How are Self Directed Teams different from most committees, task groups, or advisory groups?

Traditional organization structures
There are many common organizational structures used in private, community, and corporate organizations.

Some common terms for such things include “standing committee”, “task force”, “ad hoc committee”, “advisory group” and so forth. In all of those, as they are traditionally perceived, someone is in charge and, there is some sort of vertical accountability. A chairman or other leader makes appointments to the group, there is a single acknowledged leader of the group (appointed or elected), with information and resources flowing “up” and “down” through that leader.

These forms of organization are appropriate where there is a more traditional “top-down” expectation within the group or on behalf of the leadership that created the group in the first place.

These groups will contain members with widely varying levels of commitment and engagement, often being a member of the group is a result of their appointment to represent of a particular region, department, or other group within the organization.

Traditional structures like these can be very responsive in the short term, providing fairly rapid feedback or fairly rapid results. Because of the widely varying levels of engagement, commitment, differing motives, and leadership abilities, these groups can also be very non-productive.

If a group of people exists with similar commitment to outcomes forms without a need for top-down approval on routine decisions and actions, that group may grow into what is known as a “Self Directed Team”.

True Self Directed Teams
- Consistent commitment exists throughout members of the team for the work to be accomplished.

- Leadership is shared and accepted throughout the group. Group members do not wait for a single leader or co-leader to initiate appropriate action with or on behalf of the group. Team members are self-motivated and hold themselves
personally and professionally accountable for the relevance and efficacy of the team.

- A high level of personal and professional trust exists among the team members. Individuals have sufficient trust, rapport, and mutual respect to be able to interact with true candor.

- Skills and ability and experience of team members are diverse and complimentary. Differing academic and professional roles are acknowledged, respected, and valued, but outcomes from the work of the group are the focus at all times.

- The team develops and manages its own resources.

- The team has a high tolerance for ambiguity regarding the environment in which they work, yet members are able to articulate the team goals clearly and succinctly.

Self Directed Teams are NOT useful in the short-term when rapid action is required by the organization. After a self directed team has begun to mature, SD Teams can easily be more nimble, relevant, and responsive than more traditional structures.

Self Directed Teams DO work within the boundaries of the overall organization (pre-defined or negotiated), and operate to represent and uphold the values and mission of the over-all organization.

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