SECTION 5:
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Articles | Teams

THE KORN/FERRY INSTITUTE

DRIVING TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

A Comparative Analysis of the Korn/Ferry T7 Model With Other Popular Team Models.

By Kenneth P. De Meuse

Key Takeaways:

- The Korn/Ferry T7 Model of Team Effectiveness was recently validated using 303 teams (3,328 participants) in 50 organizations across a variety of industry sectors.
- Overall, two conclusions are apparent. First, the six models of team effectiveness reviewed in this whitepaper have much, much similarity in the manner in which they view team functioning. Second, the Korn/Ferry T7 Model is one of the most (if not the most) comprehensive assessments of team effectiveness in the literature.

"Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology. It is teamwork that remains the ultimate competitive advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare (p. vii)." This is the way Patrick Lencioni opened his best-selling book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (2002). It has been estimated that nearly all of the Fortune 500 companies employ teams of some form or type in their business (see Dumaine, 1994; Kirkman, Gibson, & Shapiro, 2001). Increasingly, teams are being used in a variety of applications by a wide range of organizations (e.g., project teams, virtual task forces, quality circles, self-directed work teams, standing committees).

The importance of work teams appears to be gaining in strength as jobs get bigger, organizational structures get more complex, and more and more companies become multi-national in scope (Naquin & Tynan, 2003). In today's corporate environment, it appears the team – not the individual – holds the key to business success.

Teams in the Contemporary Workplace

As companies restructure, downsize, and reinvent themselves, the new roles being created tend to be team-oriented. Organizations are becoming flatter, leaner, and more agile. A prominent feature of effectiveness today is satisfying customer needs. Many jobs and projects are becoming increasingly complex, less time-bound, and global in scope. All these factors collectively are making it increasing difficult for one person to perform a single job. The contemporary workplace uses teams as the basic work unit (e.g., surgical units, airplane crews, research and development teams, production crews).

In today's corporate environment, it appears the team – not the individual – holds the key to business success.

Although teams are ubiquitous in organizations, most employee-related functions are individualized (e.g., selecting, training, evaluating, rewarding). Such a disconnect between an organization's need to foster effective teams and its natural tendency to focus on the individual employee can create many problems. In addition, some research suggests a key reason why some teams fail is that employees are ill-prepared to make the transition from individual contributor to team member.

Bergmann and De Meuse (1996) investigated the implementation of self-managed work teams in a large food processing plant. They observed that employees lacked the basic team skills of problem solving, dealing with conflict, conducting effective meetings, and interpersonal communication. Eventually, the employees resisted the movement to self-managed work teams to such an extent that management returned to the old system of production after 10 months.

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One of the keys to developing high performing teams is to remember that successful teams do not simply happen. They take much effort and time. They take proper guidance and support from the team leader. They require an organizational culture which enables and fosters team work. To attain a high level of team performance, we must be knowledgeable about what factors influence team dynamics and effectiveness.

In an attempt to understand how teams work, a number of authors have proposed models of team performance. Each of these models presents several variables that the author(s) posit influence the effectiveness of teams. Some of the models highlight group structure and interpersonal dynamics, while others tend to focus on the talent and motivation of individual team members. Still others emphasize factors external to the team itself (e.g., a company's culture). Some models were proposed more than three decades ago; some were developed within the past few years.

Frequently Cited Team Models

This whitepaper first presents and reviews the Korn/Ferry T7 Model of Team Effectiveness followed by an examination of five frequently cited team models.

- Rubin, Plovnick, and Fry (1977)
- Katzenbach and Smith (1993)
- LaFasto and Larson (2001)
- Hackman (2002)
- Lencioni (2005)

The whitepaper summarizes the differences and similarities between the models. As consultants and organizational leaders, it seems as though each of us has our favorite team model. We hope this investigation will provide some clarity regarding how the T7 Model compares to other popular team models.

As we will discover, the T7 Model presents the most comprehensive framework of all the models reviewed. Our goal is that this paper will enable us to become more familiar and confident that such an approach to assessing team effectiveness can offer client organizations a powerful framework for improving their work teams.

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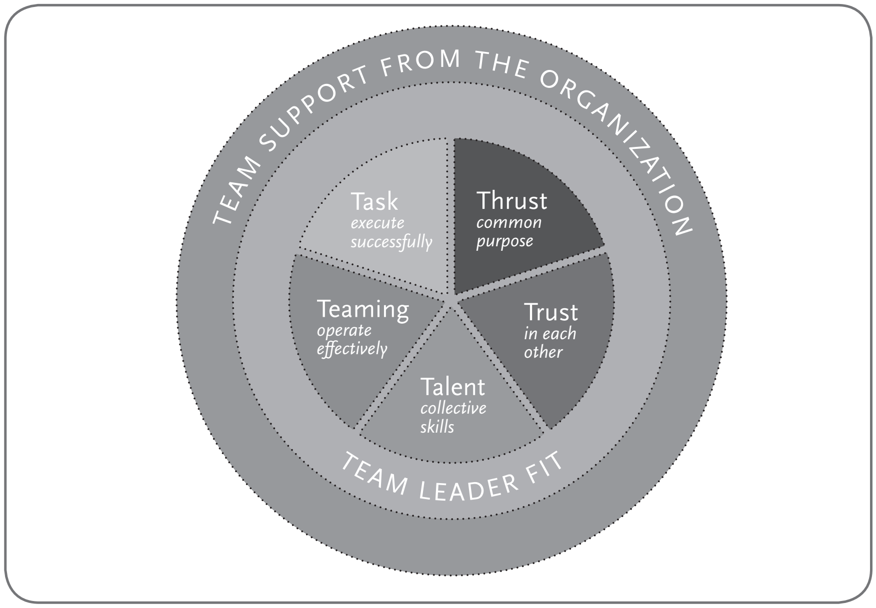
The T7 Model of Team Effectiveness

In an attempt to understand how teams work, Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger originally developed the T7 Model in 1995 to represent the key facets that influence the performance of work teams. Based upon their review of the research literature, they identified five factors inside the team and two factors outside the team which impact team effectiveness. Each one of the factors was named to begin with the letter "T." Hence, the name T7 Model (see Figure 1).

… [Lombardo and Eichinger] developed the T7 Model in 1995 to represent the key facets that influence the performance of work teams.

FIGURE 1

The T7 Model of Team Effectiveness



The five internal team factors include:

- Thrust – a common purpose about what needs to be accomplished or team goal(s)
- Trust – in each other as teammates
- Talent – the collective skills of the team members to get the job done
- Teaming Skills – operating effectively and efficiently as a team
- Task Skills – executing successfully or getting the job done

The two external team factors are:

- Team-Leader Fit – the degree to which the team leader satisfies the needs of the team members
- Team Support from the Organization – the extent to which the leadership of the organization enables the team to perform

Each of the factors inside the team can be delineated into sub-factors or dimensions. For example, "thrust" refers to agreed upon vision, mission, values, and goals among members within a team. Moreover, members employ a common strategy and tactics to accomplish goals. Specifically, thrust consists of the following three behavioral dimensions: (a) thrust management, (b) thrust clarity, and (c) thrust commitment. In contrast, "trust" includes the following dimensions: (a) trust in truthful communication, (b) trust in actions, and (c) trust inside the team. In total, the five internal factors consist of 18 dimensions of team effectiveness (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

Inside the Team Factors and Dimensions

Internal Factor	Dimension
Thrust	• Thrust Management • Thrust Clarity • Thrust Commitment
Trust	• Trust in Truthful Communication • Trust in Actions • Trust Inside the Team
Talent	• Talent Acquisition and Enhancement • Talent Allocation and Deployment
Teaming Skills	• Resource Management • Team Learning • Decision Making • Conflict Resolution • Team Atmosphere • Managing Process
Task Skills	• Focusing • Assignment Flexibility • Measurement • Delivering the Goods

Each of the factors inside the team can be delineated into sub-factors or dimensions. For example, "thrust" refers to agreed upon vision, mission, values, and goals among members within a team.

All five internal factors have to be present for teams to be high performing. However, teams cannot be high performing unless the necessary organizational and leadership support also are provided. It does not matter how good a team is on thrust, trust, talent, teaming skills, and task skills, it must have the support from the organization and the leadership fit to be effective (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1995).

T7 Model Research

The factor and dimension structure of the T7 Model of Team Effectiveness recently was validated. A total of 303 teams and 3,328 participants were administered the Team Architect® assessment. The teams were employed in 50 organizations across a variety of industry sectors (e.g., manufacturing, health care, telecommunications, finance). Whether the data were obtained from the team leader, team members, or were aggregated at the team level, the model was supported (De Meuse, Tang, & Dai, 2009).

That redefinition [of goals and responsibilities] enables them to adjust and readjust team processes, such as decision making, conflict resolution, and work flow.

