An eBook from the
IT Management & Leadership Institute

Accelerated Team Building
Featuring the LEAPFROG Teambuilding Accelerator©

Quickly moving new teams from introduction to efficiency

Introduction
The LEAPFROG Teambuilding Accelerator©

Congratulations! A new team at your company is being created to start work on an exciting new project and you have been selected the team's leader. While this is a great opportunity for you professionally, your new position is also highly visible to the company's senior management who are watching your project closely and are expecting to see immediate initial results.

Most of the members of your team have never met before and those who have previously met have never worked together. Your fear, as the project manager, is that the more time the team needs to get to know each other, the longer it will take to begin doing meaningful work.

Your challenge is that time is of the essence and budgets are tight, but as team leader you feel it's imperative to get things going on the right foot.

All that said, you have made the strategic decision to begin your project by investing time and money in the LEAPFROG methodology to get your team up and running quickly.

Chapter 1:   **L** - Layout organizational structure and staff roles and responsibilities
Chapter 2:   **E** - Establish relationships and trust among teammates
Chapter 3:   **A** - Assemble goals, objectives and values
Chapter 4:   **P** - Provide Individual and team Critical Success Factors
Chapter 5:   **F** - Form a culture of teamwork and camaraderie
Chapter 6:   **R** - Render efficient internal department processes
Chapter 7:   **O** - Outline specific process measurements
Chapter 8:   **G** - Get going

This methodology, designed by Manager Mechanics, is designed to get your team up and running quickly in a way that will help facilitate long-term team/project success.

The eight steps within the methodology can be divided into five distinct components:

1. Acquaintance and pecking order (L & E)
2. Common goals and teamwork (A & P)
3. Culture formation (F)
4. Process and Measurement (R & O)
5. Project kickoff (G)

The thought process behind this methodology is that the creation of a new team's structure must come first and be immediately defined. The reason is that it establishes the chain of command, reduces infighting as team members jockey for position, and sets the stage to begin establishing appropriate manager/subordinate and peer/peer relationships between team members.

With roles defined and relationships beginning to form, your next step is to create a sense of "team". This is done by first defining common goals, then clarifying the goal objectives by defining Critical Success Factors that can be used as the basis for both initial project planning and ongoing performance measurement purposes.

With the team's goals and CSFs in place, the next step is to begin to create a culture of trust, teamwork and productivity based on the combination of your predefined organizational structure, defined team goals, and known success criteria.

Your next step is to define and implement efficient and measurable processes based on the combination of team goals, success criteria and business necessity.

Then, with your organization in place, goals defined, and initial processes in place, true project work is ready to begin.

Lastly, just because project work has begun, it doesn't mean that you are done with your team building activities. As time marches forward deeper relationships will form between team members, interpersonal issues will rise and must be addressed, your groups culture must be carefully nurtured to assure its establishment, and processes must evolve based on their usage and your experience.

Please note that Manager Mechanics is now also offering a new ONE DAY CLASS based on this eBook and the LEAPFROG methodology.

Chapter 1
L - *Layout organizational structure and staff roles and responsibilities*

The creation of a new team's structure and the roles and responsibilities of each member must be immediately defined. The reason is that it:

- Establishes the chain of command
- Reduces infighting as team members jockey for position to define their roles
- Sets the stage to begin establishing appropriate manager/subordinate and peer/peer relationships between team members

To effectively execute this first phase in the process, consider the following five steps:

Step #1: Define your Teams Organizational Structure
The very first step must be to define your group's future organizational structure. This is of great importance because it provides you with the context to perform steps 2 through 5. This may sound like a simple process, but to correctly define your department's structure requires that you have a deep understanding of your group's overall goals, specific objectives, and a strong grasp of the specific skills that are needed to perform your department's new function. It may also require you to build smaller, interim, organizational structures based on the tasks performed within your team. For example, if your team is writing documentation for a product, you will most likely want to hire a subject matter expert and the writers before you hire the proofreaders.

