leader makes
“on-the-spot,” yes-or-no decisions on those recommendations, empowers people to carry out the ones that are approved, and afterwards reviews progress regularly to make sure that results are actually achieved. (Ulrich et al., 2002, p. 23)

Planning the Workout session begins with the selection of an appropriate business problem, usually involving a process where results are unsatisfactory. Team members are selected who have a stake in the outcome and energy to contribute, and a Workout is planned for 1 to 3 days, during which the process will be redesigned or other changes will be proposed. Senior management support before the Workout session is necessary to ensure that they are open to the change and ready to listen carefully to team recommendations. With halfhearted management support, the team will not have backing later when there are inevitably obstacles to implementation.

The Workout session itself generally follows a five-step process (Ulrich et al., 2002):

1. **Introduction.** Participants learn about the purpose, goals, and structure of the Workout. All participants are encouraged to see the meeting as an opportunity to develop and implement a wide range of solutions, not as a chance to defend one’s own function or territory.

2. **Brainstorming.** Small groups develop lists of ideas about what the Workout should accomplish.

3. **Gallery of ideas.** Groups identify their top ten best ideas and post them for others to read. The larger group reviews the ideas and votes on three to four to work on for the remainder of the Workout session.

4. **Action planning.** Teams are formed to expand on the ideas that were described, identifying actions that should be taken and changes that should be made. They identify costs and benefits for making the change and create a project plan and timeline for implementation of the initiative. A project sponsor and team leader are also identified. During a longer Workout session, a process might be redesigned on the spot at this stage.

5. **Town meeting.** The town meeting is the opportunity for Workout participants to present their ideas to senior management. Participants describe the change desired, and potential costs, risks, and benefits to the organization of making the change. Senior leaders ask questions to clarify, challenge, and test the team’s thinking, and are asked to make a yes-or-no decision immediately. They may decide to delegate the decision or poll other managers in attendance. Initiatives that are agreed to are immediately sponsored and expected to begin implementation. Some Workout sessions end with the symbolic physical action of the senior leader(s) signing the flip charts or project plans to publicly demonstrate their commitment to the effort.

Following the Workout session, senior leaders check on the initiative progress on a regular basis. In the first days and weeks following the Workout, the high level of
enthusiasm for the project can be supplanted by negativity and discouragement as the difficult change work begins. Leaders can help to encourage the implementation team to maintain energy and focus on the project.

Appreciative Inquiry

Most discussions of organizational effectiveness, including written works such as this one, contain an implicit medical model of organizational health. Problems are seen as deficiencies, illnesses, and cancers to be rooted out and eliminated. Our language is full of descriptions of issues, gaps, barriers, obstacles, snags, crises, errors, conflicts, and mistakes. Team meetings that direct attention to “what’s going wrong here” create negative environments where people focus on harmful and destructive actions and relationships, and these conversations often create a cycle of depression, pessimism, and low energy. Organizational members can come to see the problems as insurmountable and hopeless. As members of a team continually examine what is wrong, this habit even seems to carry over to the implementation of any possible solution, as team members may point out weaknesses and faults with even the most promising changes. Energy wanes and morale suffers. It is no wonder that there are few to sign up for yet another problem-solving meeting.

Some authors suggest that more progress might be made in a team if change agents were to direct their attention to what is working and where things are going well instead. A recently popularized method of intervening in teams and organizations called appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Srivastva, Cooperrider, & Associates, 1990) aims to do just that. Whereas ordinary problem-solving approaches follow a standard process of identifying problems, brainstorming possible causes and their negative effects, generating solutions, evaluating possible solutions, and implementing the ideal solution, the appreciative inquiry process begins with the team's strengths. By appreciating what is working well and where the team has found success, positive energy is released, and the team begins to gain a better understanding of its own valuable contributions. These conversations are naturally more enjoyable, encouraging, and upbeat. Cooperrider and Whitney (2001) write that “the seeds of change—that is, the things people think and talk about, the things people discover and learn, and the things that inform dialogue and inspire images of the future—are implicit in the very first questions we ask” (p. 20). Consider the different reactions a team might give to “what’s going wrong in this team?” and the following alternative set of appreciative inquiry questions:

- Describe a time in your organization that you consider a high point experience, a time when you were most engaged and felt alive and vibrant.
- Without being modest, tell me what it is that you most value about yourself, your work, and your organization.
- What are the core factors that give life to your organization when it is at its best?
- Imagine your organization 10 years from now, when everything is just as you always wished it could be. What is different? How have you contributed to this dream organization? (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 14)
The conversation that results from these questions creates an environment of openness, hope, and participation in creating a better team or organization. These questions also tend to free creative thinking and avoid allowing a group to get bogged down in the problems of the present.

Its creators see appreciative inquiry as philosophically in contrast with the traditional action research paradigm, where problems of the past are examined through disciplined data gathering and examination, and solutions are implemented and measured. It is based in the “power of the positive question” and that “human systems grow and construct their future realities in the direction of what they most persistently, actively and collectively ask questions about” (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001, p. 191). It is thus highly consistent with the social construction model of organizational change discussed in Chapter 4, harnessing the power of language and communication in creating organizations and teams as they unfold and are always in-process. For the change agent, appreciative inquiry requires a shift in mind-set to “view organizations as living spiritual-social systems—mysteries of creation to be nurtured and affirmed, not mechanistic or scientific operations with problems to be solved” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 46). We are well-trained in rooting out problems and their solutions, but this new way of intervening also requires a new way of thinking, asking questions, and directing a team’s energy.

The appreciative inquiry process consists of four steps or phases, called a “4-D cycle” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005):

1. **Discovery.** The discovery process consists of engaging the team and relevant stakeholders in a dialogue about strengths, best practices, accomplishments, and rewarding experiences. Topics are turned around from what is absent or not working to what the team would like to see happen more often and what is working well.

2. **Dream.** Participants look to the future to imagine how things could be, articulating and sharing their visions for the future.

3. **Design.** The team collaboratively constructs a vision for a new future and actions that move the team or organization to a desirable new point.

4. **Destiny.** Last, the discussion focuses less on action plans and spreadsheets and more on creating grassroots networks (including those beyond the team) of interested and committed parties who are empowered and who freely choose to take action on their own.

Several studies have attested to the positive outcomes that resulted from using an appreciative inquiry approach. In one review of the literature, Bushe and Kassam (2005) found that appreciative inquiry was most successful and transformative when it generated new knowledge, new ways of thinking about the organization, or new approaches to taking action. Barrett and Cooperrider (1990) present a compelling case study of change in a hotel management team where conflict and defensiveness were high. Problem-solving and conflict
resolution efforts had stalled, and conflicts had become aggressively hostile and confrontational. Instead of focusing on the negativity of the past, the authors encouraged the group to begin to share their images for what might be different. They began to imagine a new hotel environment and to discuss changes to both the hotel and the team that would fit with their shared vision. Over time, personal conflicts waned as the group learned to resolve its ideational disagreements in favor of a shared future.

Some may find the appreciative inquiry approach naive, wondering how a team or organization could succeed if it failed to honestly admit to and examine its problems. Appreciative inquiry does not deny that problems exist, but it tries to reframe them into new subjects for dialogue. For example, one group of consultants worked closely with a customer service department at a major airline. Instead of focusing their attention on the problem of mishandled, lost, or late baggage (a problem they all agreed plagued the airline), the consultants helped them turn the discussion to developing an “exceptional arrival experience” for customers (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 134). The discussion then turned to exploring all of the multiple aspects of that experience instead of becoming mired on the baggage concerns, which were just a part of the larger topic. Interest and energy remained high, because the topic was attractive, it encouraged thought and participation, and it inspired dialogue about a new future.

**Intergroup Interventions**

To this point we have concentrated our attention on the development of a single team. As we know, however, teams do not exist in isolation. They usually interact with other teams inside and outside organizations. The East Coast production team works with the West Coast production team, the customer service team produces reports for the sales team, client management teams create contracts to hand off to internal project teams, and so on. During the course of their work, for various reasons teams can come into conflict with one another. They can develop rivalries and become competitive. Some interdepartmental competition may be beneficial; for example, when two sales teams each try to outperform the other, participants may be motivated to work harder and increase regional sales. When coordination is required and unhealthy conflict increases, however, performance can significantly decline. Organizations may consider these team conflicts unique, but in fact a long history of research in psychology and sociology demonstrates why and how social groups come into conflict and what can be done to resolve these disputes.

