



Team Up!

Creating High Performance Teams

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The Center Consulting Group is passionate about advancing leadership and organizational health. We believe this article on creating high performing teams will be a helpful resource for you and your team. As an extension of our vision of advancing organizational health, we are providing this resource without charge.

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WHY TEAMS?

Have you ever noticed how most titles for organizational leadership are singular – referring to only one person? For example, businesses often mention the president of the company. Nonprofits commonly use executive director when describing their top person. Churches most often use senior pastor. Sports teams have a general manager. These all refer to just one person. This is not necessarily a problem since it has been historically common to have one person defined as a leader and it can certainly make organizational life more uniform and efficient. However, regardless of whether you have one person at the top or you have a team of people who share leadership, today's complexity necessitates plurality. In other words, if you want to succeed, you will definitely need a team of skilled people who are working together. One talented leader is no longer sufficient.

There is an often quoted passage from the Old Testament book Ecclesiastes that sheds light on the practical benefit of teamwork and interdependency.



“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Why team up? As explained in Ecclesiastes, some of the benefits include:

1. Higher performance
2. Better decisions
3. Greater support for one another
4. Better quality of life

By intentionally creating high functioning teams, your organization can experience these benefits.

WHEN TEAMS CAN BE A HINDRANCE

While we believe effective teaming is a vital part of a successful organization, there are times when teams can be more of a hindrance than a help. Here are a few examples:

Groupthink. Groupthink happens when a group’s interactions and dynamics bring about either conformity or fear of conflict and punishment which can result in perceived agreement rather than actual agreement. The outcome is often that the team’s decision becomes less desirable than the individual’s decision.

Weak members. A team that has a weak member is like a chain that has a weak link. It can weaken the performance of the whole team and hold back the higher performing members. In addition, if this goes on too long, your highest performing members will eventually look for a new team!



Poor use of time. Teams are not the best at solving simple problems. In fact, it can become expensive if you have a lot of staff hours being invested into a simple problem. It can also be frustrating to team members since they see the inefficiency of it.

COMMON LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES

While we believe that teaming up is a vital part of building a highly effective and healthy organization, today's organizational leadership structures utilize teams to differing levels.

POSITIONAL AUTHORITY MODEL	One top leader based on title/position
LOW	TEAM FACTOR
CHALLENGES	<p>Leader may lack range of skills needed</p> <p>Staff may desire collaboration</p>

1. The positional authority model. In this model, one leader is considered the top person based upon his or her position or title. This is the most common model especially among more traditional and established organizations.

Team factor: Low dependence on team

Greatest challenges: The complex nature of organizational leadership today makes it increasingly difficult for the autocratic, singular leader to have all the skills necessary to successfully lead an organization into the future. In addition, highly skilled staff, especially those who are younger, are not as likely to desire to be told what to do but would rather work collaboratively toward a shared vision and future.

CHARISMATIC LEADER MODEL	One influential person shapes the direction
LOW	TEAM FACTOR
CHALLENGES	<p>Few skilled charismatic leaders to choose from</p> <p>Possibility for the leader to become narcissistic</p>

2. The charismatic leader model. In this model, one highly influential and inspirational person is the shaping influence in setting direction and leading the organization. This is especially common in new or fast-growing organizations with influential founders.

Team factor: Low dependence on team

Greatest challenges: There are a limited number of highly skilled charismatic leaders from which to choose. Such gifted leaders can



choose from the best, largest, and highest paying opportunities, making it difficult for the average organization to recruit one of them. And, should such a leader become narcissistic, there can be serious consequences.

COACH/TEAM MODEL One point leader with authority but works collaboratively

MODERATE TEAM FACTOR

CHALLENGES
No accountability for the leader
No authority for the team

3. Coach/team model. In this model, a point leader has authority over what is happening but generally works collaboratively with his or her team to accomplish the vision.

Team factor: Moderate dependence on team

Greatest challenges: While this model can result in better collaboration, the top leader (coach) does not have to follow the advice of the team and the team does not have authority to prevent or correct poor decisions made by the leader.

SHARED AUTHORITY MODEL 2-4 leaders with equal authority over the vision

HIGH TEAM FACTOR

CHALLENGES
Requires high trust
No member can desire to be alpha
Decision-making can be slow

4. The shared authority model. This model has anywhere from two to four leaders who have equal authority and work collaboratively to develop vision and direction as well as oversee staff in the departments for which they are responsible.

Team factor: High dependence on team

Greatest challenges: Requires high levels of trust and fit. No one member can strongly desire to be the “alpha” or top leader. In addition, decision-making can be slow and/or confusing.

Remember, there are no perfect leadership models. Most models can succeed or fail depending on the skills, attitude and relational health of the individuals filling the position(s).



6 CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS

Every effective leadership team needs the right elements to be successful. The following list includes the top six characteristics of high performing teams.



SHARE VISION

1. Share Vision

How would you like to get on a plane and have everyone advocating for going to different locations? The result would be chaos and frustration! A high performing team always has a shared vision and shared priorities.

While they may not agree on every nuance, this shared vision unifies them and provides focus for their energy.

“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision; the ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.” – Andrew Carnegie

2. Love Work

If you love what you do and why you do it, you will reflect a passion for it. I believe that leaders and team members would do better to assess passion for the work rather than just count hours on the job. We find that almost all of the leaders we have worked with who are successful in what they are doing manifest an energy or passion for it. In other words, they love what they do! Not every part of it and not every moment, but if you absolutely love 75% or more of what you do, you will feel less stress, complain less about your job, and wake up energized to get to it. Far too many leaders are more passionate about their hobbies than the organization’s vision. Team members who love their work add great value.



