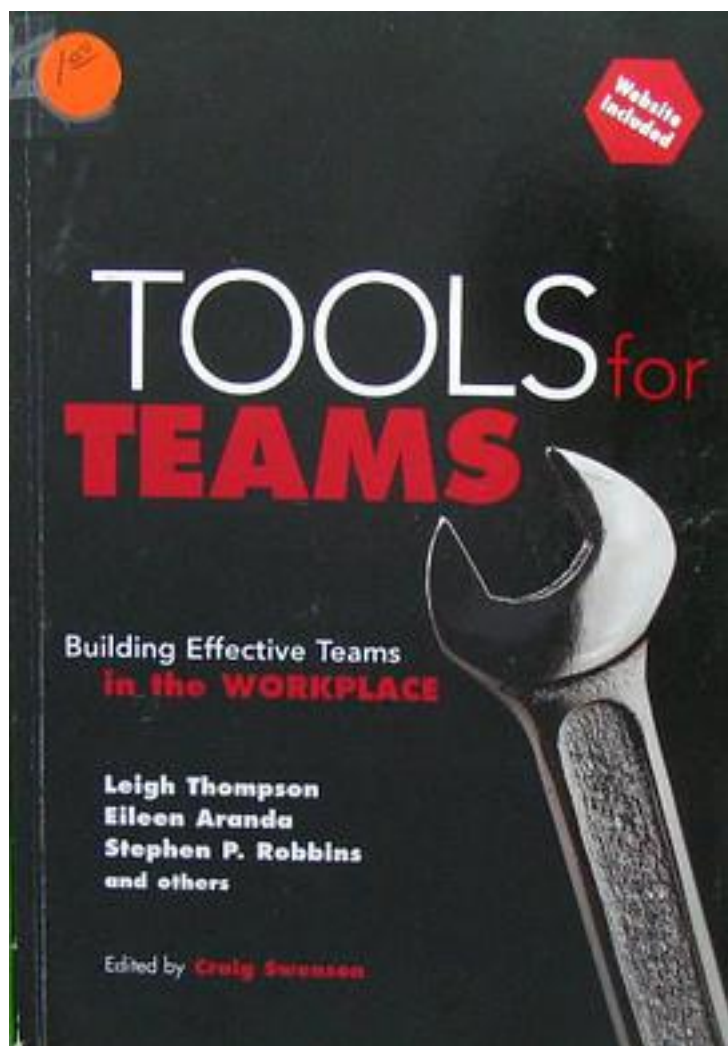


Tools for Teams



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During the last decade of the Twentieth Century nearly every company in North America caught the team bug. If the hype was to be believed work-places teams would solve virtually every corporate problem, ratchet up quality, increase productivity and profits, improve organizational culture and cure the common cold. Teams were good. Teams were in. Hierarchy was bad. Hierarchy was out. Try this thought experiment: The boss comes back from a conference (always a dangerous thing) carrying a big binder they handed out at the conference and announces that the organization is going to "institute teams? Clearly he or she expects everyone else to share the zeal and so forms an executive team to plan the "teaming effort? Soon teams are being formed across the company. There's a big kickoff meeting or videoconference broadcast. An eye-catching logo and clever motto are flashed on the screen and emblazon the T-shirts, baseball caps and buttons that are distributed to everybody in the company. The training department gets into the spirit and training classes, Web sites, manuals and posters are popping up all over the place. There are teams meeting everywhere, employees carrying notebooks, gathering data and making presentations to management with their proposals. It's now 18 months later. The posters are gone; the buttons are junk in the back of that pencil drawer in your cubicle and the word "team" -- if spoken at all -- is whispered or elicits a sneer. Ring a bell? It would in lots of cubicles and offices across America. So what happened? Was the idea to try teams a bad one? The answer I believe is a clear and resounding NO! The problem was not with teams. This is a description of what can happen in an organizational change effort and isn't about teams.

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