

What Is a Team?

By Sherry Heinze, Senior Test Consultant
March 31, 2015

I have worked on teams ever since I started in software development in, what was then called the Systems Department; some teams were as small as three people and others were well over a hundred people. I never really thought about what I meant by a team until years later. I have stayed in IT for as long as I have for two reasons: most of the smartest and most interesting (to me) people I know work in IT, and we usually work in teams.

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People work and play on teams in a lot of different situations – work, sports, communities, etc. Team members can be competitive with each other, collaborative or sometimes both. Sports teams are usually both, the teams competing against each other and the team members competing for better spots on the team. IT teams can be competitive too where there is a hierarchal structure. In the ideal scenario, we simply collaborate with each other and the competitive drive many people have is directed towards the problems we are trying to solve together. Different people lead, depending on the situation. In other companies, the teams have a leader and assigned positions. There is a hierarchy and you are expected to obey the

people in charge. If you don't play exclusively your own position or follow the leader, you will probably get in trouble. You may even be thrown off the team. Some of us aren't very good at working in isolation or following the leader. I never was.

Lately, I have been reading about leadership, various kinds of intelligence and how companies can keep their employees engaged. Leaders need to be competent in emotional intelligence, which includes things like self-management, adaptability and having a positive outlook. They also need to consider social intelligence, which includes things like teamwork, conflict management and coaching and mentoring. [3] [4] These are all things that build both leaders and team players. Management skills and technical skills are more respected in many companies than soft or people skills. Many kinds of skills are needed in any business. If you think your staff is your greatest asset, which your people certainly are in knowledge work, remember that you can only keep them if they are engaged.

In systems work, the needs and demands change quickly. Most of what we do is research and development, which has never been done before, and will never be done again. The hierarchal model of management, the unchangeable requirements and the enforced roles don't work well in this environment. We

have to leverage the whole team to do really good work. We have to work together to create something new. We have to work fast to get a product to market, to keep up with government regulations, to satisfy the business departments and the shareholders. Studies show that employees with emotional intelligence competencies are significantly more productive [1] [2]. We all need emotional intelligence and social intelligence to be effective, whether or not we are leaders or managers.

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Before I worked in Systems / Information Systems / Information Technology, I worked for someone who was the first good manager I ever had. I would take ideas to him and we would talk about them. He never seemed to like them at the time. However, a few days later, he would often come back with his great new idea, which would sound very familiar. It made one of our colleagues crazy that he did not give me credit. In the three years I worked for him, I never got credit for a good idea. In the same three years, he promoted me from junior clerk to supervisor, and taught me, and encouraged me to learn, about the business. He also tripled my salary and wrote a recommendation that got me a job in the company's Systems Department. I was more engaged by him than most of the managers I had later.

In 1990, I worked on a large project team that designed and built several systems and

integrated them with each other. The project included a couple of existing systems and a vendor accounting application with three separate but connected modules. We started with about twenty people doing analysis and design from both the user company and the consulting company. A year later, we had a hundred and thirteen people doing training and implementation. At the beginning of the design stage, I worked with a user company developer and a consulting company analyst on two of the subsystems. One day, the project manager sat us down together to discuss the individual assignments we had been given. When she was finished, the developer said that he and the analyst had discussed them and decided I had too much to do, and that each of them would do some of my assigned tasks. The project manager was very upset. She asked who would be responsible, essentially who could be blamed if they were not done. The developer said “The team will be responsible and the team will get it done.” And we did, even when he was recalled to work on a production system for a month. Ever since then, that has been my definition of a team.

“Teams share ideas and team players share credit.”

Recently, I read Jowett's Law "The way to get things done is not to mind who gets the credit for doing them." To me, that is one characteristic of a team. Teams share ideas and team players share credit. In a variety of ways, teams interact and engage each other, regardless of their role on the team. Teams may have one leader or

many, depending on what is needed. A manager may also be a leader and / or part of the team. We all need to cultivate Emotional Intelligence

and Social Intelligence to work together as a team.

That's my idea of a team. What's yours?

- [1] http://www.eiconsortium.org/reports/business_case_for_ei.html
- [2] <http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01322/abstract>
- [3] <http://www.danielgoleman.info/topics/emotional-intelligence/>
- [4] www.youtube.com/watch?v=NeJ3FF1yFyc



About The Author

Sherry Heinze is a Senior Test Consultant with Professional Quality Assurance (PQA Testing) with over 30 years of Information Technology experience, as a Test Lead, Tester, QA Analyst and Trainer. With a broad background in analysis, design, testing, training, implementation, documentation and user support, Sherry has focused on testing from the analysis phase forward, developing testing related and quality assurance processes, training and mentoring.

Sherry has extensive experience working with users and technical staff to identify and test requirements; design, create, implement and support systems in a number of industries, including oil and gas. She has worked for large corporations with detailed standards and guidelines for development projects, both working alone and within large groups, along with companies who are just introducing processes or testing to their culture.