Step #2: Write Job Descriptions for Each Position
I have never met a manager whose favorite task was writing job descriptions, but it is one of the most important tasks in the hiring process. Writing the job descriptions forces you to really think about the job to be performed, the skills required to complete the required tasks, how the job incumbent will be measured, and the context of the position related to other people inside and outside your department. It also asks as the primary communication vehicle to:

- Your manager to get approval to begin the hiring process (open the job requisition)
- Human Resources to help them define the appropriate level of compensation
- Recruiting to help them find the right people for you to interview
- Potential candidates to help them understand what they will be doing if hired into the position
- Co-workers involved in the interview process as a basis on how to evaluate potential candidates

Step #3: If Possible, Hire From the Top Down
Hiring from the top down (supervisors first, then individual contributors) is not always possible for a number of reasons. Very often new teams start out very small, with everyone reporting to the manager, and a supervisory layer is only added when the manager has too many people reporting directly to him/her to manage them effectively. If you must hire in this way, it's ideal to hire an individual contributor that you believe could grow into a supervisory role. Otherwise,

your initial/best team members may feel they were passed by for promotion if you later bring someone in from the outside to be organizational between them and you. The slang term for this is "being layered", saying that a new level of management has been placed between you and your boss.

The advantage of hiring your supervisors first is twofold. First, it eliminates the future hard feelings of being layered and second, it allows your supervisors to be involved in the hiring decisions related to their staff.

Step #4: Seek Potential Candidates for Personal Fit and Technical Skill
The philosophy behind this step is that if you hire someone who is slightly underqualified for the position but is a great person, a quick study, has natural ability, a great attitude, and whose personality truly jells with the team, then after a few months of doing the job, he/she will be fully qualified because they have been doing the work for months.

If you hire on only current technical skills and credentials and not on organizational fit, they will be fully qualified on day one to perform the needed tasks, but a few months down the line the person will still not get along with his/her teammates.

This lack of interpersonal connection between team members can dramatically reduce future team cohesion, thus hurting overall department performance, effectiveness, and output.

Step #5: Accurately Describe Job Roles During the Interview Process
Tying back to the job description, it is extremely important that each candidate fully understands the tasks they will be performing, their role within the organization, and their promotional opportunities. If, when hired, they are surprised about their newly accepted position, it can dramatically reduce their morale. In the short turn, this decreases your chances of moving your team ahead quickly to the task at hand and in the long term, increases the probability that people will leave your department, further hurting overall efficiency and output.

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Chapter 2
E - *Establish relationships and trust among teammates*

This step discusses how to quickly build relationships and trust among members of a team.

As you may expect, this process begins with your team members first getting to know each other and then, based on these relationships, begin to develop trust based on their individual ethics and professional abilities.

As the team leader, there are a number of things that you can do to begin building relationships among your team members including the following:

Define a consistent management style
When forming a new team, as you are trying to learn about your new staff, they are also trying to understand you. Being consistent in your mood and actions allows your team to understand more quickly how to deal with you, as their new manager. This understanding reduces the nervousness of your new employees toward you, thus, allowing them to concentrate on getting to know fellow team members.

Use ice breaking and teambuilding exercises
Ice breakers are fun exercises designed to accelerate the acquaintance of a new group of people. Teambuilding exercises and/or instructional activities are designed to transform a group of acquainted individuals into a cohesive team.

Define virtual team communication processes
If your team includes employees in multiple physical locations, it's imperative that you establish easy ways for your team to communicate with you, as their manager, and with their fellow teammates. Without these strong communication gateways, it will be very hard for your team members to get to know each other and, thus, gel as a team.

Quickly intervene with conflict resolution
As soon as difficulties arise between employees they must be immediately resolved, otherwise, they have the potential to grow in intensity and potentially spread to include other employees.

With rudimentary team member relationships in place, your next step is to begin to create trust within the group. The following list contains various ways to help instill this trust within your team.

Require strong business ethics
The philosophy behind demanding that all team members aspire to the highest possible business ethics is that it allows people to expect ethical behavior from their fellow employees. This assumption of the moral high road helps facilitate a feeling of trust.

