



**Management Communication Systems, Inc.**  
4000 Bridgeway, Suite 404  
Sausalito, CA 94965  
(415) 339-2990 FAX (415) 339-2999

## ***Fast Start Teambuilding***

*by Charles Sheppard, Management Communication Systems, Inc.*

*Too often companies miss the opportunity to create something extraordinary in their culture with the introduction of a new team leader or the creation of a new team. A company's culture is its competitive strategic advantage: you can duplicate technologies, you can replicate processes, but a culture is almost impossible to recreate. The Fast Start process is designed to help you create your ideal corporate culture. It sets into motion the kinds of values and behaviors that create a high performance team.*

A new world is emerging, and success is no longer simply about profitability, competitiveness, strategic planning, re-engineering, and quality management. It's all of that and much, much more. Being truly effective is about understanding the inner workings of people, what's important to them, what motivates them, what makes them tick. In today's continuously changing world, everyone must understand the other person they are partnering and working with.

The Fast Start process introduces communication skills that concentrate on producing extraordinary relationships. These rare yet crucial relationships form the basis of extraordinary teams. Because productive, flexible, innovative work teams are the key to a company's survival and prosperity, Fast Start researchers offer you a "tried and true" method of handling the most important decision in your career: How to build extraordinary relationships with your coworkers.

Most people will agree that extraordinary changes are taking place in today's business world. These changes go far beyond imbalances in supply and demand or advances in new technologies. They

represent a paradigm shift of far-reaching proportions--an unprecedented revolution in the global work force.

We are entering an era of permanent "white water" that will toss our organizations in unexpected directions. Wave after wave of change will challenge your organization's ability to respond. These rapids of change are accelerating in a geometric progression. Around 5000 BC major inventions only disrupted the status quo every few hundred years. By 10 AD, it had grown to about every fifty years. By 1750, new inventions on the average created change every 25 years.

Today, however, not a month goes by where a major invention doesn't shake the foundations of society. The statistics are mind boggling: It is predicted that all information will soon double in less than a generation. By the year 2007, information will start to double on an annual basis. The information age requires that organizations constantly pioneer new and innovative ideas in order to prevail. One of these ideas is that successful organizations can only be built on a foundation of extraordinary relationships.

## Riding The Waves of Culture

***Most of us can recall a time when we were part of an extraordinary team. Being part of a such a team is an extremely rewarding feeling. Whether your experience involved a football team, a debating team, or a new-technologies research team, you were probably not aware of the actual process of building your team. When asked how they did it, most people state, "It just happened."***

The most neglected aspect of leadership is that of cultural design. Organizational cultures are created by their leaders. One of the most decisive functions of leadership may well be the creation, management, and manipulation of a team's culture. Culture and team leadership, upon closer examination, are actually like two sides of the same coin. In fact, leadership research has suggested that one of the most important things that leaders can do is to create and manage their organizational cultures. The unique talent of leaders is their ability to work with and create a culture in which people excel.

A "culture" is a pattern of basic presuppositions and values, discovered and developed by individuals as they learn to cope with their environment. This set of beliefs is of valid concern and, therefore, is demonstrated to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel. These beliefs are likely to be taken for granted by employees. They have dropped out of conscious awareness of their surroundings, "like water to a fish."

However unconscious or hidden, these powerful beliefs and values govern the behavior of any team. As a new team member, it is important to understand the culture you are walking into before you can have an appreciation of how to modify it. Thus, it is crucial to develop a deeper understanding of culture--not only what goes on in a culture but, more importantly, to how to develop the tools you need to change it for the better.

The area where leaders can directly affect culture is through the influence of relationships, communications, and behavioral patterns. Imagine that your organization is like an ocean liner and that you are the leader of it. What analogous role would you occupy in relation to the ocean liner? The most common response

would be "the captain." However, the person who has the greatest actual influence on the ship's performance is not the captain. It is the naval architect who originally designed the ship. No captain can elicit great performance from a ship which, due to its design, tends to list in the water or has problems turning. The way a ship (or a team) is designed is vitally important for "smooth sailing."

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Planning a Fast Start process builds the momentum needed to create a team in which everyone wants to belong as well as excel. The Fast Start process gives you a template of the environment in which you are working, allowing you to utilize this knowledge in a way that fosters deep, trusting relationships with your fellow employees. Fast Start will facilitate an openness within the group that encourages constructive interaction among coworkers. Your strategic planning will jump-start the development of a synergistic, dynamic team culture that will be both productive and rewarding.