Why would teams experience conflict when they are ostensibly part of the same organization and dedicated to its larger purpose? There are so many reasons, in fact, that participants in one research study could identify as many as 250 unique types of intergroup conflict (Cargile, Bradac, & Cole, 2006) among collectives as large as nations and religious groups. Of the general categories that participants identified, several sources of intergroup conflict are especially germane to organizational environments:
• Economic differences. Competition over limited resources such as budgets and opportunities for promotion.
• Beliefs. Different cultural beliefs about how things should be done.
• Past injustice. A perception that one group has been mistreated by the other.
• Egocentrism. One group holds a feeling of superiority over other groups and resists them to maintain its group identity.
• Communication. Difficulties in exchanging information or holding dialogue with the other team.

It may also be the case that simply dividing up into groups and functions, with unique identities and team or department names, actually creates the seeds of intergroup conflict. In a classic series of studies in the 1950s, Sherif and colleagues (see Sherif & Sherif, 1979, for a summary) found ingroup/outgroup conflict to rapidly develop in children’s groups almost from the moment teams were created. In similar studies, team members tended to favor their own team and hold negative feelings about members of other teams, even when there was no significant incentive for them to hold those feelings (West & Markiewicz, 2004). Over time, members come to perceive other teams as threats, perceptions that feed anxiety and hostility toward other teams. They begin to develop more cooperative and cohesive relationships with their own team members. Thus, there is some evidence that organizational structures themselves can contribute to conflict.

An us-versus-them mentality prevails when different teams with unique identities perceive their interests to be in conflict with those of another team. When the team feels a stronger team identity than a larger organizational identity, they can come to see other teams as competitors (van Knippenberg, 2003). Minor conflicts can spiral, reducing trust and cooperation between teams, and encouraging stereotyping of other teams’ members. These findings are especially notable not only for typical organizational teams but also for increasingly prevalent situations such as mergers and acquisitions (which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter).

Some minor intergroup conflict is natural and likely, but when extreme symptoms are noticeable, an intervention may be recommended. When teams come into conflict and are unable, unwilling, or otherwise fail to resolve their conflicts, some of the following behavior patterns might become evident:

• Unit members avoid or withdraw from interactions with people from the other unit when they should be spending more working time together.
• The mutual product or end result desired by both units is delayed, diminished, blocked, or altered to the dissatisfaction or one or both parties.
• Needed services between units are not asked for.
• Services between units are not performed to the satisfaction of those units.
• Feelings of resentment or antagonism occur as a result of unit interactions.
• People feel frustrated, rejected, or misunderstood by those in the other unit with whom they must work.
• More time is spent in either avoiding or circumventing interaction with the other unit or internally complaining about the other unit than in working through mutual problems (Dyer, 1994, p. 144).
Such negative behavior patterns are far from inevitable, however, and research fortunately points to several interventions that can reduce it. The overarching objective of an OD intervention in these circumstances is to reduce the interteam conflict by breaking down barriers between teams, encouraging the development of a shared identity and purpose, and improving cooperative processes. Researchers have demonstrated a reduction in interteam conflict through several means (summarized in Table 11.8):

1. **Increasing intergroup contact** (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003). More communication among group members alone is not sufficient to completely resolve intergroup disputes, especially those that are long-standing or particularly hostile. However, it is more likely when certain conditions are present, such as group members having equal status and a common goal. Particularly when team members establish friendly personal relationships through increased contact, tension is reduced and team members begin to associate those positive feelings to other members of the team as well.

