

RIGIDITY OR OPTIMUM PERFORMANCE IN TEAMS

Teams – From Dysfunctional Behaviour to High Performance

There is nothing like rigid, inflexible "my way" behaviour to kill any chance of a team performing well. This rigidity is experienced in numerous ways and can take on similar characteristics of a dysfunctional family. This dysfunctionality can be further exacerbated when the leader is rigid and inclined to be tyrannical. Conversely high performing teams have all the characteristics of a well-balanced family.

1. CONTROL

In dysfunctional teams one must be in control of all interactions, feelings and personal behaviour at all times. Control gives each member a sense of power, predictability and security, yet it can take on the mores of a disability since by its nature it tries to will away what cannot be willed away - the fundamental insecurity and unpredictability of life. As energy is put into controlling feelings, spontaneity can be lost.

Internal competitiveness thrives in this environment. The corollaries in well functioning teams are cooperation, "live and let live" and trust.

2. PERFECTIONISM

The key to perfectionism is to be right in everything you are doing. The leader in particular may assume, or pretend to assume, that other team members know less than he or she does on all or most things. Perfectionists seek to become experts and can be aggressive in opinion (dogmatic, arrogant) such that others are sufficiently inhibited that they will not take them on. "One should be thoroughly competent, adequate, and achieving, in all possible respects."

A perfectionist team expects to hit high C on the very first try, and is unwilling to slog along a failure-strewn path of trial-and-error. This perfectionism protects the team and its leadership from mussing up their record of uninterrupted success. Imagine anything of value being achieved by people unwilling to experience initial failure and frustration.

The error at stake is thinking the effort is more about the people undertaking it than the good the effort will accomplish.

This is especially easy when the leader exhibits coercive power that depends on fear. People then can do things because they are afraid of the consequences of failing to do what is required of them. The leader may even become tyrannical about being right especially about norms that the team has developed. For example moral self-righteousness, intolerance of an approach unlike yours eg smart analysis vs. creative approach, knowing the answers due to excessive diligence versus experimenting or floating ideas etc.

Perfection involves a measurement being imposed and has a competitive aspect to it.

There can be a one-up, better than others aspect that is exhibited in behaviour such as an intense focus on results at the cost of all other things drilling down, sending back first, second and tenth iterations of proposals.

The leader's approach can be one of "never right" intervention, obsessive faultfinding, or pretending to give credit to others especially when observed by the wider organisation. Also common is measurement imposed post event - i.e. clever in hindsight - I told you so, I don't understand why you didn't, I would never do that...and so on.

The members of the team anxiously avoid what is bad, wrong or inferior particularly with peers and especially where the boss is dominant, even predatory. Peers tend to take turns to be "beaten up" and don't either support or question each other.

Team members stop putting up ideas; they wait turns and address all commentary to the one with the power. Decisions are centred through the leader and meetings are simply presentations to him or her. Decisions that appear democratic are taken out of the forum and changed or not raised at all. The leader takes on veto rights, as an exercise of power even where the idea proposed is well thought out and intelligent. The exercise of veto is always kept in reserve and is used to cause stumbling and incoherence and ultimately lack of confidence.

Hence, fear and avoidance of the negative become the organising principles. Team members live according to an externalised image. This amounts to a chronic experience of dissociation from self. One is busy observing one's own actions in a situation while internally self-monitoring, "Am I coming across okay?" "Am I getting it right?" One is constantly

comparing self with a perceived norm in an attempt to measure up or striving (often in vain) to meet the leader's needs while the leader in turn sees this as weakness, and, in fact gains greater power.

This can lead to a feeling of hopelessness where flight is more prevalent than fight.

3. BLAME

This is the situation where things don't turn out as planned and you blame yourself or others. A person's blaming behaviour covers one's shame or projects it onto others. Blame can become an automatic way to avoid one's deepest feelings and true self.

Life's spontaneity and unpredictability inevitably break down control, but blame is habitually used to regain the illusion of control. Blame is how the shaming process continues to function. As each person feels the danger of vulnerability and exposure, he shames the other with blame.

Typical blaming responses are illustrated below.

Word Used (Disagreement)	Affect (Blaming)	Behaviour (Attacking)	Inner Experience (Isolated)	Psychological Effects
"You never do anything right"	"I'm the boss around here"	Judging	"I'm lonely and unsuccessful"	Paranoid
"What's the matter with you"	Powerful body position	Dictating		Delinquent Homicidal
It's all your fault"	Tightness	Finding Fault		Muscle Tension
				Back Trouble
				Circulation Problems
				High Blood Pressure
				Constipation
				Asthma

4 PLACATING

This behaviour is intended to appease others by apparent shouldering responsibility (mea culpa), obsessive pleasing and ingratiating. It is a behaviour exhibited by some people in weak positions, especially towards a coercive leader. The nature of this "response" is illustrated below.

Word Used (Disagreement)	Affect (Begging)	Behaviour (Dependent Martyr)	Inner Experience	Psychological Effects
"It's all my fault"	"I'm helpless"	"Too good" conduct	"I'm feel like a nothing"	Neurotic
"I'm nothing without you"	Pleading expressions and voice	Apologising, excusing	"I'm worthless"	Depressed
"I'm just here to make you happy"	Weak body position	Whining and begging		Suicidal
		Giving in		Digestive Problems
				Stomach disorders, nausea
				Migraines
				Constipation

5 SUPER REASONABLE

Another approach that is common is the appearance of reasonable, calm and collected that can deny any real experience. Again, this behaviour is something in a team that may not be what is seems.

