

Chapter 5 *Structuring Teams*



This chapter offers an overview of how to develop the conditions that enable leadership teams to work together effectively and develop an interdependent leadership structure across a coalition. The chapter should be used in conjunction with Tools 6–8 on pages 111–121 for further learning and practice.

Learning Objectives:

- To understand why leadership teams and interdependent structures matter
- To learn how to establish the essential conditions to enable teams to function effectively
- To learn how to develop an interdependent structure across a coalition
- To highlight best practices in QIO work

Why Do Leadership Teams Matter?

Creating a cross-institutional leadership team is intended to address several of the challenges facing multi-stakeholder coalitions.

- 1) First, since no single organizational or institutional structure already exists, alignment and buy-in for change starts with a collaborative leadership team at the center. A leadership team can hold a coalition’s vision and act on its behalf.
- 2) Second, the key decisions that affect a coalition’s work are under the control of many separate groups and institutions, and they must work interdependently. Although coalitions are not built on command-and-control authority structures, they are ineffective if there is no structure for coordination. Leadership teams enable those most affected by a coalition’s aims to participate in its leadership.
- 3) Third, a leadership team increases shared commitment and enables the evolution of structures and rules over time. They develop new language, norms of conduct, and hybrid cultures that operate across the organizations and sectors of the community involved in the coalition.

A QIO’s Central Focus Is To Launch A Coalition’s Leadership Team To Function Effectively.

A leadership team offers a structural model that fosters distributed leadership whereby individuals can work toward goals together with each team member equally owning the team’s purpose and activity. At their best, leadership teams enable the productive use of the unique talents of the **individuals** who make up the team. Team members provide mutual support, help, and a venue for learning.

Team structures also build strategic **capacity** – the ability to strategize creatively in ways that produce more vibrant, engaging strategies than any individual could create alone; and in building a “snowflake” structure, multiple layers of leadership teams can engage people creatively and strategically at all levels (regional, local, neighborhood). This structure creates many entry points for volunteers to join a coalition, forming more and more teams, all able to learn and exercise leadership together.

Leadership teams provide a foundation from which a coalition can expand its reach. Once a team is formed, members can create systems to foster a rhythm of regular meetings, transparent decision-making, and visible accountability, increasing the effort's effectiveness to achieve its **goals**.

Why Don't People Always Work In Teams?

We have all been a part of teams that work well – “dream teams” – and teams that function poorly – “scream teams.” In the latter, team members alienate each other; factions form; or all the work falls on one person. We conclude: “I’ll just do it on my own”; or “I don’t want to try to make decisions together, just tell me what to do”; or “I hate team meetings, how can I get out of them?” There is just one problem with this way of thinking: a coalition will not become powerful enough to do what it sets out to do if the people involved are unable to work together to take action.

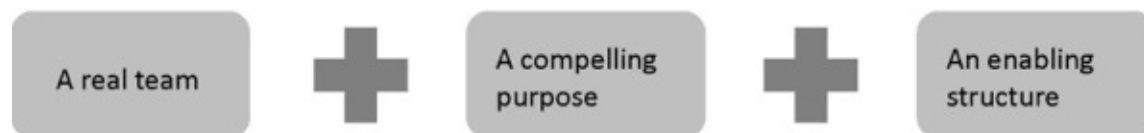
What Is An Effective Team?

The good news is that research tells us what it takes to develop a dream team: we just have to learn how to put the conditions into place that will generate successful collaboration and strategic action. Effective teams generally have three criteria:

- 1) **Action:** A team is effective if it achieves real outcomes for the many constituencies it serves.
- 2) **Capacity:** A team is effective if it builds capacity for future efforts and sustainability. A great leadership team gets better, smarter, and more capable over time.
- 3) **Learning:** A team is effective if individual leaders learn and grow as a consequence of working together.

What Conditions Enable Teams To Work Together Effectively?

Research has identified three key conditions that, if put into place from the beginning, increase the chances of the team's effectiveness:



- 1) It is a real team with the right people,
- 2) It has a compelling shared purpose, and
- 3) It has an enabling structure.

Condition 1: A Real Team With The Right People

The team must be a **real team**, meaning that it is **bounded**, **stable**, and **interdependent** for a common purpose.