In addition, the literature on teams was examined recently to determine whether any additional factors and dimensions were required to capture various components of team effectiveness. Based on a comprehensive review of the relevant research, it was found that no addition factors or dimensions were needed (De Meuse, 2007).

Other Models of Team Effectiveness in the Literature

Rubin, Plovnick, and Fry Model—The GRPI Model of Team Effectiveness

This model by Rubin, Plovnick, and Fry (1977) is one of the oldest models of team effectiveness. It is sometimes referred to as the "GRPI Model," which stands for Goals, Roles, Processes, and Interpersonal Relationships. The authors present their model in terms of a pyramid similar to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1954). However, unlike Maslow's theory, this model starts at the top of the pyramid.

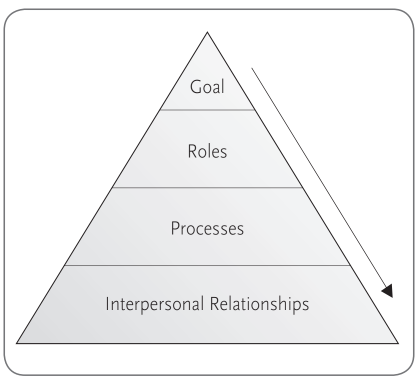


FIGURE 2

The GRPI Model of Team Effectiveness–Rubin, Plovnick, and Fry Model (1977)

According to the model, a team always should begin with a team-level goal. After the goal is defined, the roles and responsibilities will become clearer. As individuals work together (processes), they will see that goals and responsibilities often are not sufficiently clear. Consequently, team members will need to redefine them. That redefinition enables them to adjust and readjust team processes, such as decision making, conflict resolution, and work flow. When doing all that, they will be developing the interpersonal relationships needed to relate to other team members and the team leader. See Figure 2.

The authors provide guidance for defining components of the model.

Goal definition:

- Clarity about the main purpose of the team
- Agreement on the desired results
- Understanding of the main tasks

- Agreement on the standards and expectations
- Clarity of priorities and deadlines
- Understanding of boundaries

Role clarification:

- Acceptance of a team leader
- Understand all members' roles
- Individual responsibilities
- Shared responsibilities
- Clear boundaries
- Identify and fill gaps

Processes and workflow:

- Team processes – (e.g., how decisions are made, how the team solves problems and resolves conflict, communication)
- Work processes – (e.g., procedures and work flow)

Interpersonal relationships:

- Relating with the other team members
- Trust
- Sensitivity and flexibility with each other
- Good communication
- Collaboration in problem solving
- Effective methods for dealing with conflict

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Katzenbach and Smith Model—Focusing on Team Basics

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) assert most people realize the capabilities of teams, but there is a natural resistance to moving beyond individual roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities. Individuals do not easily accept responsibility for the performance of others, or cherish others assuming responsibility for them. Overcoming this resistance requires that team members understand, accept, and apply the "the basics" of team work. Katzenbach and Smith depict these team basics in the form of a triangle (see Figure 3).

There are three overarching goals in the Katzenbach and Smith (1993) model: (a) Collective Work Products, (b) Personal Growth, and (c) Performance Results. These outcomes are presented in the vertices of the triangle and indicate what teams can deliver. In contrast, the sides and center of the triangle describe the team elements required to make it happen – Commitment, Skills, and Accountability.

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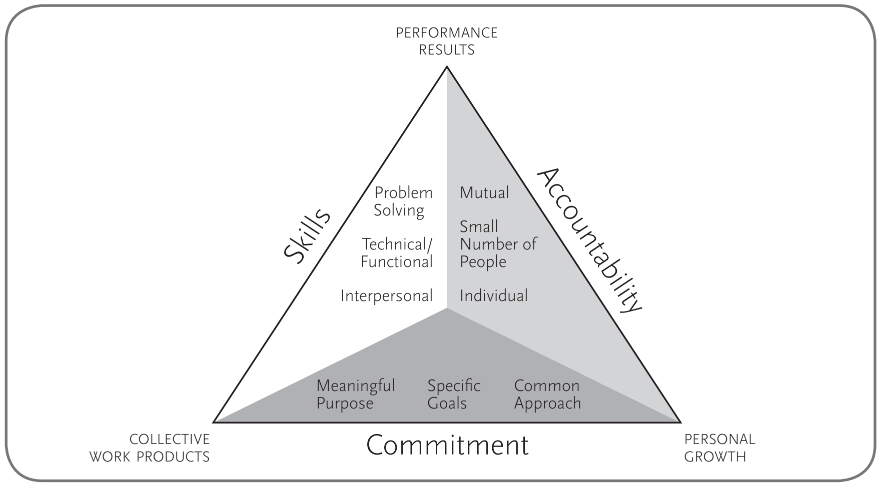
FIGURE 3

Focusing on Team Basics Model—Katzenbach and Smith (1993)



There are three overarching goals in the Katzenbach and Smith (1993) model: (a) Collective Work Products, (b) Personal Growth, and (c) Performance Results. These outcomes are presented in the vertices of the triangle and indicate what teams can deliver.

The authors contend that successful teams are deeply committed to their goals, approach, and purpose. Members in these teams also are very committed to each other. They understand that the "wisdom of teams comes with a focus on collective work-products, personal growth, and performance results" (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p. 9). They assert that successful teams always are a result of pursuing demanding performance goals at the team level.

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) pose the following series of six questions to diagnose the functioning of teams and enhance their effectiveness.

- Is the size of the team appropriate?
- Do members have sufficient complementary skills?
- Is the purpose of the team truly meaningful and understood?
- Are there team-oriented goals – are they clear, realistic, and measurable?
- Does the team have a well thought-out, articulated working approach?
- Is there a sense of mutual accountability?

For teams to be effective, all six questions need to be addressed satisfactorily.

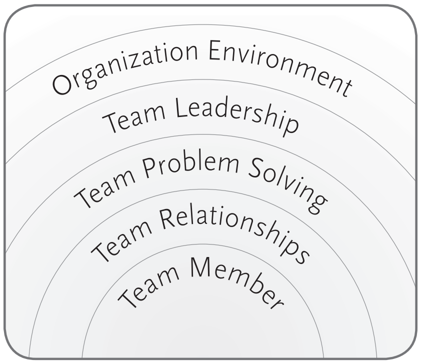


FIGURE 4

Five Dynamics of Teamwork and Collaboration Model—LaFasto and Larson (2001)

There are four necessary behaviors for members in a team setting: (a) openness, (b) supportiveness, (c) an action orientation, and (d) a "positive personal style."

LaFasto and Larson Model—Five dynamics of teamwork and collaboration

LaFasto and Larson (2001) developed a model of team effectiveness which they refer to as the "Five Dynamics of Team Work and Collaboration." They based this model upon the insights they gleaned from investigating 600 teams in a variety of industries. They theorize that there are five fundamental elements or components which must be understood and actively managed to increase the likelihood of team effectiveness. These elements are presented in Figure 4.

Similar to other model authors, LaFasto and Larson provide much definition and guidance for each of the components in their model. The authors devote an entire chapter in their book to clarifying teamwork, and then offering suggestions on how to enhance team effectiveness for each of these five components (LaFasto & Larson, 2001).

For example, the initial element is "team member." A key to team success is to begin with the right people. There are four necessary behaviors for members in a team setting: (a) openness, (b) supportiveness, (c) an action orientation, and (d) a "positive personal style." The model components are addressed in the following manner:

- What makes a good team member – the abilities and behaviors that really matter?
- What behaviors in a group foster effective team member relationships?
- What are the behaviors of teams – as perceived by their members and leaders – that cause some teams to be more successful than others at problem solving?
- What are the behaviors of team leaders – as viewed by members of the team – that foster team success or failure?
- What organizational processes and practices promote clarity, confidence, and commitment in a team?

Hackman Model—Team effectiveness model

Hackman (2002) declared that a team is most likely to be effective when the following conditions are satisfied: (a) it is a real team rather than a team in name only, (b) the team has a compelling direction for its work, (c) it has an enabling structure that facilitates teamwork, (d) the team operates within a supportive organizational context, and (e) it has ample expert coaching in teamwork available.

According to Hackman (2002), team effectiveness is measured by providing products or services that exceed customer expectations, growing team capabilities over time, and satisfying team member needs. These points are depicted in the model in Figure 5.

