

ing the planning stages of Rockefeller Center can be interpreted as a real team at work. Nine men involved in creating the specifications of the project crowd around the plan and two miniature models of the three-block site. The photo captures two men adjusting the model, while the others look on with enthusiasm, as if any of them could reach down and adjust the model themselves.

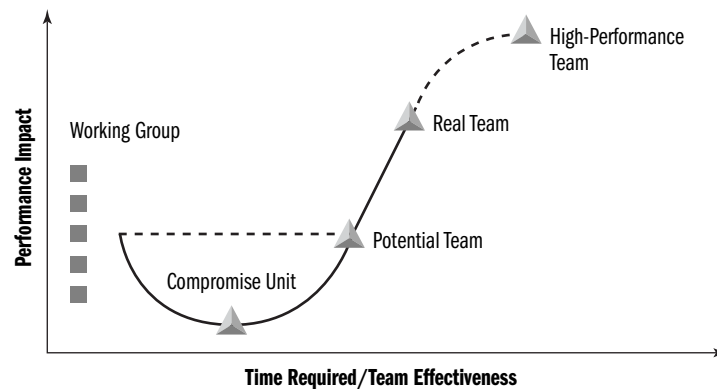
One global design firm recognizes the innate difficulty of forming a real team during design development, but acknowledges there are opportunities for “real team moments.” Internally the firm uses a process for discussion called “discourse on design.” Here a project team explains unresolved design issues to a group of peers. While this group of peers does not join the project team permanently, during the session, problems are solved with complementary skills, mutual respect, shifting leadership, and the common purpose of achieving the most appropriate design for the client. Often the “discourse on design” is viewed as a turning point or guiding light for a project.

Potential Teams

On the path to becoming a real team may lie what is termed a *potential team*. This is a group that has a significant need for incremental performance and is trying hard to improve its performance impact. Typically, the potential team is lacking clarity around purpose, goals, or work-products and discipline in developing a common working approach. Mutual accountability between members tends not to have been established.

Perhaps the greatest performance gain comes from successfully making the step from a potential team to a real team. There is no best answer as to how to make this transition; however, an underlying pattern is that real teams do not emerge unless the individual members take risks involving conflict, trust, and interdependence, and together complete hard work and learn to shift the leadership role. The most formidable risk involves building the trust and interdependence necessary to move from individual accountability to mutual accountability—and from single to shifting (multiple) leadership roles. This usually requires an adjustment of attitudes that must come primarily through action, not words. Not every potential team becomes a real team. Individual differences, threats of being personally disadvantaged, actions that destroy instead of build mutual respect and interdependence, and unconstructive conflict are among some of the forces that can block team performance and produce a performance level less than that of a working group.

FIGURE 11-1
The Team
Performance Curve.



Everyone who worked hard to invest in the team will suffer lost time and disappointment and will be more reluctant to try teams in the future.

Moving from Potential to Real Teams

There is no guaranteed way to build team performance; however, a variety of common approaches can help potential teams take the necessary risks to move toward becoming a real team.⁸

1. **Establish urgency and direction.** All team members need to believe the team has urgent and worthwhile performance purposes, and they want to know what the expectations are. Indeed, the more urgent and meaningful the rationale, the more likely it is that a real team will emerge.
2. **Select members based on skills and skill potential, not personalities.** Teams must have the complementary skills to do their job or the ability to develop the necessary skills. With the exception of certain advanced functional or technical skills, most people can develop the needed skills after joining a team. All of us have the capacity for personal growth and need only be challenged in a performance-focused way. The question instead may become whether the team is willing to invest the time and effort to help potential team members grow. Training tends to work best when it is supplied “just in time” and is customized to meet the group’s specific performance needs.
3. **Pay particular attention to first meetings and actions.** In everyday life, initial impressions mean a great deal, and this holds true for teams. When a potential team first meets, everyone watches one another to confirm or dispel preconceived assumptions and concerns. Close attention in particular is