To be **bounded**, leaders should be able to name everyone on it. Members do not come and go frequently; whoever shows up does not have the automatic right to participate in the team; leaders know who is in and who is out. Highly effective teams have 4–7 members.

To be **stable**, the team meets regularly. It is not a different, random group of people every time. Membership of the team remains constant long enough that the team learns better and better how to work together; each member is fully committed to be on the team and commits consistent time and effort.

To be **interdependent**, the contribution that each person makes is critical to success of the whole. Team members have to work closely together, exchanging information and resources in order to get vital work done.

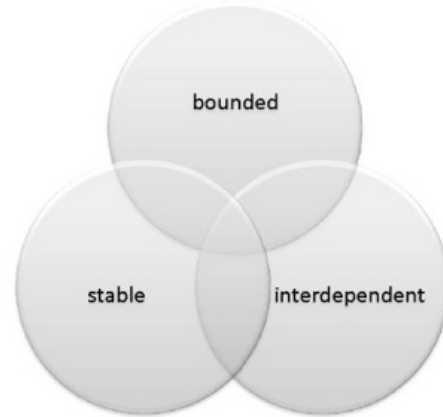
Teams that are bounded, stable, and interdependent hold their members accountable to one another. This norm addresses the challenges that arise as a result of loosely coupled arrangements among individuals and organizations in coalition settings.

Teams must also be made up of the right people. In coalition settings, we often assume that senior leaders must be at the table or that key stakeholders must be represented; and we conduct no real assessment of individuals' collaborative abilities. (See Chapter 4 for a discussion of interdependent leadership characteristics on page 41.)

In determining the right people, consider that members of effective coalition leadership teams:

- Possess an “enterprise perspective,” meaning that they lead for the whole group, not just their home institution;
- Share a collective view of the “system” that the coalition is addressing;
- Demonstrate high levels of empathy and integrity in order to address the concerns of others explicitly and act as one on group agreements; and
- Have time to devote to the work itself.

Highly effective teams are also made up of people from **diverse** backgrounds, races, ethnicities, political ideologies, skills, and opinions. When there is diversity among team members, it inspires robust conversation during decision making, pushing the team to more creative and resourceful strategies. (See Tool 6 to determine whether you have a real team with the right people on page 110.)



QIO Testimony On A Real Team With The Right People

"If we were starting anew on this project, we would establish a finite core of key partners prior to expanding our coalition-building efforts into the broader community of providers and community stakeholders. This tactical change might have allowed initial members to fully develop as a team and create a clearly defined process for on-boarding new members."

Condition 2: A Compelling Shared Purpose

A team must craft a **compelling shared purpose** for the effort that is **clear, challenging, and consequential**.

A **clear** purpose articulates what the outcomes will look like if achieved (i.e., what the team is created to do, who will be doing it, and what kinds of activities the team will participate in).

A **challenging** purpose is a real stretch that requires the best of what people are capable of – but which is not impossible to attain if everyone really strives.

A **consequential** purpose has a real impact on the lives of others, and everyone knows why it matters.

Articulating a compelling shared purpose as a team addresses the challenge that arises when coalition leaders come with different amounts of power and resources. A shared purpose suggests that all partners are created equal, by defining the activity space **of the group**, not of any one individual. The team's purpose establishes a scope of activity around which team members can cohere and agree that it is significant to broader multi-stakeholder interests. Preexisting negative patterns in intergroup relationships can also be overcome by creating mutually valued superordinate purposes.