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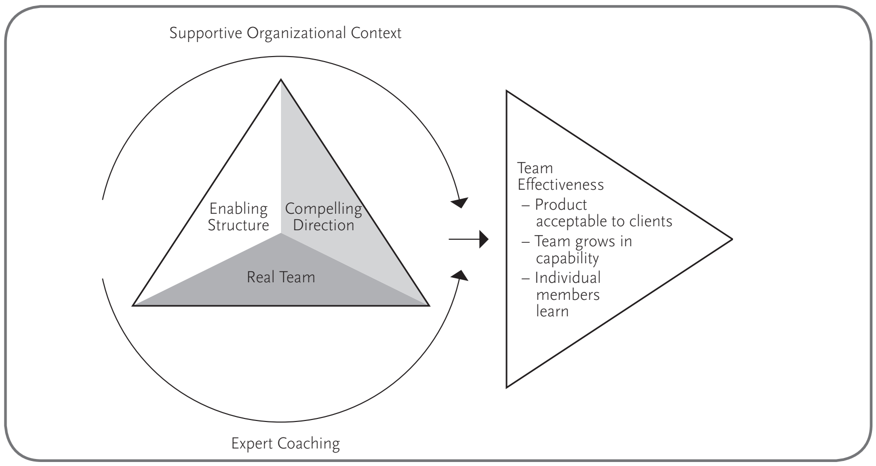
FIGURE 5

Conditions for Team Effectiveness Model—Hackman (2005)



Hackman (2002) goes on to clarify the five necessary conditions for team effectiveness as follows:

- A so-called real team has these four features: a team task, clear boundaries, clearly assigned authority to make team decisions, and membership stability.
- Possessing a compelling direction refers to whether the team has clear, challenging, and consequential goals that focus on the ends to be accomplished rather than the means the team must use to pursue them.
- An enabling structure refers to whether the team's task, composition, and norms of conduct enable rather than impede teamwork.
- Supportive organizational context refers to whether the team receives adequate resources, rewards, information, education, intergroup cooperation, and support that members need to accomplish their tasks.

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- Expert coaching refers to the availability of a competent coach to help team members deal with potential issues or existing problems in order to accomplish the team tasks. Expert coaching also helps team members take advantage of emerging opportunities and improve their coordination and collaboration.

Lencioni Model—Understanding team dysfunction

One of the most interesting models of team effectiveness was developed by Lencioni (2005). According to him, all teams have the potential to be dysfunctional. To improve the functioning of a team, it is critical to understand the type and level of dysfunction. Again, a pyramid is used to demonstrate the hierarchical progression of team development. Similar to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1954), there are five levels and each must be completed to move on to the next one. See Figure 6.

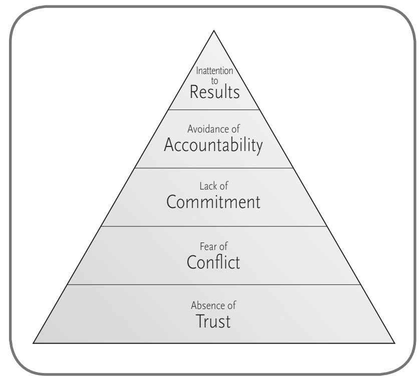

FIGURE 6

Five Dysfunctions of a Team Model—Lencioni (2005)

There are five potential dysfunctions of a team in Lencioni's model:

Dysfunction #1: Absence of Trust

This outcome occurs when team members are reluctant to be vulnerable with one another and are unwilling to admit their mistakes, weaknesses, or need for help. Without a certain comfort level among team members, a foundation of trust is not possible.

Dysfunction #2: Fear of Conflict

Teams that are lacking trust are incapable of engaging in unfiltered, passionate debate about key issues. It creates situations where team conflict can easily turn into veiled discussions and back channel comments. In a work setting where team members do not openly air their opinions, inferior decisions result.

Dysfunction #3: Lack of Commitment

Without conflict, it is difficult for team members to commit to decisions, fostering an environment where ambiguity prevails. Lack of direction and commitment can make employees, particularly star employees, disgruntled and disenfranchised.

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Dysfunction #4: Avoidance of Accountability

When teams do not commit to a clear plan of action, even the most focused and driven individuals are hesitant to call their peers on actions and behaviors that may seem counterproductive to the overall good of the team.

Dysfunction #5: Inattention to Results

Team members naturally tend to put their own needs (e.g., ego, career development, recognition, and so on) ahead of the collective goals of the team when individuals are not held accountable. If a team has lost sight of the need for achievement, the business ultimately suffers.

Summary of the Models of Team Effectiveness

The most striking observation [among the five popular team models] is the amount of similarity across all the models.

The most striking observation is the amount of similarity across all the models. For example, all the models examine issues related to (a) thrust, (b) trust, and (c) teaming skills. Four of the five models also identify member talent as an important factor in team effectiveness. Likewise, four of the five models indicate that team-leader fit needs to be considered. Perhaps, one should not be surprised with the substantial overlap of factors among the models. Table 2 highlights the similarities and differences among the five models of team effectiveness relative to the T7 Model. Both factor-level and dimension-level comparisons are provided.

Goals and goal setting activities have been recognized as a key ingredient to high performance for decades (see Latham & Locke, 1979). For the past several decades, psychologists have been contending that mutual trust and open communication are the foundation for any successful relationship. It also is logical that how one resolves conflicts, makes decisions, and deals with resource issues would be highly related to team effectiveness.

Korn/Ferry's T7 Model is one of the most (if not the most) comprehensive assessments of team effectiveness in the literature.

The LaFasto and Larson (2001) and Katzenbach and Smith (1993) models most closely mirror the T7 Model. LaFasto and Larson address all seven factors of the T7 Model as well as 17 out of the 20 dimensions. Katzenbach and Smith examine five of the seven factors and 16 of the 20 dimensions. The Lencioni (2005) model has the least correspondence with the T7 Model, with four common factors and 11 common dimensions.

Overall, two conclusions are apparent. First, the six models of team effectiveness have much, much similarity in the manner in which they view team functioning. Second, the Korn/Ferry T7 Model is one of the most (if not the most) comprehensive assessments of team effectiveness in the literature (see Table 2).

TABLE 2

Comparing the T7 Model with other Team Effectiveness Models in the Literature

Factor / Dimension	**Rubin, Plovnick & Fry (1977)**	**Katzenbach & Smith (1993)**	**LaFasto & Larson (2001)**	**Hackman (2002)**	**Lencioni (2005)**	**Total**
Thrust	■	■	■	■	■	**5**
1. Management	○	○	○	○	○	5
2. Clarity	○	○	○	○	○	5
3. Commitment	○	○	○		○	4
Trust	■	■	■	■	■	**5**
4. Truthful Communication	○	○	○	○	○	5
5. Trust in Actions	○	○	○	○	○	5
6. Trust Inside Team	○	○	○	○	○	5
Talent	■	■	■	■		**4**
7. Acquisition/Enhancement	○	○	○	○		4
8. Allocation/Deployment		○	○			2
Teaming Skills	■	■	■	■	■	**5**
9. Resource Management		○		○		2
10. Learning			○			1
11. Decision Making	○	○	○		○	4
12. Conflict Resolution	○	○	○		○	4
13. Team Atmosphere	○	○	○	○	○	5
14. Managing Process	○	○	○	○		4
Task Skills			■		■	**2**
15. Focusing	○			○	○	3
16. Assignment Flexibility		○				1
17. Measurement		○	○			2
18. Delivering the Goods			○		○	2
Team Support from Organization			■	■		**2**
19. Organization Support			○	○		2
Team-Leader Fit	■	■	■	■		**4**
20. Team-Leader Fit	○	○	○	○		4
Total Factors [■]	**5**	**5**	**7**	**6**	**4**	
Total Dimensions [○]	13	16	17	12	11	

The Secret to Successful Teams

Successful teams become stronger when members learn to work together. They have clear, acceptable goals. The members trust and respect one another. They communicate often and openly. Members have talent. The leader "fits" the needs of the team. The organization supports the team.

Supposedly, Native American Chief Tecumseh once declared that "a single twig breaks, but a bundle of twigs is strong." Successful teams become stronger when members learn to work together. They have clear, acceptable goals. The members trust and respect one another. They communicate often and openly. Members have talent for creating and implementing ideas. The leader "fits" the needs of the team. And the support and resources from the wider organization and community are provided.

Teams have the potential to be one of the most powerful drivers of success in an organization today. However, highly performing teams simply don't happen. They take time to evolve and mature. They take proper leadership. The T7 Model provides the framework by which to analyze the operations of a team. The Team Architect® assessment enables you to systematically collect the perceptions of team members as well as obtain the views of relevant others. It is up to you to understand how teams function, and then improve the cohesiveness, chemistry, and productivity of the team. Talent is not enough! After all, as noted major league baseball coach Casey Stengel use to say: "It's easy to get good players. Getting 'em to play together, that's the hard part."

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Even in the best companies, a so-called top team seldom functions as a real team.