## Beyond the Task-Oriented Approach

Fast Start operates on the premise that teams need more than management information that concentrates solely on the task elements of projects. Too often new team members or leaders come into a new organization and set out to tackle the tasks at hand. They jump into expense management, re-engineering, and employee evaluation--basically falling prey to the pressures of the business. The single most critical success factor--

the creation of successful relationships--is often left to chance.

***The first principle  
is to drive out  
fear.***

***W. Edward  
Deming***

Imagine trying to accomplish complicated business tasks in an environment characterized by high levels of interruption, confrontation, and emotion about proposed courses of action. You would most likely experience a mounting frustration level over the difficulty of getting a point of view across, and a sense that every group member was only looking out for his or her agenda. Entering a few new "management" skills into this environment may change it a little, but until the culture changes it will be difficult--if not downright impossible--to create a truly extraordinary team.

Historically, engineering the optimum team involved obtaining the highest performance players while maintaining stability and predictability within the group. The goal was to design a structure in which one need only replace a departing worker with another of approximately equal talent so that the organization would experience no significant loss in performance. However, this mechanistic orientation will never lead to inspired performance. Inspired performance is a function of inspired people who operate with vision and purpose within well-conceived organizational structures. These structures must foster, by design, the creation of a collective vision. Producing optimal teams requires leaders who channel the group's creative energy and inspire a full commitment from all involved.

### **Fear: The Invisible Wall**

The single biggest obstacle to creating extraordinary teams is fear. When looking over their shoulders, employees worry that their plans will be disrupted, their reputations soiled, or their jobs put on the line. Like an invisible poison in the air, fear heightens tension and distracts employees.

Pervasive and irrepressible, fear is difficult to isolate, and even harder to eliminate. One of the biggest factors for fear is the unknown. The unknown of a new team member or the unknown of a new manager. When you arrive it would be naive to assume that you would not elicit each person's own unique flavor of fear. The dangerous part your introduction is that their fear is usually unconscious to them and projected onto you in the form of perceptions that are limiting. Imagine doing a presentation to a group of people that you have never met and with whom you are going to largely impact their lives.

Thus the first thing a new manager needs to know is whether the workplace is dominated by fear. Fear tends to transform people into tortoises. It says to them, keep your neck in as long as you can and hope nobody notices you. Just go through the motions of your work, making sure all the technical bases are covered. Don't be creative, because that could get you in trouble, and don't try to solve any problems, because that involves sticking your neck out. When people are dominated by fear, they don't think well, their decisions are poor, and they certainly don't have a valid picture of where the company is headed, or should be headed.

And where there's fear of repercussions, there almost certainly has to be a crippling fear of accountability. The ol' fear of "stepping up to the plate." Lack of accountability is crippling, because it is precisely what's most needed in the modern workplace. For better or worse, both organizations and technologies have become so complex that only the person who's doing the job can really know what's going on and be accountable for it.

As we've moved towards a high tech environment, all too many companies have completely ignored the other half of a necessary balance--the high touch. The human factor must be dealt with just as

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effectively as the systems, the machines, the accounts and the strategic plans. Overlooking the human factor is bound to be the costliest mistake any organization can make.

One manager told us he thought the turf wars and other fear driven behavior in his company consumed about seventy percent of its productivity. "And we're pretty good—we're one of the better companies," he said. "Some places it's bound to be true that over ninety percent of an the energy they've got they spend on in-fighting, we/they splits and about trivial issues."

At a corporate training, an account representative began to speak out on some issues that were important to him. He felt that management had treated employees badly in several crucial situations, and this was affecting the attitudes of workers. As he spoke he trembled, and beads of sweat dripped from his forehead. Clearly this anxiety didn't come from nervousness about public speaking. It came from a very deep rooted fear of reprisal for speaking out at all.

And the biggest fear is someone new. Some people, even when the reality of change is inescapably bearing down upon them, react like deer caught in the headlights of an oncoming car. They may know what they have to do, but they are too terrified to move. Perhaps they're afraid they won't be able to adjust to the new order, or that they will have to work harder.

Whatever the case, they are motivated to fend off real progress, while seeming all the while to promote it. Only when the organization has been transformed to the point of supporting the unique contribution of all the members can they move over to support the effort of others. For then change will no longer threaten as it used

to. At least, this is the transformation we've seen in a great many people who participate in our training, including many conservatives locked in a particular point of view. These types have well-earned reputations for fighting change.