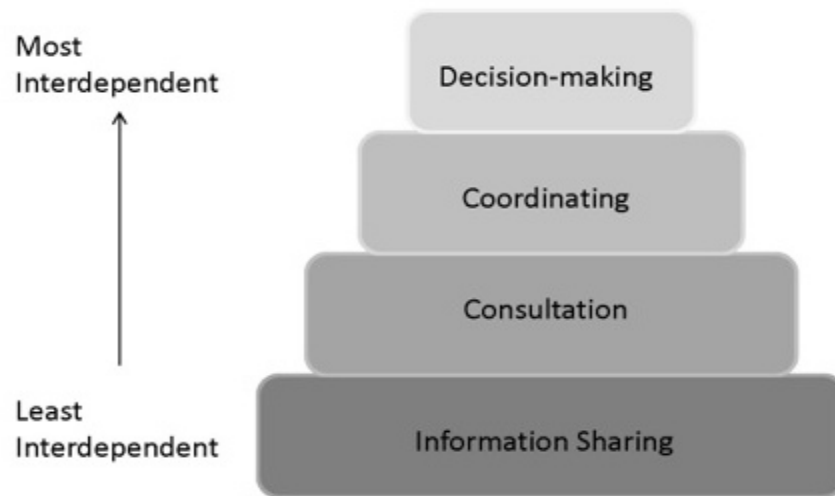
Developing a compelling shared purpose also addresses a second challenge in this context: coalition leaders have tenuous authority to influence coalition members because participation is voluntary. Keeping people engaged and reducing turnover can be a struggle when people are balancing volunteer commitments against full-time employment and other competing priorities. This is especially true when participation is not financially compensated. A compelling shared purpose helps commit coalition leaders to follow it publicly; it demonstrates collective buy-in and ownership.

How To Develop A Shared Purpose

Developing a shared purpose as a team is a challenging task for two reasons: the team has to get clear about what it will do together; and it is difficult to write a purpose statement as a team.

(a) What does the team actually do together?

In drafting a shared purpose, it is important to imagine the range of activities that teams of leaders will do together. The figure below depicts four different kinds of leadership team activities, from least to most interdependent (bottom to top).



Information Sharing. This is a team that keeps each other informed about what is going on in individual spheres of responsibility. These teams make individuals more knowledgeable about what is happening so that each is better aligned toward a shared purpose. Although they share information, they do not do anything, decide anything, or create anything together.

Consultation. Consultative teams meet in order to provide advice and counsel to one member of the team or to each other. They help support each other's areas of responsibility.

Coordinating. Leadership teams take responsibility for aligning multiple parts of complex activities and making sure all the parts fit. The timing, sequence, interfaces, and pieces all have to work together.

Decision Making. This is a team that engages in collective strategizing and evaluation of alternatives. For instance, what actions will a coalition focus on? Decision making is the most interdependent and complex part of team activity.

When leadership teams are too large and unbounded to be interdependent for a common purpose or too riddled with conflict to make decisions together, they tend to devolve to the least interdependent activities, such as information sharing. In contrast, coalitions that form multiple small, dexterous teams with clear purposes and mutual commitments to each other can generate structures to support decision making, mutual support, and learning.

(b) How do we write a clear "purpose statement" as a team?

The short answer is: we do not. It is like the expression "a camel is a horse created by a committee" – teams are not good at generating sharp, focused statements that capture the essence of their purpose. They tend to sand down the sharp edges of a vision or, worse, members assume agreement if there is no overt conflict. Individuals are much better at articulating a clear vision. How can we practice shared leadership in drafting and deciding on our team's shared purpose together, rather than having one leader take control?

Dream teams use the best of what individuals are good at: sharpness, creativity, vision; and use what groups are great at: coherence, shared energy, and values. We start with individual reflections about the team's purpose and share those views with each other. We then capture the themes that resonate with all of us, getting the shared values and energy of the group. Next we turn these themes over to an individual whom the team trusts to shape a purpose into a set of words that captures it sharply. S/he later shares it with the team for further discussion and approval. (See Tool 8 for a method for developing a shared purpose statement, page 115.)

QIO Testimony On A Compelling, Shared Purpose

"We formed our coalition's charter together, and we revisit it at every coalition meeting. Our charter includes our mission, purpose statement, and goals. We put it up with a slide that has an image of everyone who has signed it. It lets people know who has signed – and who has not. Then we make a call to action: if you have not committed to the coalition's work, we invite you to commit to it. Publicly. Now. We are up to 58 members."

"We have a coalition charter. A core team worked on developing the goals and vision, and a larger group signed onto the charter at our first kickoff meeting. By signing, they are saying, 'Yes, we are in, we are going to do this together.' We also have a leadership group that developed the coalition's name, logo, charter, goals, and agreement as if to say, 'This is our coalition!'"