Word Used (Extreme Objectivity)	Affect (Rigid, aloof)	Behaviour (Authoritarian)	Inner Experience	Psychological Effects
References to rules and the "right" things	"One must be cool, calm and collected - at all costs"	Rigid principles conduct	"I feel vulnerable and isolated"	Obsessive - compulsive Sociopathic
Abstract words and long explanations: "Everything is academic" "One must be intelligent"	Stiff body position Superior expression, if any	Rationalised acts Manipulative Compulsive	"I can't show any feeling"	Withdrawn socially Catatonic Drying-up illnesses - mucus, lymph nodes, other secretions Mononucleosis Heart Attacks Backaches

6. IRRELEVANT RESPONSE

This behaviour is seen where somebody appears to have "missed the plot" or appears to opt out. This can be physical e.g. leaving the room for no apparent reason, ringing in with excuses for non or late arrival, interrupting with irrelevancies and so on. In a dysfunctional team this can highly disruptive and detrimental to co-operation. It is often a response to some form of intimidation or fear of being judged.

Word Used (Extraneous)	Affect (Confusing)	Behaviour (Distracting)	Inner Experience	Psychological Effects
Makes no sense, not to the point	"I'm not really here"	Inappropriate conduct	"Nobody cares"	Confused
Constantly "leave the field" verbally	Features in constant motion	Hyperactive	"There's no place for me"	Inappropriate
	Angular and loose body position	Interrupting	Out of balance	Psychotic
			To interrupt to be noticed	Distressed
				Central nervous system
				Stomach disorders, nausea
				Diabetes
				Migraines
				Constipation

7. DENIAL OF FREEDOM

In a dysfunctional team denial of feelings can be prevalent. This includes perceptions, thoughts, wants and imaginings, especially the negative ones like, fear, loneliness, sadness, hurt, rejection and dependency needs. This follows the perfectionist rule. "You shouldn't think, feel, desire, imagine, see things, hear things, the way you do. You should see, hear feel, think, imagine, desire the way the Perfectionist ideal demands."

Instead, as Virginia Satir wrote:¹

"You might: see and hear what is here instead of what should be, was or will be; say what one feels and thinks instead of what one should say; feel what one feels instead of what one ought; ask for what one wants, instead of always waiting for permission; take risks in one's own behalf, instead of choosing to be only 'secure' and not rocking the boat."

8. NO-TALK RULE

Members of dysfunctional teams tend not to talk openly about any feelings, thoughts or experiences that focus on the pain and loneliness of the dysfunctional. This rule is a corollary of the denial of freedom concept above. The denial of expression is a fundamental wound to humanness. Human beings are symbolic animals who speak the need to express themselves. If deprived of this, we become shy, yet with encouragement, such people are usually extremely intelligent and creative.

9. MYTH-MAKING

The tendency here is to "always look at the bright side." Here we reframe the hurt, pain and distress in such a way as to distract everyone from what is really happening. This is a way to keep the balance.

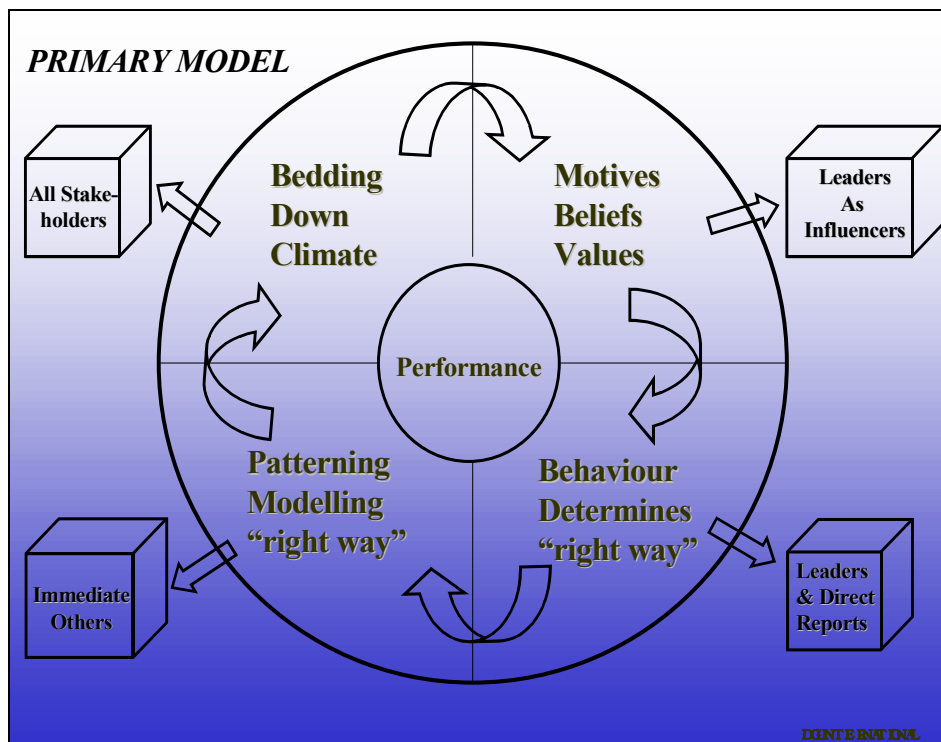
The system remains closed and rigid. Anyone rocking the boat would upset the status quo.