2. **The implementation of a superordinate goal** (Johnson & Lewicki, 1969; Sherif, 1979). A superordinate goal is one that is “urgent, compelling, and highly appealing for all groups involved” (Sherif, 1979, p. 261) and is “beyond the resources and efforts of one group alone” to accomplish (Johnson & Lewicki, 1969, p. 10). That is, it is not enough for the goal to be simply shared—it must be one that each group could not reach if it were to try to do so alone. Conflict is reduced when teams come together in a cooperative context to reach a goal that is important to them, and when team members witness members of the other team working hard on an interdependent task. Superordinate goals are most likely to be effective means for reducing interteam conflict when they are initiated by a third party, not by one of the conflicting teams. Higher level managers and executives are often in a good position to do this.

3. **Recategorization** means developing a “common in-group identity” (West & Markiewicz, 2004, p. 62). This involves finding or highlighting the common identities that both teams share, for example, stressing how members are all part of the same organization.

4. **Finding a common enemy**, or an external threat to the well-being of both groups. Some have argued that the common-enemy approach only reduces conflict momentarily, and when the enemy is defeated, the intergroup conflict returns, because the groups never really resolved the underlying differences (Blake, Shepard, & Mouton, 1964). In organizational contexts, finding a common enemy is often a simple task. This might involve emphasizing how both teams are working for the same organization (the common identity approach suggested above) and against a common set of external competitors who are trying to lure business away from the organization.

5. **Exchanging team members**. Teams may develop a rotation program or invite members of other teams to observe or attend team meetings. This can increase understanding and appreciation of how other teams work, and can also provide opportunities for learning.
An Intervention to Resolve Intergroup Conflict

One widely used method for reducing interteam conflict was first reported by Blake and his associates (Blake et al., 1964; Blake, Mouton, & Sloma, 1965) and was initially designed to reduce very hostile union-management conflicts. The intervention consists of eight activities over a 2-day meeting of the members of both groups:

1. With support of the leaders of both groups, an outside consultant explains the purpose of the session. The session will not attempt to resolve specific process issues or disputes between the groups. Instead, the objective is increased understanding of the other and dedication to improving the relationship. All conflicts are not likely to be fully resolved by the end of the session, but the session should be a first step in the reduction of conflict and launch further work on the specific differences between the teams. Time: 30 minutes.

2. Next, each group meets separately to develop two lists. The first list is the team’s description of how it sees itself, especially as the group relates to the other group. The second list is the team’s description of the other group. The task, as Blake et al. (1964) put it, “is to describe the character, the quality, of the relationship; that is, typical behavior and attitudes” (p. 161). Most groups, the authors note, find it easier to create the latter list about the other group than the former list about themselves. Yet, the development of the group’s self-image is an important step in the group examining its own motivations and actions as well. Group members begin to jointly confront the idea that they are a contributor to the relationship with the other. In one variation of this activity, Beckhard (1969) presents different topics for the two lists. On the first list, each group writes what it thinks of the other group, and on its second list, what it thinks the other group will say about them. Time: up to 5 hours.

3. The lists are exchanged. Now each group has the other group’s lists. Group A sees how Group B sees A, and how Group B sees itself. The two groups can now compare their self-images with how the other group sees them, and they can begin to point to areas of similarity and difference. Both groups may see Group A as comprised of skilled and talented content experts. But Group A may see Group B as “slow to act and

Table 11.8 Ways to Reduce Intergroup Conflict

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make decisions” whereas Group B may see itself as “deliberate, conscientious, and thoughtful in evaluating options prior to decisions.” Time: up to 1 hour.

4. Each group has time to ask clarifying questions of the other group. The urge to deny the other group’s interpretation will be strong, but members are all asked to seek understanding and elaboration of the images first. Time: up to 2 hours.

5. Groups return to their separate meeting rooms for a period of self-diagnosis and discovery. Each group is given two questions: “One, what is it we do . . . that has contributed to the image the other group has of us? Second, what is it in our own beliefs and actions that leads us to the conclusion we have reached about ourselves?” (Blake et al., 1965, p. 43). For example, Group B would try to examine why Group A sees it as slow to act. Now each group not only understands how each group sees the other, but each has begun to analyze its own contributions to the relationship and the source of misunderstandings or different interpretations. Time: up to 4 hours.