"At our first coalition meeting we asked our coalition members to write 'what health means to me' in large handwriting with bright markers. Then we held up our individual words along with a statement saying, 'We are ACT Delta and this is what health means to us.' We took a picture of ourselves and shared it with coalition members. Like the shared purpose exercise, I loved that this exercise started on an individual-values basis and then brought the group together as an 'us' by making it one statement from the coalition as a whole."

"We asked the coalition to identify shared values at the first meeting. We put them up on the wall at every meeting after that. Members referred to the values as criteria every time a decision had to be made. It helped when new people attended meetings, too – we reviewed the values and asked if they were still appropriate. Our values helped us frame our purpose and vision, our goals and strategies. It set the tone and direction for the group to have values-based discussions."

"Once – when the coalition broke into smaller groups to conduct root-cause analysis – they referred back to the values to describe why it mattered. It was amazing because root-cause analysis examines what is causing something to go wrong, which is negative and problem-focused, and our values are positive, like patient-centered and results-based. There was a real difference in the conversation when people kept bringing each other back to their shared values."

Condition 3: An Enabling Structure

An effective team has **enabling structures**. Structures allow members of multi-stakeholder teams to move forward in a shared direction. They enable teams to conduct real leadership work and develop trust within the functioning of the team.

We put two enabling structures into place at the launch of a team: *interdependent roles and teamwork*; and *norms of conduct*.

Interdependent Roles And Teamwork

Everyone should have a roughly equal share of the work based on the unique skills and resources he or she brings to the team, understanding that each part is necessary to achieve the team's shared purpose. In interdependent teams, the success or failure of one has an effect on all. Clarifying roles is about managing this interdependency – the team is coordinated as a whole and aimed in the same direction.

Roles enable the effective functioning of *meetings*, such as a note-taker role (which can rotate, of course), and the functioning of the *team*, such as “liaison to hospital staff” or “the person that we authorize to coordinate our work.” Understanding team members' skills, experiences and resources allows team members to take on roles for which they are especially well-suited. (See Tool 8 for an approach to establishing clear roles on page 115.)

Examples Of Roles:

- Meeting roles: Logistics coordinator, facilitator, time keeper, note taker
- Team roles: Liaison to particular constituencies, data coordinator, communications coordinator

Spending energy on shared *teamwork* every time the team meets is also important because it leads to the team's working increasingly well together over time; learning each other's strengths; and keeping each other energized. The team should solve problems, make decisions, coordinate work, share information, and create structures and opportunities that enable others to join in action.

Effective teams coordinate and help each other accomplish collective goals. Team members should communicate when they need assistance; no one should carry out activity in a silo. Lastly, in especially effective coalition leadership teams, members consult to one another about the challenges they face in their own institutions.

QIO Testimony On Interdependent Roles

“We intentionally structured meeting agendas to co-create the formalized rules, roles, structures, and procedures necessary to enhance effectiveness and ensure sustainability in the future.”

“We end meetings by asking for specific commitments to take forward the coalition's work. We ask people to serve on subcommittees, to volunteer to coordinate the next coalition meeting, to build relationships with each other. This encourages everyone to find a place to participate – anyone can help with these commitments – and it gets people involved in the work of the coalition so they don't feel like they attend meetings for no reason.”

Norms Of Conduct

Every team needs a couple of ground rules about how to operate – what members expect to do and not do in working toward their shared purpose. Because coalition leaders come from different institutions

with different preexisting norms of conduct, it is especially important to generate new norms – to reset the dynamic among members rather than rely on preexisting norms to be shared or constructive.

Many teams benefit from having rules about discussion, decision making, and meeting management. If they don't discuss them explicitly, they form these norms implicitly anyway.

In order to have meaningful ground rules that guide behavior, teams also need to have a way to enforce those rules—an agreement about what is going to happen in the group if someone does not live up to the rules. Although it may sound counterintuitive, this practice *energizes* the effort because teams function more effectively, and people are more committed to participate in its work.