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Expand interpersonal relationships
Striving to expand the working and personal relationships between members has three primary benefits. First, it will help strengthen the trust between teammates. Second, as their interpersonal trust expands, so will their teamwork and productivity. Lastly, as acquaintance transforms into friendship, team morale and job satisfaction will bloom.

Look for small wins and reward the team
The reason to look for early small rewards is that it builds positive momentum and allows the team to get their first taste of group success. This team celebration helps facilitate a feeling of cohesiveness and teamwork.

Chapter 3
A - *Assemble vision, goals and values*

Never underestimate the impact that goal setting can have on those you lead. It creates:
- Common purpose
- Feelings of reliance on each other to reach the planned objective
- Personally instilled peer pressure to not let the team down
- Raising the level of energy
- Increased commitment

This effect of goal setting works in sports and in the workplace. Regarding values, while goals and objectives define what you want to achieve, values describe the way you want to achieve them. Team values, which are the written embodiment of the business ethics discussed in the last step, define the group's moral character.

The steps that follow will provide insights as to how you, the team's leader/manager can define your team's goals, objectives and values and then infuse them within your team.

1. Describe team/project vision and goals
The process used to define a team's vision and goals could be a full day class by itself and in the business world can require weeks of intense introspective, understanding of purpose, future vision, and a realistic grounding in the current day's environment. The objective here is simply to give you a general understanding of the concept and the process.

If your team has been created to perform for a long-lasting purpose, such as the formation of the Client Service group, then your future direction should be vision-based, rather than simply goal based. This template can be used to help define your group's vision "The (group name) group exists to (description of services) by (activities to be performed) so that (purpose of services)."

If your team is transitory in nature and has been created for the purpose of completing a specific task, such as implementing a new accounting system, and will be disbanded when the project is finished, then your team's goal statement should be constructed using a SMART goal. Smart is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time bound. SMART goals are a standard industry technique and further information on them can be easily obtained via a web search.

To help start you on this journey, consider the following sentence template.

The goal of our team is to (specific and measurable goal goes here) by (date you want to do it) with the goal of (goal goes here).

An example of a completed statement is

Reduce network downtime during standard business hours by 35% by June 30th.

Note that for this goal to truly be SMART, it must also be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time bound and is appropriate, given the group's overall business purpose.

2. Outline team values based on trust, ethics, and teamwork
A declaration informs your staff and clients of your organization's core beliefs. A value statement can be used to describe how your staff should treat each other, treat your clients, the expected level of professionalism, and other related topics. To that end, this template can be used to help define your group's values. "The guiding principles of the (group name) are to (list of your values) with the goal of (your reason for the list of values)."

3. Make the vision, goals and values visibly noticeable
The creation of your team's goals, vision and values have intrinsic value to you as the team's leader/manager because it can help your actions and decisions toward achieving your desired result. To maximize their effectiveness, you must communicate them to your team in a way that allows your group to internalize them as both their personal goal and the goal for the team. This communication could be posters on the walls, included in their email signatures, as plaques on their desks, or other similar means. The trick is for them to see or hear them often enough until they become part of the culture and fabric of your team.

4. Lead by example
As the author of the vision, goals and values statements, you must also embody them in your actions and leadership style. If you don't, they will simply be words on the page and noise to be ignored. Also, if you are saying one thing and doing another, it will undermine the respect that your team has toward you as their leader.

5. Praise or punish those following or violating stated values
Lastly, walking the walk and talking the talk is great. This consistency is very important. Your goal, however, is to also get your team to follow your defined guidelines. The technique of praising the few to motivate the many is a great technique to use to help instill team goals and values into others. Publicly praise those who are following your direction and, as needed, privately discuss your displeasure with those not following your stated direction.

Chapter 4
P - *Provide Individual and team Critical Success Factors*

Critical Success Factors (CSFs) are the criteria used by the project stakeholders to judge its success or failure. One way to look at CSFs are like the test questions asked in a college final exam. That is to say, the student may have a wide understanding of the class materials, but he/she is only being judged on his/her knowledge related to the specific questions on the exam. In college, it is considered cheating if you get the exam questions prior to the examination date. In the workplace, however, knowing exactly how you will be judged prior to the beginning of your project is good business.

