

# BUILDING YOUR RESEARCH TEAM:

## Tips from the Science of Teams

From ICTR's Team Science Expert, Dr. Michael Rosen

Increasing teamwork and communication is a foundational component of patient safety and quality improvement efforts. The need for good teamwork extends beyond patient care teams. The ultimate effectiveness of your CUSP efforts will depend, in part, on how well your CUSP team functions.

A large, well-validated, and practical scientific literature exists to help guide the development of effective project or management teams in organizations.

**This tool provides a structure to plan and evaluate your team's development. It is based on the key factors that drive effective teams in organizations.**

### INSTRUCTIONS

You can do this as an individual activity, or with your team members to elicit broader input.

1

Review each of the five critical areas and the associated questions.



2

Reflect on your team (or the team you are about to start).

3

What are some of the key strengths?

What are some of the key weaknesses or opportunities to improve?



4

Discuss with your team members, focusing on how to improve the team's effectiveness.



5

Work with your team to codify and build on your strengths and to address the weakness you've found.



# 1. Make sure the team is a “real” team.

Being an effective team is more than just being a collection of individuals.  
It is about managing interdependent work (i.e., no one can do it on their own)  
while pursuing shared and valued goals (i.e., everyone is working to the same ends).

## Understanding your task:

- What are the collective goals you are pursuing? • What does success look like?
- What happens if the team fails? • Are the consequences different for different team members?
- Are these goals valued by everyone on the team? • Do they conflict with other goals or priorities of team members?
- Does your team have the authority it needs to do its work (e.g., can you make the changes you need too)?
  - If not, who does, and have they bought in to the team’s vision?

### STRENGTHS

### CHALLENGES

## Building the core of your team:

Highly effective teams are built on a strong foundation of clear roles and responsibilities for the core team members  
- those people directly responsible for moving the team’s work forward.

- Who is on your team? • What unique knowledge and skills does each member bring to the table?
  - Who will be responsible for doing what? • Do you have stable team members?
  - Or, are people rotating in and out too frequently to maintain focus and progress?

### STRENGTHS

### CHALLENGES

### Building your team's external focus:

Effective teams have a strong core, but the teams who are able to persist over time and change their own organizations are also 'externally focused'. They don't turn inward and focus on exclusively on themselves, but outward on understanding and addressing larger needs of the organization as well.

- Outside of your core team members, what organizational functions (or specific people) have a large impact on your success?
  - What is your strategy for ensuring they are involved in and supportive of your project?
- What other units is your work most intertwined with, and who are your collaborators on those units?
  - What is your strategy for coordinating your efforts with other units you work with?
  - How are you ensuring that your work is aligned with organizational needs and priorities?

STRENGTHS

CHALLENGES

## 2. Establish a Compelling Direction.

Motivation drives behavior and outcomes. Effective teams have a strong vision—a guiding purpose that motivates their members and others in the organization. Without this, teams can easily fall apart as people pursue other, competing priorities.

### Defining the vision and mission for your team:

- What is your team's mission or vision statement? • Is it challenging, but still realistically achievable?
- Is it clear to your internal team? • To external stakeholders? • What makes it meaningful to everyone involved?
- What is your strategy for ensuring that this vision is compelling to other people in your organization?
  - How are you spreading this vision? • How are you dealing with dissenters?

STRENGTHS

CHALLENGES

### 3. Create an Enabling Structure for the Team.

**Do you have the right team composition and norms?**  
Effective teams create an 'enabling structure' for themselves. They set themselves up for success by making sure they have a team of the right size, membership, and appropriate norms of interaction.

**Size & Skill Mix:**

- Do you have enough people to manage the work? • Or, is the group too large to organize effectively?
- Do you have all of the needed task-related expertise to be successful? • Do team members have effective interpersonal skills?

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES

**Developing effective norms in your team:**

- How are you ensuring effective information sharing? • How frequently do you communicate or meet? • Is this sufficient?
- Does the team truly value input from different perspectives? • Or, does the group reach a 'superficial consensus'?
- Are ideas and contributions valued based on their merits, or based on the role or identify of who proposed it?
- Does the team tend to 'not rock the boat' to avoid anxiety, or does it openly discuss tough problems?

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES

## 4. Ensure a Supportive Context.

Do you have access to the resources you need? Teams need certain things to succeed. While this varies by the team's task, it will always include access to information, educational and technical resources, materials, and fulfillment of job and personal growth needs of its members.

### Creating a supportive context:

- What information do you need to be successful? • What educational or technical resources do you need?
- What material resources do you need to be successful? • How is your organization recognizing or rewarding participation in this effort?

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES

## 5. Expert Coaching.

Do you have access to external experts at the right times? Good teams have access to good coaching. Good coaching does three things at very specific times: motivate at the beginning, consult on strategy in the middle, and educate at the end of a team's lifecycle.

### Beginning of the team's work ~ Motivation:

- Who can help you form a compelling vision for your team's work?
- Who will help you ensure it is strategically aligned with the broader organizational priorities?

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES

**Middle of the team's work ~ Strategy:**

- Who will review and consult on your plan and methods for accomplishing your goals?
  - Are there others with 'organizational knowledge' (i.e., people who have addressed this problem before, people who have solved similar problems in other areas, etc.) you can tap?

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES

**End of the team's work ~ Education:**

- Who will help you learn from experience? Identify strengths and development needs?
- Who will help you connect team members (and the team as a whole) to learning and development opportunities?

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES

**Content in this tool was developed based on the following key sources:**

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