EXAMPLE OF NORMS OF CONDUCT	
Discussion norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respectful listening • Candor and transparency <i>with</i> confidentiality • Conflict surfaced, welcomed, engaged • Step up, step back (if you tend to contribute, step back to create room for others / if you tend to listen, step up and contribute)
Meeting management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Come on time, stay on task with the agenda (exercise flex with consensus), end on time, be patient with the tension around time • No calls or emails during meetings • Schedule meetings as far in advance as possible (60 days+) / flex for meetings when needed • Place "action item" in subject heading for any emails that require responses from team • Prioritize our team's work together (seek permission if needed)
Decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask all team members to develop criteria for making decisions • Make decisions that affect the coalition by consensus • Individual decisions okay in implementing individual tasks
Accountability mechanism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold one another accountable as a team – not one individual policing everyone else • Thank and celebrate those who honor the norms • Put \$5 in the kitty for broken norms; put the kitty toward team's final celebration

Teams with explicit operating norms like these have a much higher likelihood of achieving the results they are aiming for. Initial norms guide teams in early stages as members learn how to work together as a team. Norms can and should be refined through regular group review of how well the team is doing and whether its norms are serving it well. (See Tool 7 for a sample agenda to launch a leadership team, page 113; see Tool 8 for an approach to establishing norms of conduct, page 115.)

QIO Testimony On Norms Of Conduct

"We worked hard to promote a norm around sharing data. Data is extremely limited and highly desired. Together we used data to confirm and deny perceptions that existed. We used data to drive some discussions on what the real problems were, why this is something we want to work on, what we know we need to improve. Showing them the data helped the coalition achieve its shared purpose."

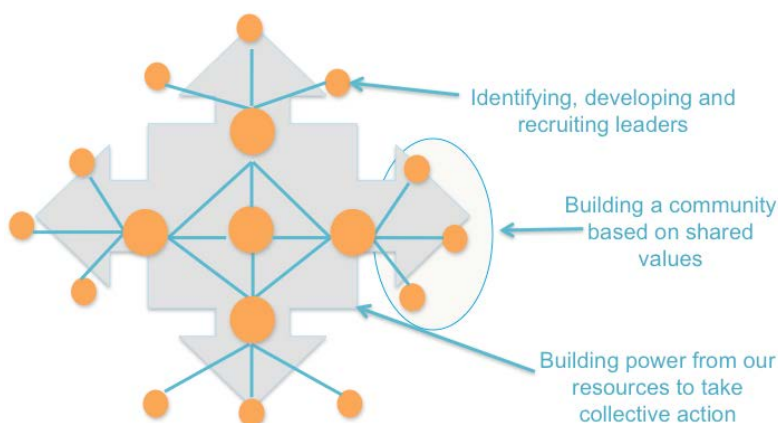
"Being aware of and honoring cultural norms and expectations is fundamental to developing successful partnerships. It is customary at meetings in our targeted communities to serve refreshments. This is considered an essential point of etiquette, especially in the senior and faith-based communities. Going forward, it is important to develop a process to fund light refreshments for meetings exceeding one hour to demonstrate to stakeholders their time is valued and fully appreciated."

"Meeting the community you wish to engage where they live and at times that are convenient for them is central to honoring and connecting with them."

"Travel can be difficult for stakeholders. Meeting in local community centers or churches and being mindful of existing transportation options are key. Small reimbursements for stakeholders with transportation limitations would demonstrate that their involvement is valued and appreciated."

Developing Interdependent Structure Between Teams Within The Coalition

Strategies are supported by structures. An important characteristic of the distributed leadership approach is connecting multiple teams to one another across levels of coordination within a coalition. These connections enable the coalition to form and reform temporarily stable, bounded, interdependent teams of actors who craft purpose and norms uniquely suited to relevant and coordinated work; further, they connect those teams in an organization that sits outside of any institutional boundaries. We call this the "snowflake" model.



Coalitions tend to form interdependent leadership structures based on who can enact different parts of the strategy; however, one risk is reinforcing the existing silos among stakeholder groups. For example, the coalition formed by **TMF Health Quality Institute (TMF)** originally organized itself as affinity groups (i.e., LTACHs with LTACHs). TMF reported that this structure reinforced traditional ways of thinking and working. The coalition achieved greater success after restructuring its teams to work across interprofessional boundaries (i.e., two long-term acute care hospitals, one acute care hospital, and one academic hospital). Mixing the stakeholder groups within each individual team enhanced their interdependency and developed an equal-status contract between them, building trust through the interdependencies between individuals – and between teams – as they work together toward shared goals.