From a project perspective, knowing your CSFs will help you:

1. Building your project plan and deliverables based on those criteria
Understanding how your project will be judged allows you to build your project plan and deliverables based on the specified success criteria. At first glance, this may seem self-serving, because it is self-serving. It is also, however, the best possible course of direction for the project because, by definition, CSFs are the things most important to the project stakeholders. Therefore, guiding the project's outcome toward the CSFs simultaneously directs it toward relying on the project's success.

2. Direct resources to the most important deliverables
With your deliverables defined and your people in place, knowing the project's CSFs allows you to prioritize your team's most important activities. It also provides insight into where your personal time, attention, and efforts should be directed.

3. Stay focused
With the project underway, as time passes, you and your team dig into the day-to-day tasks; it's easy to accidently stray from the project's main purpose. Keeping the CSFs in mind can help you stay the course. This is the case because at project end, each member on the team knows specifically how they will be judged.

From a staffing and talent management perspective, CSFs will help you:

1. Hire the right people
Knowing the projects CSFs allows you, as the Project Manager, to define the ideal candidates needed for your team. As an example, if your goal is to build a website and one of the CSFs is exceptional user experience, then you know you must hire a top notch web designer and skilled graphic artist. Conversely, if the user experience was not considered important and processing speed was the primary objective, then you would know to spend more money on experienced software developers and money on graphic artists.

2. Define specific job performance criteria to each team member

As the team leader, knowing the project's overall CSFs allows you to define and communicate specific performance measurements to each team member is consistent with the project's overall objectives. This individual/project consistency helps drive project success because of the forced alignment of stakeholder needs, project CSFs, and team member performance criteria.

3. Define training needs

Performing a gap analysis between your team's current skills and the skills needed to meet your project's CSFs provides insights into your teams training needs. For example, if your project requires a well written training manual and you don't have the option to hire additional staff, logic would dictate that you must train one of your staff members on instructional design.

4. Enhance teamwork through common purpose

In a team related endeavor, very often the goals of each individual can only be realized through the help of his/her fellow team members. If you, as the Project Manager, make these co-dependences clear to your team, it gives them a common purpose which has the real potential, through peer pressure and a want to not let their teammates down, to dramatically enhance each individual's performance. This is truly an example of the old adage that the total can be greater than the sum of its parts.

Chapter 5
F - *Form a culture of teamwork and camaraderie*

This step is the culmination of the four prior steps. This is the time your group becomes a team by taking advantage of the foundation that was laid in the previous activities.

As anyone who has ever participated on a sports team, been involved in an entrepreneurial endeavor, and/or participated as a member of a project team, can attest to that when a group of individual participants bond as a team, the total is always greater than the sum of its parts in regard to job satisfaction, individual performance and team efficiency. This is why, from the leader's perspective, that it's so important for your team to jell as a single cohesive unit.

The steps that follow will provide insights as to how you, the team's leader/manager can complete this crucial process of converting a group of individuals into a well-oiled machine.

1. Emphasize goals and objectives to build a common purpose
Step "A - Assemble goals, objectives and values" discussed the importance of defining team goals, objectives and values. Emphasizing these statements to your team gives them a common purpose to rally around. This common purpose, in turn, will help facilitate their camaraderie because of the realization that they must work together to attain this mutual goal.

2. Use values as a way to drive importance of team commitment
Emphasizing team values helps solidify the rules of engagement between members. This is the case because, by their nature, they describe the team's internal code of conduct and moral standards.

3. Establish concept of team, not just personal, success and failure
With common goals in place, establishing the concept of "team", not just personal success and failure, places an implied reliance on fellow teammates. This in turn, puts implied peer pressure on each member of the group to perform, as to not let their teammates down. Additionally, the team members themselves will push each other to perform, thus assisting you in motivating less-driven staff members.