The MYTH of the Top Management Team

by Jon R. Katzenbach

COMPANIES ALL ACROSS THE ECONOMIC SPECTRUM ARE making use of teams. Self-directed work teams, product design teams, sales account teams, cross-functional teams, process redesign teams – you name it, you are likely to find it. And you are just as likely to find the group at the very top of an organization professing to be a team.

But walk into almost any organization and ask anyone about the "team at the top." The immediate response is likely to be a knowing, skeptical smile, followed by a comment along the lines of "Well, they are not *really* a team, but…" Even in the best of companies, a so-called top team seldom functions as a *real* team. The fact is, a team's know-how and experience inevitably lose power and focus at the top of the corporate hierarchy. And simply labeling the leadership group a team does not make it one.

The idea of a team at the top still remains a seductive notion. There are very few CEOs who do not refer often – both privately and publicly – to their "top team." New CEOs shape their own version of a team at the top to fit their idea about the support they will need from their leadership group. And the business press perpetuates the view that CEOs of large organizations put together a top team of executives to spearhead their enterprises.

> *Team at the top* is a badly misused term that obscures both what teams can accomplish and what makes them work.

But *team at the top* is a badly misused term that obscures both what teams can actually accomplish and what is required to make them work. The terminology is important: when we are undisciplined in our language, we become undisciplined in our thinking and actions. Real teams must follow a well-defined discipline in order to achieve their performance potential.

And performance is the key issue. Not long ago, the corporate world was victimized by an army of gurus proclaiming the virtues of such "team values" as involvement, empowerment, and sensitivity. The focus on performance was lost temporarily, and in many companies, it still is. The *team-based organization* became a dangerous idea – if not a dirty word – in the minds of those who saw it lead to the undiscriminating pursuit of new teams everywhere. But in well-managed enterprises today, the notion of performance is central to team efforts. And the closer a team is to its marketplace, the easier it is to maintain that critical focus on performance – because customers and competitors energize a team's natural instincts more than any other source. As one moves up the leadership ladder, however, one can easily lose sight of the collective results that differentiate real teams from pseudoteams.

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It is critical to be precise: A real team is a *small number* of people with *complementary skills* who are committed to a *common purpose, performance goals,* and an *approach* for which they hold themselves *mutually accountable.* Each phrase in that definition represents an explicit element of a discipline – what I've referred to in the past as the *discipline of team basics* – that is absolutely essential if a group at any level is to obtain the extra measure of performance results that real teams can deliver.

There is little doubt that many senior executives and CEOs become frustrated in their efforts to form teams at the top. Too often, they see few gains in performance from their attempts to become more teamlike. And they recognize that the rest of the organization knows that the senior group doesn't really work together as a team.

My message, then, might come as a welcome relief to those who have been struggling with their frustration over top teams. Indeed, trying to shoehorn a group of top-level executives into a team *can* be frustrating. More important, it can be pointless. But it's also true that when the conditions are right, a team effort at the top can be essential to capturing the highest performance results possible. Good leadership requires differentiating between team and nonteam opportunities, and then acting accordingly. (See the insert "The Myths That Hamper Team Performance.")

Why Nonteam Behavior Prevails at the Top

The typical pattern of behavior in the top leadership group of all kinds of enterprises is familiar and well established: The CEO designates his or her direct reports as some kind of executive council. That council's primary purpose is to shape strategic priorities, enforce operating standards, establish corporate policy, and develop management talent; its members set the direction, mission, and policies for the business. The group meets at least weekly to discuss operating matters; individuals also come together periodically to discuss major strategy and policy matters. The CEO chairs the meetings, controls the agenda, and gains support for decisions from members. Agendas are circulated in advance, allowing only modest amounts of time for unscheduled subjects. In short, the executive council functions as an efficient, effective working group with a single leader. It seldom applies the discipline of

The Myths That Hamper Team Performance

Among top-level executives today, there is a set of strongly held beliefs about the importance and potential value of teams at the top. Ironically, these myths hamper the very team performance they are designed to stimulate.

Teamwork at the top will lead to team performance. This myth argues for more attention to the "four Cs" of effective teamwork: communication, cooperation, collaboration, and compromise.

The reality is that *teamwork* is not the same thing as *team performance*. Teamwork is broad-based cooperation and supportive behavior; a team is a tightly focused performance unit. By concentrating all its attention on teamwork, the senior group is actually *less* likely to be discriminating about when and where it needs to apply the discipline required to achieve real team performance. Members of the group may improve their ability to communicate and support one another, but they will not obtain team performance without applying the discipline.

Teams at the top need to spend more time together building consensus. This myth assumes that time spent together will lead to team performance and that decisions built on consensus are better than those handed down by individuals. In addition, it assumes that building consensus is synonymous with reducing conflict – and that less conflict somehow leads to more teamlike behavior.

The truth is that most executives have little time to spare, and the idea of spending more time struggling to build consensus simply makes no sense to them. In fact, many decisions are better made individually than collectively. Moreover, spending time together seeking consensus is not the same thing as doing real work. Most important, real teams do not avoid conflict – they thrive on it. And conflict is virtually unavoidable at the top.

The senior group should function as a team whenever it is together. This myth suggests that every task to be tackled by the executive leadership group qualifies as a team opportunity.

In fact, most senior-leadership interactions are not real team opportunities. A lot of time can be wasted attempting to apply team behaviors to situations that require approaches driven by a single leader. Nonteam efforts can often be faster and more effective – particularly when the value of the collective work-products is either difficult to identify or less than compelling.

team basics either to the full group or to its occasional subgroups. Why, despite the increasing value of team performance down the line, do nonteam behaviors continue to prevail at the top? There are a number of reasons for this apparent paradox.

First, a meaningful purpose for a team at the top is difficult to define. A real team must be deeply committed to a purpose that not only provides a sense of direction to its members but also justifies and clarifies the kind of extra collective efforts required for the team to achieve its performance potential. A frontline team on the plant floor can relatively easily articulate a meaningful purpose – for example, one that might involve making full use of a machine's capacity or improving a product's quality. A team effort at the top, however, cannot be tied to a machine or a single product line. And abstract goals – such as "improve the company's performance" or "implement the company's strategy" – are much too broad to provide the appropriate focus or mutual accountability that is necessary for a real team effort.

Second, tangible performance goals are hard to articulate. The goals of frontline teams are clear, specific, recurring, and measurable. They cover, for example, downtime, changeover speeds, yields, costs, and outputs. At the top, however, team goals are much harder to determine. Appropriate goals must be culled from targets for corporate and business-unit objectives, long-term finances, market share, and executive performance. As a result, goal setting for a so-called team at the top is often vague, and the process is rarely compelling to results-oriented senior executives.

Third, the right mix of skills is often absent. The extra performance capability that a real team provides comes largely from a complementary mixing of its members' skills. As a result, team members should be selected primarily on the basis of the set of skills they will bring to the group. But that's not how it usually works at the top, where team assignments are often based more on members' formal position than on actual skills. (See the insert "The 'All My Direct Reports' Fallacy.") And although any group of executives can bring a good mix of skills to a team, it is simply wrong to presume that a senior leadership group will possess the right skills for *any* given project.

Fourth, most teams require a heavy time commitment. Each team needs to shape a working approach that takes into account its members' available time, as well as their different skills and roles.

The "All My Direct Reports" Fallacy

Many CEOs tend to think of their group of direct reports as a team. But shaping collective work of high value that fits the group's mix of skills is difficult. It is analogous to searching for a market after a product has been designed, rather than first identifying what the market needs and then designing the product to fill that need.

Top-level executives are chosen because their individual capabilities and experiences qualify them for extremely demanding primary responsibilities. Team challenges at the top seldom require the particular mix of skills represented by a CEO's direct reports, and such challenges do not usually take clear priority over the individual executives' formal responsibilities. In other words, it is hard to find collective work-products that justify top-level executives doing real work together. As long as senior leaders instinctively hold to the "all my direct reports" assumption about team composition, their experience with teams at the top will remain disappointing.

Consider the case of a large multinational company that recently confronted a disaster in its management-information-systems function. Years of inept leadership, misallocation of resources, and procrastination had produced an intolerable situation. When senior managers finally acknowledged the magnitude of the problem, the company was in critical condition. Without a major transformation in the MIS function, there was little doubt that the company would lose its competitive edge and would either go out of business or be acquired by another company.

The leadership group convened in several intensive sessions to evaluate the options and decide on a course of action. None of the group's members had any MIS experience, yet the group proceeded without any changes to its composition. The members simply assumed that the CFO would be able to provide the necessary MIS knowledge and judgment. Early on, they concluded that they should retain outside consultants. Soon after, they entered into a five-year contract for nearly $100 million to reengineer the function. Several months later, the CEO had to bring in a hired gun to straighten out the mess. By that time, the company was practically at a standstill.