Mythology is, of course, a key component of culture. Cultures are living (therefore not resistant to change as such) and are also built over the long term. They lie at the heart of a healthy, life-sustaining business,

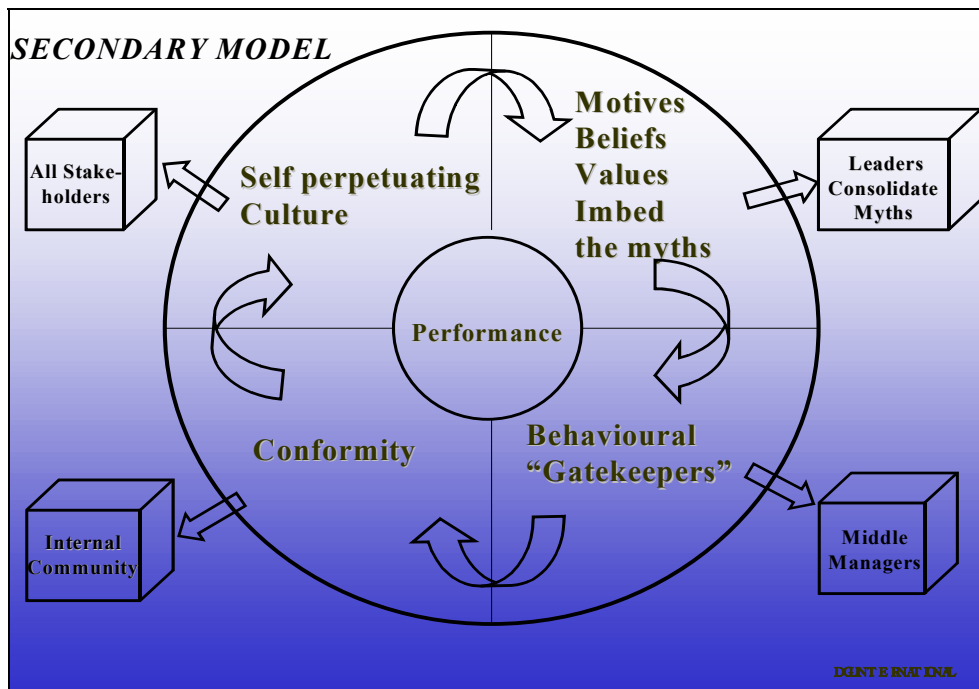
¹ Part of this paper is taken from work by the Satir Centre, Armadale Victoria

organisation or team. Cultures in organisations emerge in the first place from leaders.

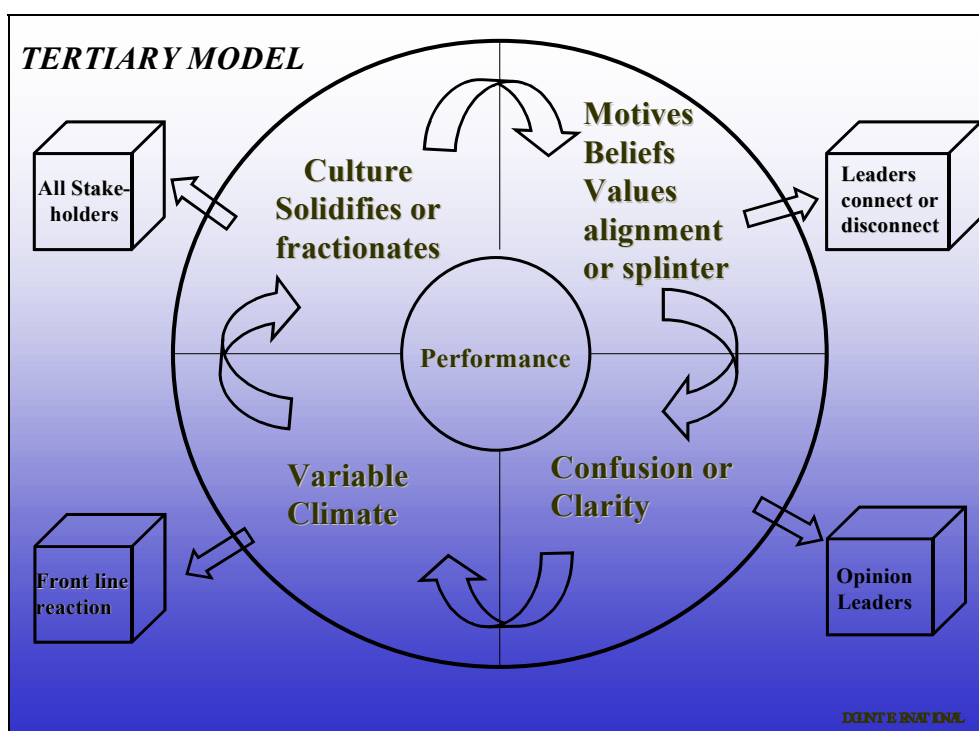
In the *primary model* below leaders enter organisations with motives, beliefs and values and their position or status gives them influence. This influence can have a major impact on behaviour to the extent that their role modelling sets up some "right way" behaviours, particularly as seen and copied by their direct reports. Others then see a pattern emerging around acceptable mores and as the pattern widens the climate (what it's like to work here) starts to form.



In the *secondary model* the leaders behaviour based on their motives and beliefs starts to become imbedded as the mythology of the organisation. Blow them gatekeepers are created to protect the myths and conformity that can occur in the internal community. This is where culture starts forming. It can be, by its very nature, self-perpetuating.



The *tertiary model* sees leaders aligning or splintering, particularly as new leaders emerge who might question the prevailing culture. This split at the top can fractionate the organisation or align it depending on the extent that the top gets "together." Confusion or clarity follows. The climate can henceforth vary greatly and the culture may evolve in quite unpredictable ways. At worst it fractionates. At best it solidifies. But the best may be a culture that is not entirely desirable. This model has general application. But is replicated in mergers repeatedly as cultural transformation sets in.



