Team Building and Collaboration Strategies
DESIGN FIRM LEADERSHIP SERIES

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This first discussion in the **Design Firm Leadership Series** will consider the topic of team development and the use of collaborative techniques to keep your teams efficient and effective.

To facilitate the use of this material in your firm, please consider the **Recommended Discussion** exercises at the end of each topic section. Their purpose is to provide leaders and team members with an opportunity to gain insight about a major learning point and how it influences a team's ability to coalesce and perform. Many of our clients have found it useful to engage in highly participative exchanges with team members facilitated by the team leader. The duration of these sessions should take approximately 15-20 minutes each. The intent is to make this information "come to life," allowing all leaders and team members to share their perceptions for the benefit of the group as a whole.

Stages of Team Development

We would be remiss not to define the classic and predictable stages teams go through in their developmental efforts. As your team gains experience working with each other, its members are required to cope with the emotional and group pressures they face. They will go through four predictable stages:

- **Forming** – During this stage members cautiously explore the boundaries of acceptable group behavior. This is a stage of transition moving from individual to team member identification where they will exhibit a variety of feelings ranging from excitement and optimism to initial tentative attachment to the team to suspicion and anxiety about the job that has been assigned.

- **Storming** – The team members begin to realize the task is different and more difficult than imagined and as a result team members may become irritable, blaming or over-reaching. In this phase members argue about what actions the team should take and they attempt to rely on their personal and professional experience and resist the need for collaborating with other team members.

- **Norming** – During this stage members reconcile their competing loyalties and responsibilities, accept the team mission and ground rules, and begin to embrace their respective roles on the team. They tend to become more cooperative than competitive.

- **Performing** – At this stage the team has resolved most of its relational conflicts and is more adept at diagnosing and solving problems and implementing appropriate changes. Team members have discovered one another's strengths and weaknesses and accept their respective roles.

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("Berkley DP") specializes in professional liability products and services for the Design Professional industry.

Berkley DP has partnered with PACES, LLC to develop this educational series addressing critical and highly relevant subjects which, when configured together, will provide you with the building blocks to create an impactful Executive Program.

We encourage you to use the unique insights and informative discussions of this series to advance the executive and leadership development of your firm.

Recommended Discussion:
It is important for executives/team leaders to determine at what developmental stage each of their teams is operating. It is not enough to simply identify what stage a team is in, it is also crucial for management to assist the team in moving it ahead to the norming and performing stages as quickly as possible. These two phases are where maximum productivity can be realized.

In your next team meeting, ask your participants at which phase they feel the team is currently operating.

Personal Styles

In all four stages of team development, it is also important to recognize the **Personal Styles** of each of the team players:

- **The Contributor** – is a task oriented team player who enjoys providing the team with technical information and data and who generously shares such information and materials.

- **The Collaborator** – these team members are goal directed individuals who clearly see the vision and mission in goals of the team as essential. This team player focuses on the "big picture."

- **The Communicator** – an individual who is process-oriented, an effective listener and facilitator of involvement, a conflict resolver, a consensus builder.

- **The Challenger** – the team's question-oriented member who second guesses the goals, approaches and even the ethics of the team, who encourages taking well-conceived risks.

Recommended Discussion:
Executives should initially plot the individual team player styles of the team members (and oneself).

It is then helpful to have the team members plot their styles and those of their fellow team members and discuss them openly among the group.

Team Development for Optimal Performance

The rationale for performing the facilitated exercises in the previous sections is to move the organization toward a highly collaborative effort on a project. You need a team that thrives on openness and trust, develops a natural inclination toward working closely together and shares a sense of clear focus and commitment.

Here are some hints intended to help team leaders create an optimal environment:

- **Look for "people better than yourself"** – Surround yourself with highly capable people whom you know and like and can learn from.

- **Create and engender a variety of opinions** – Actively embrace diversity (diversity in this white paper focuses on age, gender, personalities, skills, business experience and cultural backgrounds). A lack of diversity limits the ability of an organization to adapt and change.

- **Exhibit an authentic willingness to learn from the people you lead** – Bringing people on board who are "better than you" and investing in diversity makes sense only if you exhibit a genuine willingness to learn from the people on your chosen team. This is especially important in times of change, stress and anxiety, when it is tempting to tell others to listen to you and do as you say. But in so doing, you run the risk of neglecting the potential power, energy and insights embodied in your team, which you can discover if you listen to them.

Recommended Discussion:
Are you leading a successful team? Consider sharing your experiences with other team leaders, including any tips or caveats, which team leaders should incorporate when selecting and retaining the right people.

Collaboration that Generates Tangible Results

In focusing on team stages (Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing) and defining team player styles, executives can use that information to engender and enhance collaboration that generates tangible results. Producing such results will, to a great extent, depend on the quality of collaboration that exists between team members. Even for highly technical projects where detailed process management planning and technical expertise are crucial, collaboration is paramount. In these times of continual and relentless change, companies and their operational teams are challenged toward getting people to work effectively together across company lines and cultures in a way that generates results, with emphasis on increasing the company's agility and adaptability, attracting new customers with better service and products, making better decisions and solving the problems (internal and external) customers genuinely care about.

While there is no single solution, there are some suggestions you can use to improve the quality of cross-company and team collaboration which generates measureable results. Here are three that you should consider:

1. **Work with the best** – Invest in diversity (as noted earlier).

2. **Create and reinforce the concepts of openness and transparency** – Pay close attention to these characteristics, particularly when your teams have highly diverse backgrounds and different experience levels. Careful listening, as a general rule, is always a great idea in engendering the type of clarity and apolitical honesty the team needs.

3. **Have your team embrace accountability** – When people feel ownership for team objectives and feel personally responsible for their contribution to the team's success, desired results are met or surpassed.

Recommended Discussion:
Have your team discuss the ways in which it creates and reinforces openness and transparency. In which areas does it needs to improve?

Next Topic in the Series: Accountability

We will discuss accountability in our next white paper. It is a pivotal component that enhances active collaboration at every level—from the overall organization to the individual team.

Questions & Feedback

Is your organization interested in expanding Team Building and Collaboration skills? Let us know how we may be of help.

Use the button below to:

- Let us know what you think about this series
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About Berkley Design Professional

Berkley Design Professional (Berkley DP) was created in 2013, by a team of insurance professionals with a passion for the design industry and deep roots in Architects and Engineers Professional Liability underwriting, risk management and claims management. The genesis of Berkley DP was the combination of our team's commitment to bring fresh ideas to the products and services design professionals need together with the resources of W. R. Berkley Corporation. Berkley DP's motto is: Better By Design®. By this we mean that our policyholders can become better businesses by leveraging our innovative risk management solutions, fair and experienced claims services and comprehensive architects and engineers professional liability coverage.

BDP Risk® is Berkley DP's state-of-the-art Learning Management System (LMS), which provides 24/7 online access to relevant risk and practice management content, streamlined online learning, and education activity tracking and reporting. BDP Risk® won a coveted Brandon Hall Group bronze award for "Best Advance in Custom Content," which recognizes self-paced, custom-designed online courses related to workplace learning. This award reflects Berkley DP's ongoing successful efforts to help design professionals improve their practices, enhance business performance, earn risk management education premium credits, and mitigate professional liability claims.

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