At every level, leadership teams should develop a clear mission with clear goals and the ability to strategize creatively together about how to carry out their mission to meet their goals. Each team has different decision-making functions depending on the role it plays. This multilayered team structure allows coalitions to create ambitious overarching goals, breaking them down into achievable chunks to spread out and coordinate across teams. For instance, a core leadership team may refine the overall strategy, informed and inspired by the impact of lessons learned by other teams. This enables an effort's core leadership to make strategic decisions that support the distribution of leadership to those "on the ground," pushing out responsibility to teams to develop their own tactics to achieve an aim.

This structure also creates multiple points of entry and multiple opportunities to learn and to exercise leadership. Further, it allows each team to recruit for and build the next level of leadership (and teams) in the snowflake.

QIO Testimony On Interdependent Team Structures

"We developed work groups where people joined to see what was happening in one another's settings. As competitors, the information gleaned from the work groups helped move the strategies at each individual facility, despite the fact that sharing with competitors was not an existing norm. Everyone focused on patient outcomes but came up with their own tactics to achieve the goal."

"We developed three smaller teams to carry out the coalition's work: the readmission implementation intervention team; the resource guide team; and the regional coordination team. This allowed everyone involved in the coalition to take ownership of a 'piece' that together added up to 'the whole.'"

In Building Great Leadership Teams And Coalitions

What To Avoid

- Preexisting conflicts between a few key individuals/institutions can undermine the whole group, which is why "resetting" norms of conduct is critical
- Powerful people have little time; the impulse to send delegates blurs group boundaries and prevents decisions that stick

- If purposes are unclear, meetings devolve to information-sharing and members lose compelling reason to be there
- Without explicit attention to collaborative skills and motives, individual inclination is to lead on behalf of own institution/constituency; this results in negotiation among interests rather than leading for the whole
- Excessive inclusiveness of people, purposes, and projects erodes alignment and sands down the sharp edges of a coalition's purpose
- If leadership turnover and onboarding is not managed with intentionality, alignment and institutional memory declines

Recommendations

- 1) Be explicit that the QIO is a convener with neutrality and moral authority
- 2) Build relationships with coalition members and leaders
 - Assess individuals' collaborative leadership capabilities
 - Explore values, interests, and resources
- 3) Recruit with a clear "ask" (see job description, below)
- 4) Treat the leadership team and coalition launch with great intentionality
 - Begin with narratives and identify shared values
 - Begin to develop a shared purpose statement, then hand-off to one team member to sharpen
 - Identify initial norms of conduct that are revisited often
 - Conduct interdependent tasks together
- 5) Consider how the idea of "relaunching" a team may serve your effort
 - Convene an initial set of leaders who can be responsible for relaunching a team to take the work forward
 - Identifying and recruiting the "right people" for that team can be motivating and interdependent tasks

Share A "Job Description" With Leadership Team Members

In seeking and securing commitments from leaders to participate on a team, share a clear set of shared expectations about team-member involvement. For example, team members should:

- Be willing and able to lead on behalf of the whole, not just on behalf of their own organization's or constituency's interests
- Exhibit clarity about and share the effort's aspirations
- Demonstrate commitment to collective impact
- Be willing and demonstrably able to hear and take into account the concerns of others

- Possess excellent conceptual thinking skills, including an understanding of complex systems
- If representing an organization, have CEO endorsement
- Be willing and able to commit sufficient time:
 - One monthly meeting of 3 hours
 - Weekly 30-minute alignment call
 - Visible leadership role in community engagement events
- Participation in committees, projects, and alignment activities

Related Tools

- **Tool 6: Diagnostic Checklist for Leadership Teams** – to determine whether you have a real time with the right people, a compelling purpose and enabling structures, page 111
- **Tool 7: Team (re)Launch Agenda** – to launch (or relaunch) leadership teams, page 113
- **Tool 8: Teamwork Exercises** – to develop a compelling shared purpose, clear roles and norms of conduct, page 115