10. INCOMPLETION

In this situation transactions may not be completed. The same fights and disagreements can go on for years. This may be manifested in two ways. The first is through chronic fighting, and conflict without any real resolution.

The second is through enmeshment and confluence - agreeing never to disagree. The team can choose between conflict and confluence, but never contact. Members stay upset and confused all the time.

Functional teams can disagree, have differences, tolerate and accept change, albeit radical at times, even disturbing to ones' own worldview.

11. UNRELIABILITY





Here we don't expect reliability in relationships. Nobody can be trusted and therefore you can never be let down or disappointed. Sometimes instability can be such that illusions of self-sufficiency may appear. By acting either aloof and independent (walled boundaries) or needy and dependent (enmeshed boundaries) everyone feels emotionally cut off and incomplete. No one gets his or her needs met in a functional manner.

Conversely, if our lives have been lived with trust and intimacy, the world is a safer place.





12. MOVING TO AND FRO

Individual relationships in teams are crucial to well being. "Movement" in these relationships is complex but the characteristics of various approaches illustrate a range of responses as shown below.





Some people are **self-effacing** i.e. moving towards others as shown:

Needs		Acceptance
Fears		Rejection
Identifies in self as positives		Good, kind, caring, loving, generous
Denies in self as negatives		Control, power, anger, jealousy

Others have **mastery** i.e. move against others

Needs		Control
Fears		Helplessness
Identifies in self as positives		In control, power, anger, perfectionism
Denies in self as negatives		Passivity, kindness, caring, loving, generous

Others are "**resigned**" i.e. they move away from others and conflicts

Needs		Calm, inertia
Fears		Stress, conflict, coercion, pressure
Identifies in self as positives		Peaceful, unambitious
Denies in self as negatives		Self assertion, needs, desires and wants

13. THE USE OF POWER & INFLUENCE

The perception that we need to take personal responsibility for dealing with issues that arise makes sense. However the notion that the 'one cap fits all' approach works is nonsense. The most common expression of this is the overly simplistic idea that 'if you have an issue with somebody then just confronts it with him or her'.

This sort of view makes a crucial yet implicit assumption that the power game is played on an even playing field and that the sources of power of those involved are similar. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Effective team members use a variety of influence strategies, depending on the situation, people and needs.

Power has been defined as the capacity to produce effects on others or the potential to influence others' behaviour. The greater one's dependence on the source of power; the greater their power over you.

One way to think about influence strategies is to consider the sources of power that you have with people that you deal with on the job. The following definitions of power sources have been synthesised from French and Raven's work.¹

Their taxonomy illustrated the dimensions of social power.

Position power refers to power associated with hierarchy or status, while **personal power** is gained through one's particular attributes.

Position power is made up of legitimate, reward and coercive power.

Legitimate power is associated with a structural position in an organisation where that power is extended by virtue of the role or status.

Reward Power provides benefits as a result of some transaction between the power broker and the recipient. For example "an honest day's pay for an honest day's work" represents the transactional nature of reward power.

Coercive power depends on fear - people doing things because they are afraid of the consequences if they fail to do what is required of them.

Personal Power includes referent and expert power.

Referent power creates the potential to influence others, based on the strength of the relationship between leaders and followers.

Expert power is the power of knowledge where people are able to influence others through their expertise.

According to French and Raven's research, as well as some of McClelland's¹ organisational theory, the following influence strategies might be considered. For each situation, for every individual, taking personal responsibility is best started with a defined approach where recognition of power imbalances are understood and managed. It is also the case that people who have always had power have little or no

¹ (French, J.R.P & Raven, B.H 1959) *The Basis of Social Power. Michigan IT)*

¹ McClelland, David. 1995 paper on Influence form Hay McBer LOI Program

understanding of those who haven't, and their offer of "plucking up courage" is meaningless and demeaning.

Consider these options again:

- **Assertive persuasion:** convincing others by strong, logical arguments backed up by facts, reasons, and appeals to others' needs or interests.
- **Reward/punishment:** getting others to do what you want by offering them rewards for doing it or threatening punishment if they don't do it.
- **Political coalition building:** figuring out (a) who has power, and (b) what each person wants; then (c) persuading the key persons to support you until (d) you have organised the "critical mass" of supporters you need to attain your end.
- **Personal example:** "modelling" the behaviour you want others to display; e.g. expressing positive attitudes - enthusiasm - about the task or organisation, or visibly doing some of the work yourself - going into battle at the head of the troops.
- **Participation:** sharing information - communicating intent of actions and explaining why - or inviting others to express their ideas (note that this is not democratic leadership - "taking a vote")
- **Common vision:** presenting issues "charismatically", in terms of "higher" organisational goals or loyalty to one's fellows - "You're part of a great team, and your role is essential"; "You can't let the team down".
- **Empowering:** making others feel strong by recognising them - listening to them, rewarding them, asking for their help or commitment.
- **Acts of impact:** dramatic acts that get attention and arouse strong reactions - shock, humour, awe, fear (note: this strategy can be a high risk, and is best followed by one of the other strategies).
- Added to this is the notion of a **circle of influence** where people actively assess who they are closest to and furthest from, and where these people are influential or not.

13. TEAM SPIRIT HARMONICS

In Barry Heermann's book *Building Team Spirit*² he describes a set of harmonics combining both consonant and dissonant factors that can be drawn on to animate and enliven teams. As Heermann says, "Most teams welcome the consonant - for example the sense of security that comes from working with long term associates, agreement about a key role to be performed or the alignment of team energies in accomplishing shared vision and goals.