4. Use goals, objectives and CSFs as the context for team focus
With your group beginning to jell as a single unit, the previously defined Critical Success Factors (CSFs) can be used to help channel their efforts toward specific outcomes and secondary objectives.

5. Communicate, communicate, communicate
Communicate and accentuate to your staff the importance of working as a team for the good of all. Communicate your group's goals, values and CSFs to your internal (or external) company clients so they will begin to:
- Understand your group's purpose (goals and objectives)

- Conceptualize your team as a cohesive unit (team concept)
- Gain insights on how to best work with your group (values)
- Know how your group should be measured and judged (CSFs)

Lastly, you must communicate these same concepts (goals, values and CSFs) to your management to help assure that you personally, as the group's leader, will be judged using agreed upon criteria (the CSFs).

6. Praise or punish those following or violating stated team values
In addition to properly and consistently communicating the importance of teamwork and camaraderie to your group, you must also reinforce it through your actions. People on your team that exemplify your stated values should be publicly praised in front of the group as an example of proper behavior. Those who do not understand and/or don't properly follow group norms should be spoken to privately so as to not embarrass them among their peers.

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Chapter 6
R - *Render efficient internal department processes*

With the people in place, the goals defined, CSFs communicated, and the group's culture initially formed, the next step is to define the group's internal processes. The reason for waiting until now to define the team's workflow is because the team members can be included in the design.

Including the team in the process design will allow the team members to:
- Have a deeper understanding of the processes being performed
- Design processes that play to their individual strengths
- Truly buy-in to the processes being performed because they helped create them
- Be more easily cross-trained on multiple activities
- Enhance the initially designed processes because they understand the rationale used to create them

With the initial processes in place, the next step is to enhance the team's culture with a mentality of continual process improvements. This mentality brings with it a number of key attributes:
- A vested interest in enhanced department efficiency
- A feeling of ownership in the current processes
- Effective communication within the group related to process bottlenecks and current inefficiencies
- A willingness to change and/or create change as needed for the good of the group
- Organizational awareness of the department's role within the larger organization
- Passion for process improvement
- Management's willingness to accept employee suggestions and feedback

As the group's leader, your role is crucial in establishing a culture that is willing and able to define their own internal processes and then be willing to modify them as needed for the good of the team. First, you must personally be willing to solicit and then accept suggestions made by your team, rather than dictate how things should be done. Second, as your team gains experience using these newly created processes, you must be willing to invest the time needed to analyze suggested improvements in a way that rewards and motivates the team to bring forth additional suggestions. To do this, you must adopt a philosophy and the corresponding actions that all suggestions are good, even if upon further investigation they are not implemented.

You must take note that this stage is a very pivotal time for your group. In the previous stages the concentration was on forming the team, defining its vision and building its culture. This stage changes the emphasis from getting the team organized to getting the work done. This change in emphasis brings with it new risks and challenges related to the team members:
- Competence to perform the tasks they were assigned
- Willingness to perform the tasks they were assigned

- Workload being evenly spread across the team, helping to prevent issues related to some team members being overworked while others are underutilized
- Comfort with their roles within the group now that reality has set in related to the reporting structure and the interaction between individuals as needed to coordinate workflow.
- Respect, trust, and willingness to follow you, their leader, as the work builds up, unexpected issues arise, and corrections must be made in your initially designed processes.