### **WHAT'S NEXT? Fast Start, Of Course!**

The Fast Start process creates a culture of understanding and with understanding you begin to create trust. This foundation pushes fear into the background. The program provides you with the overall planning process -- in the form of action items you can take to develop introduce or integrate a new team, a new team member or project leader. The Fast Start Process has been created to drive out fear, move a team into performing and help the leader define the culture that he or she wants, to create such that the spirit of a team can be unleashed. Each process is designed to guide the team leader through specific activities that will provide you with a depth of understanding of each team member. Leaders can use these processes to create a long term plan for creating an extraordinary team.

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Dealing with internal group needs that arise from these pressures is as important as the groups external task of making improvements. Yet even teams that grasp the importance of improving their performance often underestimate the need for developing themselves as teams. When a team runs smoothly members can concentrate on their primary goal of improving performance. In contrast a team that fails to build relationships among its members will waste time on

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struggles for control and endless discussions that lead nowhere. These factors show up most often when a team has the uncertainty of new members and or new leadership. The tendency is jump in and fix issues before the relationships are in place to support the changes. It is important to find out what are the real problems and then create the relationships that can support the solutions that fix the real problems.

The more you know about what to expect as your group progresses the better equipped you will be to handle difficulties. You will be able to recognize and avoid many disruptions and together work through those issues that cannot be avoided. To build the group skills needed to achieve these goals. you must start by understanding what lies behind most troubles.

There are undercurrents in team dynamics that most groups do not want to surface. To outside observers, the only obvious team efforts are to associate with the task of improving a process: having meetings, gathering data, planning improvements, getting tasks done, managing resources, making changes, writing reports and so forth. If indeed these were the teams only concerns progress would be very fast. When people form into groups, however, something always seems to get in the way of efficient progress.

The problem is that there are hidden concerns that, like undercurrents, pull team members away from their obvious tasks. When they walk through the door into a meeting team members are often beset by conflicting emotions: excitement and anxiety about being on the team, loyalty to their divisions or departments nervous anticipation about the project's success. And then when you add the unpredictability of a new team member or a new team leader, everyone fears are focused on what is this going to mean to

me. It would be naive to think that you are not stepping into an environment that will be heightened by fear. When fear is present the trust level goes down making it impossible for a group of individuals to develop as a team.

If left unattended these undercurrents will inhibit a groups chance of becoming an extraordinary team. Every group must spend time on activities not directly related to work tasks, activities that build understanding and support in the group. Teams need to resolve issues that fall into what we call the interpersonal underworld.

These are issues not often spoken about but common to us all and they fall into categories we refer to as a members personal identity on the team. It is natural for team members to wonder how they will fit into the team. The most common worries are those associated with membership and inclusion: "Do I feel like an insider or outsider? Do I belong? Do I want to belong? What can I do to fit in?" They also have to do with influence and control and mutual trust: "Who's calling the shots here? Who will have the most influence? Will I have influence? Will I be listened to? Will I be able to contribute? Will I be allowed to contribute?" Another key issue is how are we going to learn to work together: "Will I have loyalty? How will I get along with other team members? Will we be able to develop a cooperative spirit?"

The second cultural issue for a team is, of course, their relationships with each other. With low levels of trust in relationships, team members usually play it safe, avoid risks at all costs and develop a "C.Y.A." (cover your a • • !) mentality. On average teams-- where the relationships are OK, but only at the surface level--team members adopt a "wait and see" attitude and a politically correct mind set, which in turn creates the "slow death" of corporate America today.

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With high levels of trust and partnership, you begin to see the full expression of the spirit of a team emerge. And so no matter what kind of team you are on or what kind of team player you are the questions will extend to: "What kind of relationships will characterize this team? How will members of different ranks interact? Will we be friendly and informal or will it be strictly business? Will we be open or guarded in what we say? Will we be able to work together, or will we argue and disagree all the time! Will people like or dislike me? Will I like or dislike them? Will people walk their talk? Will it be supportive? Will we hold each other accountable? "

The third arena is the team identity with the organization. Team members usually identify strongly with their departments or divisions, and they will need to know how membership in the team will accept those roles and responsibilities: "Will my loyalty to the team conflict with loyalty to my coworkers? Will my responsibilities as a team member conflict with my values?" Usually it is the relationships that suffer if the two compete.

Just as team members must reach outside the group to maintain ties with their departments, so must the team as a whole build relationships throughout the organization. Corporate astuteness is crucial. Finding people that want to closely work with the team and its process can make a true difference in the support your team receives from the organization. The more people you have backing you, the better off your team will be.