Most teams avoid the dissonant - dissonant voices say: "We're not doing this right." "That doesn't work for me." I'm not happy with this...(In teams - unlike music) embracing the dissonance can move the team to a position of strength..."

CONSONANCES	DISSONANCES
(A combination of musical tones that have resolved - that is, they are in agreement)	(A combination of unresolved musical tones)
Service	Service
- <i>Contribution</i> : generously and freely giving to another	- <i>Depletion</i> : feeling used up, unable to freely give to another
- <i>Aligned execution</i> : fulfilling in a unified way, customer and team needs	- <i>Uncoordinated action</i> : incompletely fulfilling customer and team needs
- <i>Mutual support</i> : providing reciprocal assistance	- <i>Unsupportiveness</i> : acting without concern for others
Initiating	Initiating
- <i>Orientation</i> : becoming familiarised and aware	- <i>Disorientation</i> : experiencing disequilibria and fear
- <i>Belonging</i> : feeling allied with and part of the team	- <i>Alienation</i> : feeling like a misfit, not a part of the team
- <i>Trust</i> : feeling reliant and secure about team members	- <i>Mistrust</i> : feeling insecure and cautious about team members
Visioning	Visioning
- <i>Shared vision/values</i> : agreeing on what is possible and its underlying worth and merit	- <i>Ambiguous vision/values</i> : experiencing uncertainty about what is possible - let alone its underlying worth and merit
- <i>Compassion</i> : experiencing empathy	

² Building Team Spirit by Barry Heermann. McGraw-Hill ISBN 0-07-028472-5

and concern for another

-*Presence*: deeply experiencing the purpose of the team

Claiming

- *Goal/role alignment*: agreement on the outcome and the means for achieving it

- *Organisation support*: securing the necessary resources from the organisation

-*Competence*: developing skills and awareness needed to perform team roles

Celebrating

-*Appreciation*: feeling recognized and acknowledged

-*Energy*: experiencing vitality and aliveness

- *Wonder*: experiencing an unbounded sense of possibility

Letting Go

-*Disclosure*: revealing previously suppressed attitudes and opinions

-*Constructive feedback*: providing forthright responses that encourage growth)

-*Completion*: feeling a sense of freedom when everything has been said

-*Callousness*: being insensitive and harsh

-*Aridness*: feeling barren and empty, without a sense of purpose

Claiming

-*Nonalignment*: disagreeing about the outcome and means for achieving it

-*Non-support*: being unable to secure the necessary resources from the organisation

-*Deficiency*: not having the skills and awareness needed to perform team roles

Celebrating

-*No appreciation*: not feeling recognised and acknowledged

-*Burnout*: feeling used up and ineffective in the team

-*Disenchantment*: feeling repelled and put out

Letting Go

-*Withheld communication*: concealing attitudes and opinions from others

-*Criticism*: offering unsupportive critical feedback

-*Incompletion*: feeling regretful about withholding communications

Heermann argues that the dynamic of team growth is a continual ebb and flow, as the team embraces and builds on consonances while acknowledging and working through dissonances as they occur.

CONGRUENT RESPONSE

In highly effective teams congruency is always evident. It is described below.

Word Used (Real)	Affect (Consistent with words)	Behaviour	Inner Experience	Psychological Effects
Words match the body position, the voice tone and the inner feelings Words show an awareness of feelings	Expressions flow	Alive Creative Unique Competent	Harmony Balance High self-awareness	Healthy

Similarly there are a number of well know and common sense elements of effective teams. These are described below.

Balanced Roles

One of the great strengths of the effective team is in its blend of different talents and abilities - this only happens if the team membership is right and therefore balanced. This is often related to the styles or modes people operate in, rather than a particular expertise they may have.

Remember that each of the roles is not an individual member. Some individuals may act almost exclusively in one mode or other, but many members will take on several roles:

Supporter

Makes people feel at ease, and builds morale. Wants people to work in the right conditions. Someone to turn to for advice.

Leader

Not always the same person. It may be different leaders for different situations. Seen as the one who identifies strengths and weaknesses, determines contribution, leads the setting of objectives, and monitoring of performance. Main role is to get the best out of everyone.

Challenger

Usually adopts an unconventional approach, and will look afresh at what the team is doing. Will challenge the accepted order, and can be accused of rocking the boat. Without a challenger, the team may become complacent without stimulus to review itself radically.

Expert

These people provide expert opinion in a professional field. They make little other contribution, and are therefore often part-time members - but necessary to give a partly or wholly independent view in their particular field.

Ambassador

The one in the team who "goes abroad" and builds external relationships with other teams. An outgoing person, this is the team's PR representative - a bridge builder who knows the right people.

Reviewer

Full of objective observations about the way that the team is working. This character helps the team perform better in the future by constantly reviewing the past. Difficult to do, and often given to an external consultant. However the hallmark of highly successful teams is the presence of internal review.

Judge

Listens, questions and ponders. May stay out of the argument and doesn't see him/herself as advocate for one view or another. Concerned that all sides be properly considered, and will not be rushed. Good at stopping others being carried away with their own enthusiasm.

Innovator

Uses imagination to the full. Ideas person, always suggesting new ways to do things, or builds on others' ideas. Capacity to grapple with complex problems, and provides new approaches with vision and ingenuity.

Diplomat

High influencing skills, and a good negotiator. Plays a large part in steering the team towards successful outcomes. Tries to ensure that solutions are acceptable to all. Can be accused of papering over the cracks, and going for the possible, rather than the ideal solution. In difficult times, the diplomat finds the way through the minefield.