As the manager, when things go well, this is a very exciting time for you because this is where your conceptual vision of your organization becomes a working and breathing reality. Certainly expect there will be bumps in the road, but if you have performed the previous steps with careful intent and correctness, then your team should be well on its way to efficiently performing its required tasks.
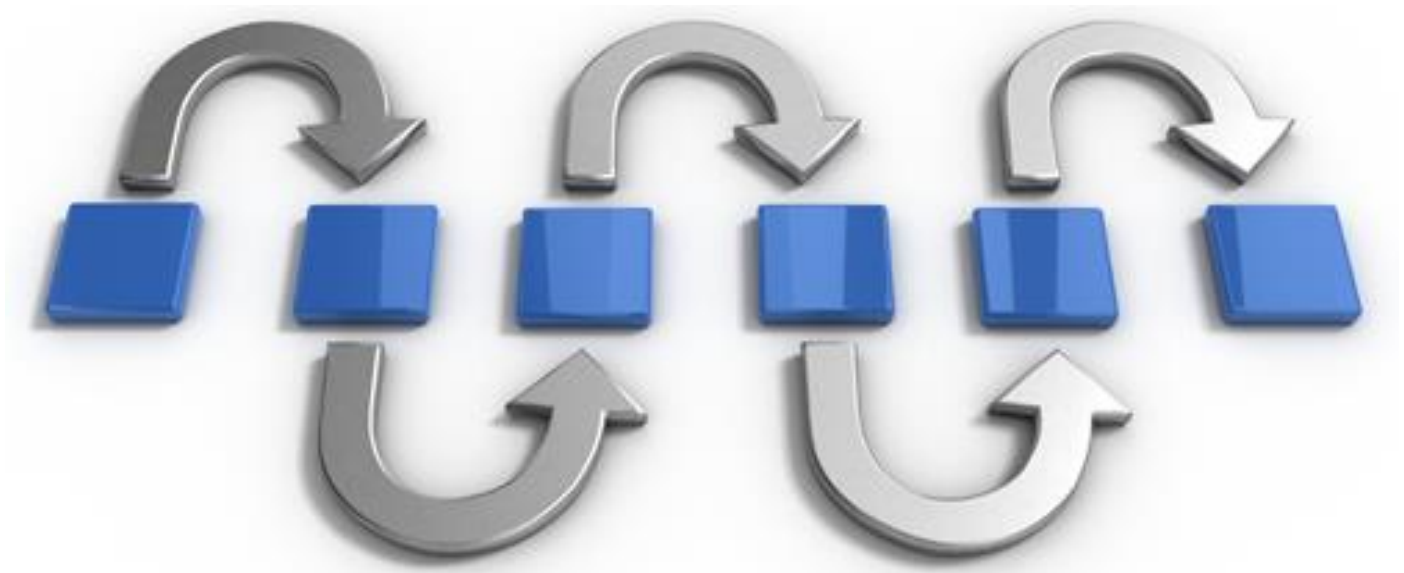
Chapter 7
O - *Outline specific process measurements*

With your people in place, goals defined, CSFs communicated, culture emerging, and internal processes defined, your next and final preparatory phase is to define how your newly created process will be measured, collected, analyzed, communicated, and used.

To that end, consider the following steps:

1. Include team in defining process measurement categories
It's important that you include your team in defining both the measurements to be used and the methodology employed to collect the needed statistics. The reason to include your team in this process is threefold. First, if they are involved in the definition process, they will be more likely to buy-in to the measurements being used. Second, discussions of this type will enhance your team's understanding of the processes being measured. Third, as you go through the steps defined below, it provides career growth to your team members by illustrating how measurements are defined, collected, stored, analyzed, communicated, and used for the good of the organization.

2. Create procedures to collect and store measurements
With the needed measurements defined, the next step must be a process to store the collected measurement data in a way that it can be easily retrieved and analyzed. If the data is not easily retrievable, then as the data grows, it will become too cumbersome to use as part of your ongoing reporting.

3. Create procedures to generate benchmarks based on measurements
Over time, as more and more data is collected, with the proper analysis, standardized timings, costs, and/or level of effort will emerge. This statistical analysis, in turn, can then be used to create benchmarks. As an added usage, these statistics can also be used to illustrate performance trends within your processes.

4. Design standardized measurement reports
The rationale for defining your standardized reports up front, before the data is actually collected, is because it helps assure that the right data is being collected and it's being stored in a way that facilitates the creation of the ongoing needed reports.

5. Define and communicate the effect of measurements on team member performance reviews
Explaining to your team how they will be measured has two advantages. First, their desire to receive high job performance ratings will cause them to do things that will maximize the value of the measurable statistics. Second, assuming the measures are properly aligned with organizational goals, individual efforts to maximize personal performance will, by definition, help the organization meet its objectives.