### **Stages of Team Growth**

As the team matures, members gradually learn to cope with the emotional and group pressures they face. As a result, the team goes through fairly predictable stages.

### **Stage 1: Forming**

When a team is forming, members cautiously explore the boundaries of acceptable group behavior. When a team first forms, team members are like hesitant swimmers standing by the side of the pool and dipping their toes in the water. This is a stage of transition from individual to member status, and of testing the leader's guidance both formally and informally.

Because there is so much going on to distract members' attention in the beginning, the team accomplishes little, if anything, that concerns its project goals. And this is perfectly normal.

### **Stage 2: Storming**

Storming is probably the most difficult stage for the team. It is as if team members jump in the water, and, thinking they are about to drown, start thrashing about. They begin to realize the task is different and more difficult than they imagined, becoming testy, blameful, or overzealous.

Impatient about the lack of progress, but still too inexperienced to know much about decision making or the scientific approach, members argue about just what actions the team should take. They try to rely solely on their personal and professional experience, resisting any need for collaborating with other team members.

Again, these many pressures mean team members have little energy to spend on progressing towards the team's goal. Now they are beginning to understand one another.

### **Stage 3: Norming**

During this stage, members reconcile competing loyalties and responsibilities.

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They accept the team, team ground rules (or "norms"), their roles in the team, and the individuality of fellow members. Emotional conflict is reduced as previously competitive relationships become more cooperative. In other words, as team members realize they are not going to drown, they stop thrashing about and start helping each other stay afloat.

As the team matures they begin to work out their differences, they now have more time and energy to spend on the project. Thus they are able to at last start making significant progress.

#### **Stage 4: Performing**

By this stage, the team has settled its relationships and expectations. They can begin performing, diagnosing and solving problems, and choosing and implementing changes. At last team members have discovered and anticipated each other's strengths and weaknesses, and learned what their roles are. Now they can swim in concert.

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Every team goes through cycles of good times and bad times. The duration of these highs and lows will vary for each team, depending on how quickly they progress, work through obstacles or problems, and so forth. Team members should know that such cycles are normal and do not indicate whether the team will ultimately be successful.

Understanding these stages of growth will keep you from overreacting to normal problems and setting unrealistic expectations that only add to frustration. The duration and intensity of these stages can be accelerated by a Fast Start

process. With strategic planning and effort this assembly of independent individuals will grow into a team.

Knowing about the typical stages a team passes through: forming, storming, norming, and performing relieves much of the fear team members have about the team's success. It is also helpful to be aware of the roller coaster of behavioral communication patterns every team experiences. By your team knowing what motivates each other, what each of them values in the way of interpersonal communication you can pass over many of the high and lows associated with the introduction of a new team member or leader.

A team's mood usually reflects its fortune with every step forward, the future looks bright and team members are optimistic. But no matter how well a teams future looks, progress will be difficult if they do not communicate effectively together. As progress swings from forward to stalled, and then from stalled to backwards, the team mood will swing, too. These swings are only partly linked to the stages of growth, and usually linked to their communication styles.

When a team member understands another team member's communication style they take an important step in building their relationship with each other. By going through your Drake P3 profile together you can accomplish a lot. By being open with others on personal issues and exploring with a sense of discovery, the Drake P3 allows for a team to begin to form. When people read their Communication Profile they begin to see patterns of communication and it opens them up to new ideas about themselves. It helps teams start to form relationships.

Of course, teams also storm, and the Drake P3 gets the real issues out on the table because people are taking about the

process of how they communicate. This gets the interpersonal issues out in the open so they can be dealt with.

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How are you going to use the information of the contained in the Drake P 3 in a way that will serve the team? What support are individual team member's going to need from each other? When we understand someone we can support someone.

What motivates your team? Use the Drake P3 to motivate each other the way that works for each individual communication style. By knowing what works for each team member you can move your team forward at an accelerated pace. The patterns are different for each team. Team members' attitudes depend on both the speed of progress and the resistance or encouragement they receive from the guidance of the team leader.

Psychological studies have shown that the brain is a pattern making device and when something new is introduced it sets the behavior and literally locks in the pattern. Too often companies miss the opportunity to create something extraordinary in their culture with the introduction of a new team leader or the creation of a new team. A companies culture is its competitive strategic advantage, you can duplicate technologies, you can replicate processes yet a culture is difficult to recreate. The Fast Start process is designed for you to create the kind of culture you want to work in. It sets into motion the kind of values and behaviors you want form your team around. Don't miss this opportunity to set it right form the start. You only get one chance to make a good first cultural impression.