6. Each group exchanges its diagnostic lists with the other. A joint dialogue is then held in which members analyze diagnoses, share additional insights, and possibly reinterpret past actions. Team members may reach new points of understanding and agreement in order to resolve past differences, and they are also likely to discover deeply held differences that still remain. Time: up to 3 hours.

7. The groups develop a list of remaining key issues in the relationship to be resolved. These might involve changes to meeting structures to enhance communication, clarification of underlying value differences and a plan to find common ground, or a commitment to trust, respect, and openness in the relationship. Time: up to 2 hours.

8. The groups agree on a plan for next steps. This might involve the leaders or a task force comprised of members of both groups holding a series of meetings to resolve the issues. Time: up to 1 hour.

Variations on Intergroup Interventions

Dyer et al. (2007) present several variations of this intervention. In one variation, they invite Group A to hold its discussion of Group B in Group B’s presence, though with the ground rule that Group B may only listen and observe the dialogue, followed by Group B holding the discussion with Group A listening. In this variation, both groups have the opportunity to hear the discussion firsthand rather than in list form, yet it can also be risky where the issues are especially contentious. In a second variation, the authors ask each group to meet separately, but to use an appreciative inquiry approach and to describe their ideal relationship with the other group. This design can have the advantage of encouraging members to consider a new vision and imagine an alternative to the current relationship. In a third approach to intergroup conflict, the authors use a task force team comprised of members that both teams find agreeable. The task force is given the responsibility of resolving some of the obstacles to working together. Issues might be resolved
quickly in this design, but because all members are not involved, acceptance of the task force recommendations might be minimal. In all cases, the authors recommend that a structure be designed to resolve future disputes, perhaps through the use of a task force or review board that meets regularly to assess the team relationship.

In addition, there are times when a team may have relationships or conflicts with more than one other team, or a team may desire feedback on how it is perceived. In these cases, an intervention called an “organization mirror” (French & Bell, 1999) can be effective in introducing the focal team to issues in their relationships with multiple other teams. In this intervention, representatives from other groups are invited to participate in a dialogue about the focal team. Focal team members sit on the outside of a large circle, and representatives from other teams sit inside the circle. Guests discuss their perceptions of the focal team and the facilitator invites specific examples. Focal group members observe and take notes, and following the discussion subgroups are formed of team members and guests to work on the identified issues. This intervention can be an excellent way for a team to gain feedback on its performance and perceptions of its working relationships with other teams.

Finally, Alderfer (1977) has described an intervention called a “microcosm group—a structural innovation designed to increase information flow vertically and horizontally among differentiated units” (p. 194) of an organization. The group is a new group comprised of a sample of individuals from the entire organizational population. They might represent each of the company’s six sales divisions, or they may come from each of the major departments in the organization. Alderfer describes how one microcosm group helped to design and interpret an organization-wide employee survey, and in another essay, how a microcosm group was used to improve race relations in a large organization (see Alderfer & Smith, 1982). Such groups break down the boundaries often created by different organizational structures and can help to solve some of the information and process problems that occur in this environment. One advantage of the microcosm group is that it brings together representatives from many groups, whereas many of the intergroup interventions described earlier only address conflicts between two groups.

Summary

Teams are the foundations of most organizations today, yet they can also be plagued by a consistent set of problems. Among their other attributes, high-performing teams have clear goals, with knowledgeable members who are mutually committed to the team’s success and have well-defined individual roles. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Teams can struggle with a number of common problems, including confusion about goals or roles, or conflict among members or between teams. Such problems are often symptoms that could be addressed with a team-building intervention to improve team effectiveness. Understanding how teams are structured and how they grow and develop can help a change agent design an appropriate intervention to improve their effectiveness. In this chapter, we addressed six common team interventions: team start-up and transition meetings, confrontation meetings, role analysis, work redesign, Workout, and appreciative inquiry. We also
discussed interventions that can improve the effectiveness of relationship between teams, in particular, to resolve interteam conflicts. These are just a few of the interventions and their variations that can help to develop effective teams. If teams are indeed the backbone of successful organizational change, then interventions such as these are likely to become important for any change agent to master.

For Further Reading