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6. Use process measurements as a basis for ongoing process improvement and product quality

One of the keys of ongoing improvement is the ability to measure process quality, efficiency, and other similar statistics. This information can be used in two ways. First, as a way to prioritize which processes should be improved based on the amount of time the team spends performing the task. Second, when improvements are put in place, collected statistics will be able to show if the expected process enhancements were actually realized.

Chapter 8
G - *Get going*

When LEAPFROG was initially introduced, this methodology, designed by Manager Mechanics, was created to get a newly formed team up and running quickly, in a way that helps facilitate long-term team/project success. One would think that having reached a final phase named "Get Going" that your work is complete and it's time to relax. In this case, however, it means that your department's work has truly just begun.

This transitional phase is where planning, teambuilding, and process design ends and the tasks, which caused your team to be formed, actually will begin.

As your team begins its real work, you as the manager, should continually perform the items in the following list to help assure your team continues to solidify its emerging culture, kickoff the execution of designed processes, and enhance process designs as needed.

Be the role model for defined team values
As the expression goes, you as team leader, lead by example if you like it or not. Your actions will be closely observed by your team. It's only natural, you are their leader. In steps "L", through "F" of the methodology, you painstakingly worked to define and build the group's goals, values, teamwork, and culture. Personally, exemplifying these traits will help cement them within the team's conceptual fabric.

Continue to praise or punish those following or violating stated team values
At this early stage of team development, positive and negative reinforcement will help keep your team headed in the right direction. People on your team that exemplify your stated values should be publicly praised in front of the group as an example of proper behavior. Those who do not understand and/or don't properly follow group norms should be spoken to privately to not embarrass them among their peers.

Praise those who define and communicate process improvements
Praise should also be used as a way to illustrate the importance of ongoing process improvement. Showing praise for improvement suggestions, implemented or otherwise, is crucially important during the early stages of production for two reasons. First, newly formed processes often need early modifications. Second, praising the first people who suggest process improvements begins to solidify a culture of ongoing self-improvement.

Celebrate successes as a team
Celebrating team successes has the dual advantage of strengthening team identity and building a momentum of success.

In closing, the concept that investing your time and effort in defining your team's structure, roles, vision definition, Critical Success Factors, culture, and internal processes early in your team's formation can pay great dividends in product quality, team culture, job satisfaction, and department effectiveness.

Part 9
About the IT Management & Leadership Institute

The Information Technology Management & Leadership (ITML) Institute is the governing body for two IT leadership certifications:

- **Information Technology Management and Leadership Professional (ITMLP)**
- **Information Technology Management and Leadership Executive (ITMLE)**

Over the years, hundreds of people have received ITMLP and ITMLE training, taken the exam and become certified. The knowledge they have gained and the credibility it provided has been of great value to their careers and the companies they serve.

The ITML Institute is dedicated to help IT professionals, supervisors, managers, directors and future CIOs be as successful in their management endeavors and their career advancement!

Information Technology Management and Leadership Professional (ITMLP)

The ITMLP Certification contains a collection of ten key IT topics designed to increase the effectiveness of new and would-be IT managers by widening their knowledge of IT. It includes techniques to enhance user satisfaction, providing insights into motivating technical professionals, and providing information on the use of various IT best-practices.

IT MLP
Certified IT Manager

Information Technology Management and Leadership Executive (ITMLE)

IT executives must be more than just technical. They must have well developed people-skills, a broad business view, solid business acumen, superior communication, strong management capabilities, and exceptional leadership capacity.   The ITMLE is a rigorous, down-to-earth, and practical certification program that provides a well-balanced foundation needed to bring superior competitive IT advantage to their company.

IT MLE
Certified IT Executive

Contact today and learn how our certifications, IT Training programs and other Institute resources can be of value to you and/or your IT organization!

info@ITMLInstitite.org   **www.ITMLInstitite.org**