Conformer

Adopts a co-operative stance - always ready to help out, and fill in gaps, he/she helps others feel at ease. Often with a broad experience and able to do many jobs in many areas. Invaluable as a fixer.

Output Pusher

Self-motivated achiever with persistent drive to see tangible results. The team's target person. A progress chaser can be abrasive with those who fail.

Quality controller

A check on the output pusher. If a job is worth doing it is worth doing well. Committed to Quality 100% - is the conscience of the team, looking for quality of relationships as well as product.

Openness & Confrontation

In strong teams members need to be able to:

- State their views
- Air their differences of opinion
- Raise interests and problems
- Without fear of retaliation
- Without fear of ridicule

Here the team does not avoid issues; it confronts them fairly and squarely. Communication is candid and honest and people share experience, views and feelings.

Feedback is crucial. It takes account of the needs of the giver and the receiver. It describes events, rather than evaluates them and concentrates on things the receiver can do something about. It is specific and is given as soon after the event as possible. It is vital to check that feedback is understood.

In effective teams knowledge of self is evident. People's true strengths and weaknesses are known, valued and admitted. Support is requested easily and help is forthcoming.

Conflict is handled constructively as this creates understanding. Positive conflict deals with facts and encourages people to talk through issues and problems.

When team members are listening actively to each other they do not:

- Try to solve the teller's problem
- Interrupt the flow of speech
- Change the subject
- Generalise the teller's problem
- Jump to conclusions and make interpretations:
- Move mentally and/or emotionally away from the topic
- Say-"the same thing happened to me" or similar:
- Fill silences or feel the need to do so
- Raise your own issues and concerns
- Give less than full attention
- Jump to conclusions about others behaviour e.g. "irrational.
- Form inattentive postures.

Further crucial listening skills involve:

- Appropriate acknowledgements of what others are saying.
- Accurate assessment of the person's feelings at the time and your response to them.
- Sensitivity in rating logical content against emotion or feelings.

Clear Goals and Objectives

No group of people is likely to be effective until it knows what it wants to achieve. People are only likely to be committed to objectives if they feel some identity and ownership of them. However, there is often a large gap between a series of personal objectives, and the objectives of the team. Similarly problems can arise where Managers and subordinates don't share a clear understanding of what is expected leading to different standards being expected from each side.

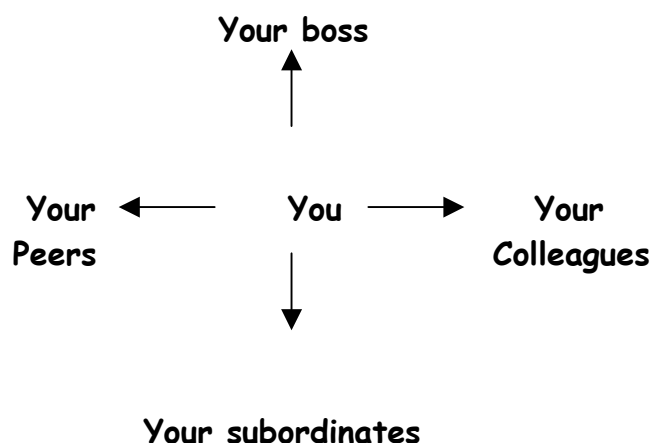
The typical wisdom around good team objectives is as follows.

- Ask the question "why" to every objective.
- Agree on what might be meaningless work.
- Conceive them democratically
- Emphasise results achieved, rather than "things to do".
- Make them realistic.
- Make them specific.
- Give them a time-scale and measures
- Review them regularly - as the environment changes respond accordingly.

Support and Trust

This is best achieved when team members feel they don't have to protect their territory or function and can talk freely about their fears and problems. To support means to strengthen by assistance. It is not sympathy. People can only provide support and trust if they feel people are frank and open. Support makes people feel wanted

Support and trust needs to be in 4 directions:



It can be improved through:

- Honest dealing
- Not going behind people's backs
- Pragmatism
- The art of the possible - finding ways of making things happen in spite of difficulties
- Not sticking to the ivory tower
- Consistency in behaviour
- Competency
- Loyalty
- Leader who supports follower, through thick and thin.
- Keeping recriminations internal and defending the team publicly come what may.

This support is nurtured when leaders praise, appreciate, listen, encourage and deal with the issues that people see as important.

Co-operation and Conflict.

Effective teams:

- Put the team's objectives before individual ones
- Share the rewards for the team's efforts
- Have individuals who are committed and willing to be involved in the work they do
- Trust each other's ability
- Share information
- Utilise all abilities, knowledge and experience
- Work through conflict and see it as an inevitable and integral part of change
- Use healthy conflict as problem avoiding.

Resolving unhelpful conflict can mean:

- Examining what is causing the trouble
- Bringing the parties together to analyse and discuss the issue
- Clarify expectations and roles
- Using constructive criticism and feedback
- Using third parties
- Getting common agreement with both sides committed

Sound Procedures

Effective teams think results first, methods second but realise that sound methods and decision-making result in achievement. They can collect information quickly and discuss alternatives openly.

There are a few useful test questions about decision-making in a team that need to be answered honestly, particularly from the leader's perspective.

- "I will make the decisions around here"
- "I will seek your opinion before I decide"
- "I take decisions with the people of my choice"
- "We take the decisions"

Good team decision making encompasses:

- A clear understand of why the decision is being taken
- A sound analysis of the problem
- An examination of all the alternatives, and consequences
- Well thought through implementation
- Appropriate review, evaluation and adjustment

A typical analysis of team decision making may involve the following.