Who is to say that top management might not have resolved the issue differently had it consulted the company's own MIS experts? Skeptics will argue that the internal experts were precisely the people who had created the mess, so they could hardly be counted on to decide how it should be cleaned up. But the organization's MIS professionals knew what "the mess" consisted of and realized that a consultant-intensive solution would meet with crippling resistance.

The company's actions reflect the prevailing mindset in many top-leadership groups: somehow the collective judgment and experience of those on the so-called top team will make up for a lack of more specific and relevant skills. All of a CEO's direct reports can seldom, if ever, constitute an ongoing real team. Nor should they be trying to become one in their quest to build and maintain a high-performing enterprise. It simply does not work that way at the top.

The members must become as committed to that approach as they are to the team's overall purpose and goals. Most frontline teams have the advantage of full-time members, whereas most top teams consist of busy executives who have trouble making the kind of time commitment that real teams deserve and who therefore devote only part of their time to the team's assignment.

Fifth, real teams rely on mutual accountability. By the time executives reach top management positions, they have mastered an *executive leadership discipline* that is grounded in the principle of individual accountability. They believe that individual accountability is essential to maintaining control over performance – and they can point to results over time to back up that belief. Mutual accountability, by contrast, is much harder to develop and is not as battle tested. In fact, most executives distrust the entire notion.

Sixth, nonteams fit the power structure. The single leader approach fits the expectations of the hierarchy that governs most organizations. Top-level executives are natural overachievers who master the art of working within an orderly hierarchy early in their careers; at the same time, they are uncomfortable collaborating in amorphous groups with overlapping accountabilities.

In any hierarchical organization, a "power alley" exists that consists of the individuals who have the most clout, make the critical decisions, and are expected to align the decisions and actions of others with corporate priorities. Working groups and organizational units with a single leader fit within this model much better than real teams do because of their clarity about leadership and accountability. In this situation, such groups tend to be formed at random – not by design. And when they do become visible, they usually are seen as forums for communication or for building morale rather than as true performance units.

Seventh, nonteams are fast and efficient. The unit or working group with a single leader can be energized and aligned relatively quickly. A seasoned leader usually knows what the group's goals and basic working approach should be. As a result, the group hits the ground running. It can rely on the experience and formal position of its leader to make individual assignments clearly and wisely, to protect it from unfriendly outside elements, and to keep its members on track. The group is likely to make few mistakes, because of the leader's knowledge and experience regarding the task at hand. Moreover, the members seek out and rely on the formal leader's know-how. By contrast, real teams, especially during the initial phase of shaping goals and brainstorming about working approaches, need more time to develop. Many executives have little patience for the time-consuming "forming, norming, and storming" activities that team efforts commonly require at the start.

Executive Leadership Discipline Versus Team Discipline

For all the reasons just cited, "teaming at the top" is an unnatural act. Rather than seeing nonteam behavior as a failure, however, wise leaders recognize the inherent value of both behaviors, and the fundamentally different disciplines required for strong executive leadership on the one hand and for true team performance on the other. Top-level executives can and do learn to integrate the two instead of replacing one with the other.

The best CEOs apply an executive leadership discipline that places a premium on individual accountability for profit, market results, speed, and growth. The business press expects it, Wall Street rewards it, and boards of directors demand it. Consequently, CEOs organize senior executives in a group in order to take full advantage of their experience and skills. They establish efficient processes and forums that bring their best leaders together to contribute their experiences, insights, and judgments to shaping the company's strategy and policy. And they set high standards of performance – and expect executives to meet them.

Most executives at the top are conditioned to this set of leadership rules. They have proved over time their ability to produce consistently good results. But the discipline of executive leadership is often in direct conflict with the discipline required for team performance. The two are uncomfortable bedfellows. Consider the following differences:

- Top executives are individually accountable for whatever happens on their watch; they enforce such accountability in the organization by rewarding and punishing managers according to how well they meet clear-cut individual objectives. A team learns to hold its members mutually accountable for collective results.
- Top executives are primarily responsible for broad corporate strategy, policy, and objectives. A team's purpose and goals must be tightly focused on specific performance results.
- Top executives must create and maintain a sense of urgency about resolving those issues that are critical to overall company performance. A team mobilizes around a meaningful purpose and a commitment to specific, common goals; a team's purpose and goals may be important without being either urgent or critical.
- Top executives make decisions on their own; they exercise personal judgment about risks, resources, and strategic options. A team makes collective judgments by means of open dialogue, conflict resolution, and collective *real work*.[1]
- Top executives assign people to tasks based largely on their position in the organization. Members of a team are assigned on the basis of the specific skills required by the task at hand, regardless of their formal role in the company.
- Top executives leverage their time and experience by means of efficient organizational and managerial processes; as executives become more efficient and thus more valuable, they are given responsibility for more people and greater assets. A team is seldom the most efficient way of getting something accomplished.

> Wise leaders recognize that strong executive leadership and true team performance require different disciplines.

These contrasting disciplines produce conflicts that are difficult to resolve. The fundamental point, however, is that each has its place in the senior leadership of any performance-oriented organization – although it takes perceptive executive judgment to determine when and how each disci-

The leader's mantle falls naturally on the shoulders of the executive with the most relevant skills.

pline should be applied. In fact, the best leaders make a conscious effort to apply both disciplines, recognizing that they will not always make the right call.

Litmus Tests for Teams

Three litmus tests determine whether a group can achieve real team performance. These tests are valid regardless of a potential team's position within its company – at the top, in the middle, or on the front line. First, the group must focus its attention on shaping *collective work-products* of clear value to the company. Second, its members must learn how to shift and share leadership roles. Third, those members must be mutually accountable for the group's results. Let's examine each test in turn.

Shaping Collective Work-Products. A collective work-product for a top leadership group is relatively easy to define: it is the tangible result of the group applying different skills to produce a performance improvement not achievable by the members of the group working on their own. Let me be clear: team performance at the top is not the same thing as open discussion, debate, decision making, or delegation of authority.

Collective work-products are not as easy to come by at the top as they are down the line. A company undergoing major change, however, will invariably encounter some obvious opportunities for collective work at the top. For example, in 1993, executives at Citicorp formed a team to help redesign the company's credit-management process after a collapse in the real estate market created a serious financial crisis throughout the industry. And in 1995, four executives at Browning-Ferris Industries, the second-largest global waste-management and recycling company, functioned as a real team in order to raise several hundred million dollars in new financing – a sum critical to the company's future growth. Those success stories, however, were energized by urgency, if not by a crisis. Without a need for urgent action, a top leadership group can seldom carve out collective work-products that match its mix of skills and also justify the diversion of executives' time from their primary responsibilities. And keep in mind that not all collective work-products constitute a real team opportunity: if the leadership role does not need to shift, collective work can be directed by a single leader.

Shifting the Leadership Role. A real team is never leaderless. Instead, it is able to draw on the leadership ability of each of its members at different times and in different ways.

A working group or an organizational-unit "team" operates under the guidance and direction of its formal leader. Although the leader may opt to delegate primary responsibility for a particular assignment, the formal leader is still accountable for the group's results – and all the members know it. Seldom does a member take an initiative that is not strongly endorsed and supported by the formal leader. This approach provides lines of leadership that are crystal clear, and it is a time-honored way for organizations to maintain order and accountability as they become larger.

Real teams, by contrast, boost their leadership capacity by shifting the leader's role back and forth

among members depending on the task. The leader's mantle falls naturally on the shoulders of whichever executive has the knowledge or experience most relevant to the particular issue at hand. In the major refinancing effort at Browning-Ferris Industries, for instance, the top team was often led by the CFO during discussions with the board, by the CEO in meetings with key investors, and by the COO when crafting events to build cross-organizational support for initiatives.

Building Mutual Accountability. True mutual accountability is critical to the success of teams. Best characterized by the phrase "We hold one another accountable" rather than "The boss holds us accountable," it demonstrates the high degree of commitment that all members of a real team must share. People at the top of an organization are accustomed to being held individually accountable for whatever happens on their watch; when they are on a true team, they must subordinate that approach in order to pursue a collective result.

When Teams at the Top Make Sense

The contrasting disciplines of team and executive performance help explain why the best senior-leadership groups rarely function as ongoing true teams. But we often see such groups functioning as real teams when major, unexpected events arise – particularly when a sudden change breaks up the natural order at the top of an organization.

Consider, for example, what happens in a merger or acquisition. The opportunity to acquire or merge with another company creates a number of real team opportunities at the top of both companies – not only during the negotiating process but also while the two organizations integrate their operations. Groups of people from both sides come together to exchange information, eliminate duplication, and meld the best practices of the merging companies. The performance challenges of a merger or an acquisition naturally give rise to team acts. Those challenges almost always include

- a compelling sense of urgency throughout both organizations;
- new imperatives to improve performance, including many that are measurable;
- critical issues that cannot be resolved without integrating the skill sets of both organizations;
- overlapping formal structures and processes that require new informal networks; and
- temporary leadership roles that differ from permanent leadership roles.