LOVE WORK

“The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.” – Mark Twain

3. Work Hard

Pick an expert in any field and you will find they have invested extraordinary hours of study and practice. Athlete. Surgeon. Musician. If they are world class, they have invested well over 10,000 hours of practice. This is how



WORK HARD



leaders feel when they work hard at something for which they are passionate. If someone is complaining about the work, it sometimes means:

- He may be working at something he does not love
- His tank is being drained by personal issues in his life
- He has a low level of endurance or stamina

Remember, one team member that does not work hard can negatively impact the morale and performance of the whole team.

“It’s all hard work. Nothing comes easy. But I have a lot of fun!” – Rupert Murdoch, founder and CEO of one of the largest news conglomerates



STAY SHARP

4. Stay Sharp

In creating a high performing team, you need a diversity of skills and each team member’s commitment to continually improve those skills. Your value to the team is influenced by how well you stay on top of your professional skills. When you allow them to slip, your value to the team is diminished and you hinder the impact of the organization. Research has shown that experts, or those who are the best of the best, are four times as productive as an average member of the team.

There is nothing normal or natural about expertise. It requires purposeful effort, which is another phrase for hard work! You know you have it when you see someone consistently perform far above those around him/her.



COMMUNICATE
OFTEN

5. Communicate Often

I have never once heard a leader or team be accused of over-communicating. Not once! We may feel we have shared the right information in the right volume, but we often forget that people are overwhelmed with messages and most people really are not very good listeners! The same is often true on leadership teams. Research at MIT’s Human Dynamics Lab found that high performing team members balance the amount they talk and listen.



Regardless of using email, social media, or face-to-face communication, it takes time to talk. But it is time well worth it since such communication helps build and maintain shared understanding and trust. People often ask, “How can a team make a decision?” The answer is rather simple: collaboratively. High performing leadership teams know how to fight well since passion and personality will sometimes lead to disagreement. Such disagreements, when taking place upon a foundation of relationship, respect and trust, are very beneficial for the overall effectiveness of the team.

“Two monologues do not make a dialogue.” – Jeff Daly



RELATE WELL

6. Relate Well

The foundation for any strong relationship is trust and respect, and it is critical that a team relates well to one another. Respect and trust are formed by consistently demonstrating character and competency. In other words, trust is the reliance or confidence that other members of the team will generally meet the expectations we have of them. The more we successfully meet these expectations, the more others will perceive us through the filter of “this is a trustworthy person.” Distrust develops when we fail to live up to the expectations others have of us. As distrust becomes embedded, it then becomes a filter through which many other actions or behaviors are judged. It takes time to form deep trust and respect. It requires intentional effort to create trust, and it requires almost no effort to lose it!

When selecting a high performing leadership team, you not only must determine how capable each individual is, but also how effective he/she will be with the collective team. An effective leadership team requires unity of vision and also necessitates a level of differentiation; each person brings a different set of skills and perspectives that work together. But it is also the job of each team member to help set the tone of unity by manifesting good emotional and relational skills. The following quote illustrates the importance of unity and emotional intelligence in team function:



“In the last few decades, much research has proven the superiority of group decision-making over that of even the brightest individual in the group. There is one exception to this rule. If the group lacks harmony or the ability to cooperate, decision-making quality and speed suffer. Research at Cambridge University found that even groups comprising brilliant individuals will make bad decisions if the group disintegrates into bickering, interpersonal rivalry, or power plays. In short, groups are smarter than individuals only when they exhibit the qualities of emotional intelligence. Everyone in the group contributes to the overall level of emotional intelligence, but the leader holds special sway in this regard. Emotions are contagious and it’s natural for people to pay attention to the leader’s feelings and behavior. So, very often it is the group leader who sets the tone and helps to create the group’s emotional reality – how it feels to be a part of the team. A leader skilled in collaboration can keep resonance high and thus ensure that the group’s decisions will be worth the effort of meeting. Such leaders know how to balance a team’s focus on the task at hand with attention to the relationships among the team members. They naturally create a friendly, cooperative climate in the room, a climate that fosters a positive outlook on the future.”

– Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence*, 2013

MARKERS OF TEAM COHESION

Teaming up with the right people focused on the right vision can produce life-changing outcomes and be a whole lot of fun along the journey. When a team is performing at its best, it has resonance. The markers of team cohesion include:

- Trust and confidence
- Shared vision
- Joy, fun and celebration
- True sense of “we”
- Avoidance of triangulation
- Minimal undiscussed issues
- Minimal conflict and tension
- Minimal relational avoidance

Team cohesion both feels good to the team members and produces good results. But every team will eventually have to face some challenges. The Center consultants are experts at helping good teams become even better as well as helping struggling teams diagnose and resolve challenges. If we can help you in your effort to team up, please contact us!



HOW HEALTHY IS YOUR TEAM PERFORMANCE?



SHARE VISION: Team members possess a shared vision and shared priorities



LOVE WORK: Team members display passion and energy for their work



WORK HARD: Team members diligently invest energy and time into their work



STAY SHARP: Team members continually work to enhance their skills



COMMUNICATE OFTEN: Team members balance the amount they talk and listen



RELATE WELL: Team members trust and respect one another

Your Score:

_____ Share Vision

_____ Love Work

_____ Work Hard

_____ Stay Sharp

_____ Communicate Often

_____ Relate Well

_____ **Your Total**

39 or below: Likelihood of lower team performance

40-49: Likelihood of moderate team performance

50-60: Likelihood of higher team performance



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