How is decision-making accomplished?

- Formal/informal?
- What levels?
- Are people really involved?
- Information collected properly?
- Do people have the right information?
- Gossip/rumour?
- Are there "power groups"?

How are decisions implemented?

- Do the implementers have the authority?
- Effectively communicated?
- Right resources?
- Resources present and co-ordinated?
- People resistant to change?

How are decisions reviewed?

- Who?
- How often?
- Does the review change anything?

Appropriate Leadership

Leadership is to a significant extent the result of assumptions the manager makes about his/her people. For example; are they fundamentally lazy, having to be pushed to work? Are they only interested in their own benefit? Do they respond best to discipline and control? Do they work better when punished? Are they interested in the job or welfare of the company? Are they willing to work, if work is meaningful? Are they basically honest? Do they take an active interest in their team? Do they respond best to responsibility and "headroom?"

Do they value honest praise and resent excessive punishment? Are they interested in quality of working life, as well as private life?

Further good team leaders delegate effectively. They analyse the areas of accountability and determine what is possible to delegate. They consider who could tackle it and who would want to. They allow for training and development and give full authority, responsibility and support.

Typically a successful team leader:

- Is true to his/her own beliefs
- Uses delegation to aid achievement and development
- Is clear about standards
- Is willing to give and receive trust and loyalty
- Has the personal strength to maintain integrity
- Is receptive to people's hopes, needs and dignity
- Faces facts honestly and squarely
- Encourages personal AND team development
- Establishes sound processes and procedures
- Tries to make work happy and rewarding

Regular Review

Good teams look at the way their team works - how it makes decisions, deals with conflict and so on. Regular review can improve performance by:

- Ensuring that there is adequate effort on planning
- Improving decision making
- Increase support, trust and honesty
- Clarifying objectives
- Identifying development needs and opportunities
- Increasing effectiveness of team leadership
- Making meetings more productive and enjoyable
- Decreasing fire fighting
- Increasing involvement and commitment

Individual Development

Effective teams seek to pool the skills of each individual to produce better team results. Obviously, developed individuals contribute more effectively to team performance. Most organisations have a competency profile that forms the basis of the capability assessment.

Sound Inter-Group Relations

Others can sometimes perceive cohesive teams as a threat, yet really effective teams reach out to other teams; ensure that their efforts are well supported and that help is forthcoming when needed.

Effective external relationships:

- Ensure that the actions and decisions of team are communicated and understood.
- Try to understand the other team's point of view
- Continually seeking ways of working with other teams
- Are not rigid in defending team boundaries
- Review and amend boundaries from time-to-time
- Positively anticipate inter-team problems before they arise
- Listening to others
- Using others as a source of ideas and comparison
- Understand and utilise the differences in people

Internal barriers may be overcome by:

Bringing different teams and departments together physically - get them to plan together

Networking inside and outside of work with members of other teams

Getting to know new team members in other teams quickly

Making sure that new team members liaise quickly with other groups

Setting up joint issues meetings

Arranging joint training and development activities

Developing win-win situations

Improving channels of communication

Good Communications

This operates at three levels.

Individuals communicating effectively

Teams communicating effectively

Organisations communicating effectively

A shopping list of communication techniques is set out below.

Attitude surveys

Cultural audits

Appraisal and counselling

Mass communications

Cascading

Getting to know others

Representatives

Systematic planning

Working environment

Eliminate unearned status symbols

Common values clarified

With an effective team, good communication is necessary between members of different disciplines. Within teams there will be managers, who direct, control and co-ordinate, operators, who perform the central task, analysts who innovate and rationalise, support staff, who support the central task.

Communication is also a personal skill. Good communicators:

- Sense their strengths and weaknesses
- Show concern for their impact on others
- Have interpersonal awareness
- Are good listeners
- Are sure in their own beliefs and values
- Have the ability to deal with a variety of people
- Have the ability to deal with variety of situations
- Have presence and chairmanship
- Are assertive
- Can write well

Stewardship

A team that acts a custodian or steward for the organisation, both presently and into the future, is characterised as follows.

- Decisions are made as a team
- When challenged as a team, the team responds in one voice
- All members' own decisions
- There is a primary commitment of the team to the organisation
- Clients are taken into account before we make the decisions
- Team members put the organisation before self-interest
- The team put the organisation before the region or function
- The team produces a collective responsibility for the outcomes of their actions.

McBER RESEARCH 2000

During 2000, Hay/McBer has jointly conducted research with Harvard University on what it takes to be an outstanding leadership team. What they have found is that people, especially the team leaders are central to the team's success.

Key Findings

1. Outstanding leadership teams are REAL teams.

What is a real team and why does it matter for leadership? As defined by Dr. Richard Hackman of Harvard University, a real team must have two key characteristics. First, the team must have a collective task that demands a high level of interdependency among its members: something that can only be accomplished together. Second, a team must have clear and stable boundaries: it is easy to tell who is and is not a team member, and membership is not constantly changing.

Outstanding leadership teams fit this criterion: they know who they are and hold themselves jointly accountable for a collective task. They define this collective task to be:

- **Direction:** establish an enduring mission, vision, and goals for the organisation;
- **Strategy:** develop and monitor a strategic plan to carry out the mission in a rapidly changing environment; and
- **Resources:** facilitate the acquisition, deployment, and development of resources to execute the strategy.

Teams that achieved these things generated better results for their organisation: being a real team matters, especially at the top.