Given those challenges, it is natural for executives at the top of two merging companies to engage in team behavior as a complement to their usual single-leader approach. Indeed, mobilized by a major change, the right executives often come together to function as a real team. But those who wait for a cataclysmic event to spawn a team at the top are likely to miss important opportunities to exploit team performance. Those opportunities are to be found wherever there is collective real work to be done by the company's top-level executives.

Doing Collective Work at Mobil. Despite the long and successful history of single-executive leadership at Mobil Oil Corporation, in 1994 CEO Lucio Noto believed that it was time to try for more team performance at the top. The company was at a critical juncture in its development: the industry was undergoing significant changes, competitors were modifying both strategies and structures, and growth prospects were becoming more difficult to identify and realize. In short, Noto wanted all the senior-level help he could get to strengthen Mobil's strategic position and leadership capacity for the next generation of the company's senior managers.

The first credible team challenge for Noto's senior-leadership group was to create a new process for accelerating the development of the company's leadership capacity. The members of the executive office began by forming a team to evaluate the company's future leaders. All team members, including Noto, were required to conduct extensive interviews about the candidates assigned to them and to review a new base of performance facts about those they had not worked with recently. This was a real-work role for the team members. Moreover, once they had developed the base of information they needed for their assigned candidates, the members of the top team had to come together and work collectively to complete the evaluations.

During those efforts, Noto functioned as both a team member and a team leader – but seldom as *the* leader. Other members of the senior group also learned how to act as leaders and team players. Noto filled the gaps whenever the group's progress seemed to falter, and he was diligent about subtly reminding the group of the main reason for its effort: to accelerate the development of the next generation of Mobil's leaders.

As these efforts evolved, the team coalesced around a few simple messages that enabled it to improve the balance between collective work and individual tasks. Perhaps the most powerful of these messages can be described in the statement "Our primary focus is development, not evaluation." That message shifted the balance of the team's collective work from evaluation to development. It became clear that the evaluation work could be delegated to organizational-unit leaders and to teams in the organization's formal structure and that the executive office should concentrate on addressing the company's high-level development needs.

At the same time, the simple message that helped the team coalesce also enabled it to identify collective work-products that it otherwise might have overlooked. One such work-product was a new leadership-development profile: the executive-office team completely redesigned the criteria and evidence required for evaluating the leadership accomplishments of middle and senior managers.

Another work-product was a more rigorous evaluation process for candidates for the top 100 or so positions in the company. The new process not only included 360-degree evaluations but also required senior executives to conduct intensive interviews and to review fact-based information on candidates that went well beyond the usual human-resources evaluations.

A third work-product was a new opportunity-development and assignment-matching process. A group called the Opportunity Development Council was established to uncover development opportunities for leadership candidates of high potential.

Top leadership groups that do real work together, such as the one at Mobil, are much like musical ensembles that sing or play together: as members gain a firsthand appreciation for the talent each possesses, they develop mutual respect for one another and a strong conviction about the value of what they can accomplish together. Unless a group continues to do substantive work together, however, it will lose its ability to shape collective work-products.

The team's collective abilities allowed it to accomplish more than its members could have working on their own.

Responding to the Marketplace at Texas Instruments. The collective work of teams at the top can be particularly powerful when the direction of the marketplace is hard to comprehend and no single member of the leadership group can clearly see the way forward. Consider the case of Texas Instruments in 1986. A small team took over the leadership of the company's rapidly eroding calculator business at a time when both the market and Texas Instruments itself were rapidly moving away from handheld calculators in favor of personal computers. The market was in such turmoil that few thought calculators would survive at all. Resorting to dark humor amid this doom and gloom, the team referred to its regular Friday afternoon meetings as "window-jumping sessions." Over time, however, the team's collective sense of the marketplace allowed it to accomplish more than its members could have accomplished working on their own. Mobilizing its collective skills in engineering and marketing, the team succeeded in redesigning the product and resegmenting the market. Most important, it persuaded the company that it needed to make use of technology from outside Texas Instruments. Most so-called teams at the top do not immerse themselves in the marketplace the way the team at Texas Instruments did.

Guidelines for Initiating a Real Team

A simple set of guidelines can help any group – at the top, in the middle, or on the front line – find its hidden potential for team performance.

Pick your shots wisely. Operating as a team is not the only way leadership groups can improve performance. Remember: team efforts work only when collective work-products and shifting leadership contributions offer high value.

Avoid the trap of picking hollow opportunities for your top team. Doing so not only distracts the team from the real issues that justify taking up executives' time but also builds skepticism among other employees about the value of the team's efforts. The best leadership groups learn to avoid such situations and focus instead on spotting real team opportunities in advance rather than waiting to be jolted into action by a major event.

Consider your options carefully. Teams go by a variety of different names according to their various purposes and goals. Although many fail to meet the vigorous litmus tests of real team performance, such groups are not without value within a balanced approach to leadership. They may be composed of a unit leader's direct reports, a cross-functional selection of managers, or an entire enterprise. The different types of small-group efforts all have their place within a high-performing organization. The best leadership groups are never wedded to one approach; they make a concerted effort to master and modify several approaches.

Make the critical trade-offs consciously. Executives must grapple with three important trade-offs when thinking about establishing a top team. First, they must consider whether the expenditure of time needed to get real team performance is worth it. Groups with a single leader are fast, efficient, and powerful when the person in charge really does know best. Second, executives must keep in mind that it is more important to a team's performance to choose individuals based on their mix of skills rather than on their formal titles. Projects that do not require a composite mix of skills for collective work-products are best handled by individuals in a working group, each tackling a piece of the puzzle largely on his or her own. Third, executives must consider the leadership trade-off. Real teams – in which the leadership role shifts – can help build an organization's overall leadership capacity by allowing both a number of different individuals to lead and a number of potential leaders to develop their capabilities. In many situations, executives will decide to forgo teams and will instead opt for the clear line of accountability provided by a single leader.

Apply the discipline that fits. It is usually more natural to apply the executive leadership discipline the higher up in the organization you go, simply because that is how large organizations are expected to work. But high-level executives tend to overuse that discipline to the detriment of potential team performance. The right balance is a moving target that is never easy to hit. Once groups at the top experience the power of team discipline, their members can easily start to overuse that approach.

Learn different leadership roles. Top-level executives should be wary of their personal preferences when it comes to leadership approaches. Most people who have attempted to be team leaders in a situation that demanded strong direction will remember the frustration and confusion that resulted. The reverse is equally true. Those who are wedded to what has worked for them in the past will always find it difficult to succeed in a new leadership role.

1. For a discussion of what constitutes real work, see the HBR Classic in this issue, "Real Work," by Abraham Zaleznik.

Reprint 97604

EFFECTIVE WORK TEAMS

Let us now return to the question with which the chapter began. Given the experiences of the international and domestic airlines, what would *you* do to ensure that teams of flight attendants consistently provide the highest possible quality of service to passengers?

The international airline's answer to the question was to engineer and preprogram the work to the fullest extent possible. It achieved predictability and protection from excessive downside risk, but at a considerable cost: Both individual flight attendants and cabin crew teams were significantly underutilized. Managers at this airline left a significant amount of talent on the table. The domestic airline had the opposite problem. Its customer service teams brimmed with energy and innovation and were ready to turn on a dime to solve the problems and exploit the opportunities they encountered. But there was a pervasive worry at the company that some team somewhere in the system might be just about to fly out of control. Managers at this airline, one suspects, did not rest as well at night as did their counterparts at the international carrier.

Is it possible to eat one's cake and have it too? Can one achieve creativity, agility, and learning while still maintaining reasonable levels of consistency, control, and alignment with collective objectives? The message of this book is that, with wise and assertive team leadership, that is indeed possible. It is not a matter of threading carefully between the poles of creativity and control. As we will see, superb leadership can make it possible for teams, in their everyday work, to operate as well as the domestic airline flight attendant team did when it instantly adapted its performance strategy to the different circumstances of the Florida and Boston flights, and as well as the international airline team did when it got into gear and took such good care of its customers after the emergency landing.

The very best work teams always serve their customers well, of course. But they also become increasingly capable performing units over time, as members gain experience and discover new and better ways of working together. And, finally, they provide settings in which each individual member can find in his or her teamwork a good measure of personal learning and fulfillment. An effective work team does all three of these things. Because the main purpose of this book is to identify what leaders can do to help teams achieve and sustain a high standing on all three of these criteria, we will take the next few pages to deepen our understanding of them.[3]

Serving Clients

The productive output of the team (that is, its product, service, or decision) meets or exceeds the standards of quantity, quality, and timeliness of the team's clients—the people who receive, review, or use the output. Those of us who study team performance in the experimental laboratory often can finesse the problem of deciding just what *effective* means. We can, for example, construct a task that has a clean, reliable performance measure—such as the number of puzzles a group solves in a given time period, or whether a group comes up with the one right answer to the problem we asked them to solve. And then we can proceed to investigate experimentally the factors that enhance or depress a team's score on that measure.