2. Leaders of outstanding teams are not necessarily charismatic leaders.

Leaders of outstanding teams rely less on personal appeal than do charismatic organisational leaders. Instead, leaders of outstanding teams leverage the talent of their people to drive success. As a result, though, they can be perceived as fading into the background, a perception that is intensified because they often promote their team rather than themselves.

The organisational implications of this are startling: you cannot assume that your charismatic leaders will produce an outstanding team. Charismatic leaders are bigger than life. They often overshadow their team and leave little room for their team to make a contribution.

3. Leaders of outstanding teams have unique characteristics.

What leaders of outstanding teams do best is leverage and maximize team strengths. They do this by drawing on different managerial styles than charismatic leaders, relying more on styles that promote dialogue and discussion such as the Authoritative, Affiliative, Democratic, and Coaching style. They avoid styles that position the leader as the ultimate authority the 'my way or the highway' tone of the Coercive style, realizing that this will shut down communication within the team and negatively impact performance.

The competencies of leaders of outstanding teams, similarly, are not those of the charismatic leader. Instead, the team leader's competencies enable him or her to energize and improve the performance of the team by:

- Holding team members accountable for not just what they do, but how they behave;
- Linking the team and its purpose to the broader organisation; and
- Establishing and prioritising team action.

This unique set of characteristics allows leaders to focus on what really matters for superior performance.

3. Leaders of outstanding teams focus on what really matters: five key conditions.

It is not easy to be the leader of an outstanding team: he or she must focus on many tasks. What we have learned, though, is that leaders of outstanding teams monitor and manage five key conditions that make the greatest difference to performance.

To launch a high-performing leadership team - or to re-energize an existing one - a leader must focus on several conditions

Articulate a clear and compelling *direction* for the team.

Outstanding leadership teams have a crystal clear sense of direction: they know exactly where they are going, and why. This allows them to stay focused and move forward despite changes in the company or the industry.

Establish a team *structure* that helps the team do its work.

Outstanding leadership teams are structured in a way that supports the accomplishment of their collective task. Small size and the necessary skill set are a key part of his structure; even more important are clear norms or standards of behaviour. Norm clarity enhances the cohesiveness of team members, allowing them to focus on their collective task rather than on the conflicts, which inevitably occur in any group.

Select the best *people* for the team, and keep them motivated.

People play an immense role in the success or failure of the team. Leaders of outstanding teams realize this, and select members who will enable the team to function at its peak: not necessarily the smartest people, but those who will strengthen and improve the team. Once these people are on board, leaders of outstanding teams keep them engaged by involving them fully in the collective team task. This also ensures that the skills of team members are used effectively, freeing the team leader from the burden of being the best and the brightest.

Once these three conditions are in place, leaders of outstanding teams focus on two conditions that enable the team to function well over time: support systems and team development.

Provide ongoing organisational *support*.

Outstanding leadership teams get more support from the organisation than typical teams. Great teams are rewarded as a team rather than as individuals, underscoring the reality that they are jointly accountable for success. They also receive more education and material resources, enhancing their ability to work toward their goal without distraction. Here again, the leader plays a key role in determining what kind of support the team needs and where it can be found in the organisation.

Provide expert *coaching*.

Finally, outstanding leadership teams receive more development than typical teams, allowing them to learn from their experiences and improve over time. They discuss how best to approach a problem or issue together and, once the impact of their decision or action is known, they debrief the lessons they have learned. The leader plays a key role in ensuring that these discussions occur, and in creating a climate that supports learning.

4. Leadership should be shared, but there are some things *only* the leader can do.

Not all leadership roles should be shared on a leadership team. There are two roles that the designated leader can do best: establish a clear direction and ensure that norms are maintained.

Establishing a clear direction is a critical element to team effectiveness, and only the leader can provide this direction. Leadership teams are, after all, composed of people who are themselves leaders. When the designated team leader does not provide a clear direction, members begin to vie with each other to do so. The inevitable result is confusion about direction, lack of focus, and ultimately a breakdown in team performance.

Likewise, the leader has a responsibility to assure norm clarity and adherence to these standards of behaviour. If the leader does not hold members accountable to norms, even when it is unpleasant or difficult to do so, the team's understanding of what is acceptable and what is not breaks down. Once again, team members will step in to fill the void, diverting attention from the goal to the internal workings of the team. The result: poor performance.

5. Members of outstanding teams are not smarter, but more *emotionally intelligent*.

Members of outstanding teams are not smarter, more driven, or more committed to their team's success than members of typical teams. Leaders often focus on these characteristics, but they are not sufficient for success. Instead, members of outstanding teams have emotional intelligence: they show the qualities of interpersonal sensitivity and integrity.

Interpersonal sensitivity allows members to hear each other's concerns, ideas, and issues, improving the communication that so many teams lack. Integrity creates the trust, which is a necessary prerequisite for outstanding team performance. Members of outstanding teams know that when other members commit to a decision, they will follow through and defend it to the rest of the organisation, even if they argued against it in the private meeting. This emotional intelligence supports the crucial norms of open communication and honesty.

Building Successful Leadership Teams

Organisations that build outstanding leadership teams will have a competitive advantage in the complex and volatile markets of the 21st century. In order to build these teams, three key questions should be asked:

1. Is the leadership team a real team: do the members share a common purpose and depend on each other to accomplish it?
2. Is the leader of the team leveraging the team's ability by managing the five conditions for team success, especially clarity of direction and norms?
3. Are the members of the team emotionally intelligent?

If these questions can be answered in the affirmative, your business will have a much greater chance of competing successfully in the economies of the next millennium.

DGL International

December 2001