Effectiveness criteria are not so straightforward for teams that perform work in organizational settings. Few organizational tasks have clear right-or-wrong answers, for example. Nor do they lend themselves to simple, unidimensional numerical measures that validly indicate how well a group has done its work. Even for teams whose performance can be timed or counted, such "objective" measures rarely tell the whole story (or, in many cases, the most important part of the story) about how they are doing.

As part of our *Groups That Work* project a few years ago, Mary Lou Davis-Sacks and I studied a number of teams in the Fiscal Analysis

Branch of the federal Office of Management and the Budget (OMB).[4] Among the teams in the branch were some whose work was to perform economic analyses for the director of OMB and his staff. How should the reports prepared by these teams have been assessed?

One possibility was to obtain judgments of the "objective" quality of the reports, using generally accepted standards for economic research, the kinds of criteria that editors of economic journals use in deciding whether to publish an article. Team members, all of whom were civil servants and many of whom held advanced degrees in economics, knew and respected these standards. They would have been quite comfortable having the standards used to assess their products.

Yet what actually *happened* to the teams' reports—and, ultimately, to the teams themselves—depended mainly on the views of the OMB political officials for whom the work was done. These officials sought bulletproof analyses because the findings were certain to be carefully scrutinized by political opponents. Even more important to the political officials, however, were the timeliness of the reports and their usefulness in promoting the president's political and policy agendas. A publishable-quality report that arrived the day *after* the director testified in Congress, or one that focused mainly on issues of interest to the team itself, would be ignored. Worse, if the team's reports came to be viewed as useless or self-serving, the political staff might well arrange to do its own analyses—in effect, freezing the civil servant teams out of the policy-making process.

It is the client's standards and assessments that count. Not those of the team itself, except in those rare cases when the team is the client of its own work. Not those of outside researchers or evaluators, except when they are engaged to do an assessment by those who *do* have legitimacy as reviewers. And not even those of the team's manager, who rarely is the person who actually receives and uses a team's output. Rather than serve as a surrogate client, the manager's job is first to help the team identify the standards that are used by its real clients, and then to do whatever can be done to help the team meet those standards.

A large number of "But what if . . ." objections flow immediately from this view. What if the client has bad judgment? What if the client's standards are far too low or too high? What if the client wants something inappropriate or even illegal? What if the client doesn't even *know* what he or she wants? What if there are multiple clients, and they want incompatible things? In such questions lie real opportunities for a work team and its leaders—opportunities that might never surface were the team to focus mainly on self- or manager-defined performance criteria. Explicitly addressing the fact that different clients have different views of what *good* means (or views that differ from the team's own), for example, can break a team out of its usual routines and, sometimes, result in innovative performance strategies.

Professional symphony orchestras can be viewed as large teams whose clients are audiences. Orchestra musicians like to play music that stretches and challenges them, but many audiences prefer music that is melodic and familiar. The imperfect alignment between team members and clients about the definition of a "good" concert has become increasingly consequential in the last decade as the economic situation of many orchestras has worsened. These times require that most concert hall seats be filled and that people pay substantial sums of money to sit in them.

The ensembles that Jutta Allmendinger, Erin Lehman, and I assessed in our research on professional symphony and chamber orchestras responded to this challenge in a variety of ways.[5] One orchestra succumbed to the wishes of its audience and, in effect, converted itself into a full-time pops ensemble. The concert hall brimmed with people who were enjoying themselves hearing old favorites, but neither the orchestra nor its audiences were being stretched. A self-governing orchestra took almost the opposite tack. To challenge themselves musically, members decided to play what *they* wanted to play. Audiences dwindled as patrons stayed away from concerts dominated by unfamiliar, strange-sounding music. By focusing on the wishes of team members to the near-exclusion of those of its clients, this orchestra came perilously close to going out of business.

A third orchestra attended to *both* musicians' and audience members' views of what a "good" performance is—but also took initiatives to bring audience members' criteria more closely into alignment with its own. Programming at this orchestra had the feel of a sandwich: Some meaty new music was performed in the middle of the program, between an engaging opening number and the major concluding work. The top and bottom slices of the sandwich provided the incentive to get people into the hall, where they also were exposed to (and, one hopes, gradually came to enjoy) serious contemporary music.

Through its artistic programming, supplemented by other educational initiatives such as preconcert discussions, this orchestra altered its clients' views of what "good performance" means. But what if a legitimate client knowingly asks a team to do something that is wrong or inappropriate? In the heat of the budget season at OMB, the fiscal analysis teams began to get cues from their political clients that it would be helpful if the team's reports were more directly supportive of the administration's position. Might it be possible to omit certain projections about the possible implications of the administration's proposals on the national debt? These extrapolations, after all, are almost certainly unreliable. Besides, including them could distract attention from the many positive features and short-term benefits of the proposals. Might the team be willing to orient its analyses and reports just a bit more in the president's direction?

David Mathiasen, the chief of the Fiscal Analysis Branch, felt it was time for an informal tour of the political side of the house to see if he could reduce some of the pressure on his teams. He reminded the team's clients why it was in their own best interest to have reports that were as complete and trustworthy as the analysts could make them. Mathiasen also met with his own manager, the head of the Budget Review Division, to suggest that he reaffirm with the director himself the importance of civil servant staff not becoming politicized.

These initiatives did appear to reduce the number of inappropriate requests made of the fiscal analysis teams—for a time. But the process of shaping clients' views of what good performance meant was, for these clients, never ending and never sufficient. Therefore, Mathiasen also worked directly and extensively with his analysis teams, making sure that members had a deep understanding of their ultimate purposes and norms of conduct that were consistent with those purposes. These leadership initiatives strengthened the teams' ability to deflect political pressures when teams did encounter them, and helped ensure that they could continue to make their unique contributions to the inherently political budget-making process.

Some teams are fortunate in that all relevant parties—the team, its managers, and its clients—agree on the criteria by which the team's work will be assessed. Less fortunate teams still have many options. They can educate their clients. They can apply political pressure. They can try to replace recalcitrant clients with others who are more amenable to the team's own aspirations for its work. Or they can succumb and do exactly what the clients want. All of these approaches, in various circumstances, can be appropriate.

What is never appropriate is to say, when the client finds the group's work wanting, "The group did great; it was just that the client was dumb." The group produced a wonderful new software package, but users were not perceptive enough to buy it. The team created a fine treatment regimen, but the patient would not cooperate. The staff came up with an elegant transportation plan, but the bureau chief wouldn't have it. All of these are group failures, and all of them stem from the team not taking seriously the fact that what good performance *means* is whatever the group's clients think it means.

Good teams know that, and meet their clients' expectations. Great teams actively shape those expectations, and then exceed them.

Growing as a Team

The social processes the team uses in carrying out the work enhance members' capability to work together interdependently in the future. Printed across the front of a T-shirt worn by a bearded, professorial-looking individual near Harvard Square: "The older I get . . ." On the back: ". . . the better I get." That may or may not have been true for the professor, but, as we will see in the next chapter, it is true for lots of teams. Over time, members come to know one another's special strengths and weaknesses and become highly skilled in coordinating their activities, anticipating one another's next moves and initiating appropriate responses to them even as those moves are occurring.

Other groups show the opposite pattern, as was illustrated by a two-person Boeing 737 cockpit crew I observed. The crew had gotten off to a bad start the previous day and things had deteriorated ever since. Now it was the crew's last leg together and the tension was palpable. The captain was flying, which meant that the first officer would operate the radios, manipulate the landing gear and flap levers, and keep an eye out for conflicting traffic. As the aircraft lifted off the runway, the captain glanced over to the first officer and nodded his head almost imperceptibly. That was his signal for the first officer to raise the gear. There was no response; the first officer kept his eyes outside the cockpit looking for other aircraft.

After a few seconds, the captain took his right hand off the control yoke and made a thumbs-up gesture in his teammate's direction. Still no response from the first officer. Finally, the captain exploded: "Gear up, dammit!" Slowly, deliberately, the first officer turned to his captain and said, "I believe the correct phraseology, Captain, is 'Positive rate of ascent, gear up.'" The captain's response was to grab the gear lever himself and slam it into the up position. The rest of that last leg was flown in almost complete silence.

As I held my breath hoping that nothing would go wrong on that flight that would require the crew to operate as a real team, I reflected on a less dramatic but otherwise similar experience of my own. A few years before, the president of the university where I then worked had asked me to serve on a committee to identify candidates for a deanship that had become vacant. According to the first of the three criteria of team effectiveness, our committee was a success. The president liked the candidate we recommended and appointed him as dean. By the time that happened, however, I already had made my vow: Never again, no matter what, would I do *anything* that required me to work with the other members of that search committee. If the president wished to consider additional candidates, he would have to appoint a new committee. Ours had destroyed itself in the process of doing its work.

Effective work teams operate in ways that build shared commitment, collective skills, and task-appropriate coordination strategies—not mutual antagonisms and trails of failures from which little is learned. They become adept at detecting and correcting errors before serious damage is done, and at noticing and exploiting emerging opportunities. And they periodically review how they have been operating, milking their experiences for whatever learning can be had from them. An effective team is a more capable performing unit when its work is finished than it was when work began.

Individual Members' Learning

The group experience, on balance, contributes positively to the learning and personal well-being of individual team members. Work teams have much to offer their members. Teams are, for example, wonderful sites for learning—for expanding one's knowledge, acquiring new skills, and exploring perspectives on the world that differ from one's own. Teamwork also can engender feelings of belonging, providing members a secure sense of their place in the social world. And, of course, working with others on a shared task can spawn satisfying interpersonal relationships, some of which may flower into friendships that extend well beyond the group setting where they were formed.[6]

Why, then, when I announce on the first day of class that students will do a group project for which members will get a common grade, does the classroom fill with barely suppressed groans? The answer, of course, is that my students have done group projects before, and they know how awful it gets when a team does not work. Being a professor who aspires to empathy, I always acknowledge that some project groups do turn out to be more frustrating than fulfilling, more a source of angst than of learning. But the groups in my course, I assure them, will be different.

In fact, the students' previous experiences mirror my own. Membership on teams such as the deanship search committee has left me dispositionally disinclined to work in teams, preferring instead to work by myself whenever I can. Like the students, I have felt the frustration that comes from trying to craft a group product that all members find acceptable. And I know from research, but also from experience, that teams can stress their members, alienate them from one another, and undermine their confidence in their own abilities. Many work teams, perhaps even most of them, provide their members with significantly less personal learning and satisfaction than they could.

While not denying the inevitability of rough spots in the life of any group, I nonetheless do not count as effective any team for which the impact of the group experience on members' learning and well-being is more negative than positive. If the group prevents members from doing what they want and need to do, if it compromises their personal learning, or if members' main reactions to having been in the group are frustration and disillusionment, then the costs of generating the group product were too high.

Using the Criteria

Although it can take some effort to think through just what "effective" performance would mean for a given work team, it invariably is worth the trouble. For one thing, it forces us to be clear and explicit about our values, about what it is that we are hoping for and trying to promote when we create work teams. It lessens the likelihood that we will thoughtlessly use whatever performance indicators happen to be available or easy to obtain. It makes salient the fact that teams must continuously manage trade-offs among the three different aspects of overall effectiveness rather than focus exclusively on any one of them. And, finally, explicit effectiveness criteria provide a standard for testing and choosing among various structural or managerial interventions we may be contemplating. "If we did that," one can ask, "how would it affect the team's standing on the criteria that we care most about? Why do we think so?" Asking such questions promotes thoughtfulness of the type that can lessen the number of times that well-meaning interventions turn out to yield unexpected and unfortunate consequences.

The three criteria—a team product acceptable to clients, growth in team capability, and a group experience meaningful and satisfying for members—can be used to assess the effectiveness of any work team, regardless of task or setting. The relative *weight* of the three criteria, however, does vary across circumstances. If, for example, a temporary self-managing team were formed to perform a single task of extraordinary importance, then the second and third dimensions would be of lesser relevance to that team's overall effectiveness. On the other hand, tasks sometimes are created mainly to help members gain experience, learn some things, and become competent as a performing unit. During the startup of an engine manufacturing plant, for example, management created a special "core skills" production unit specifically to build team members' skills and experience for the work they subsequently would do in metalworking teams.[7] The task in such cases may be as much an excuse for the unit as the reason for it, and assessments of team effectiveness would depend more on the second and third criteria than on the first.

Including social and personal criteria in a definition of effectiveness is a departure from tradition in small-group research, as is my emphasis on system-defined (rather than researcher-defined) assessments of a group's productive output. Yet the criteria themselves require neither extraordinary accomplishment nor exemplary social processes. All that is necessary for effectiveness is output judged acceptable by those who receive or use it, a team that winds up its work at least as capable as when it started, and members who are at least as satisfied as they are frustrated by what has transpired. The challenge is to generate ways of understanding, designing, and managing teams that help them meet or exceed these modest criteria.

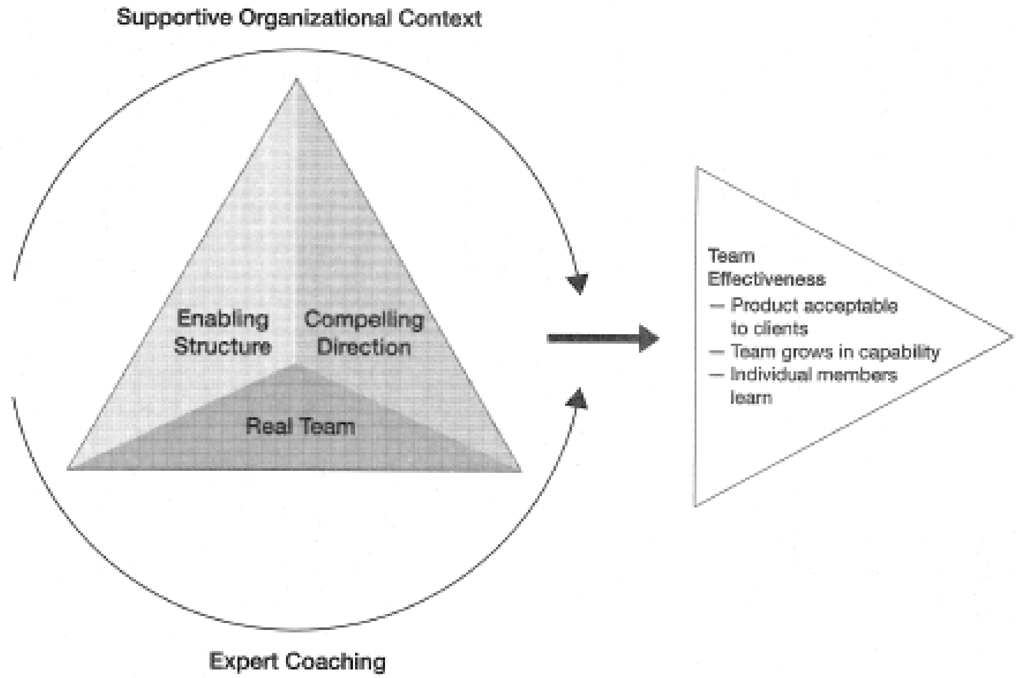
CREATING CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVENESS

This book identifies and explores the five conditions that leaders can put in place to increase the chances that a team will, over time, achieve and sustain a high standing on the three criteria just discussed. Specifically, the likelihood of effectiveness is increased when a team (1) is a *real team* rather than a team in name only, (2) has a *compelling direction* for its work, (3) has an *enabling structure* that facilitates rather than impedes teamwork, (4) operates within a *supportive organizational context*, and (5) has available ample *expert coaching* in teamwork.

Each of these conditions, depicted in figure 1-1, is addressed in turn in the five chapters that follow. The first three of these chapters address the three core conditions for effectiveness—namely, creating a real team with a compelling purpose and an enabling structure. The next two chapters discuss the two conditions that can help a team harvest the benefits of a good basic design—namely, a supportive organizational context and expert coaching in teamwork. Finally, the concluding section of the book explores the implications of this way of thinking about work teams for larger questions about group and organizational leadership and change.

To view team leadership as creating conditions that increase the chances that a team will evolve into an effective performing unit is somewhat unconventional. Both practicing managers and writers about management commonly view the actions of leaders as "causes" and the responses of teams as "effects." In cause-effect models, particular leader behaviors and styles are viewed as strongly determining team behavior and performance. By contrast, I view the main responsibility of leaders as creating and maintaining the five conditions that increase the chances that a team will, over time, become increasingly effective in carrying out its work.

The Conditions for Team Effectiveness



No one person has sole responsibility for team leadership. Leadership is provided by anyone who helps create and maintain the performance-enhancing conditions, regardless of whether that person happens to hold a formal leadership role. Nor is there any one right way for leaders to behave. Instead, they use whatever expertise they have and whatever resources they can corral to get the five key conditions in place and keep them there. This book explores what is involved in doing that, how it can be done well, and what those who would lead teams can do to build their own leadership capabilities.