Essentials

Teams

Teams have existed since humans began living in social groupings. Most people assume they know how teams work – after all, they have had first-hand experiences all their life – family, baseball teams, scouts and project teams at work. Despite this and the growing recognition of what teams offer in the workplace, the collective impact of teams on the performance of an organization is woefully underexploited.

"It is the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) that those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed."
- Charles Darwin

What is a team? When Use a Team versus Individual?

Katzenbach and Smith in *Wisdom of Teams* define a team as:

"a small number of people who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves accountable.'

Teams outperform individuals when*:
- The task is complex and/or cross functional;
- Creativity is needed;
- The path forward is unclear;
- Efficient use of resources is needed;
- Fast learning is necessary; and
- High commitment is desirable for implementation and achievement of results.

Lessons on Team Performance

Katzenbach and Smith studied teams to identify four key lessons for maximum performance:

1. No team arises without a challenge meaningful to those involved. Teamwork is not the same thing as a team. A common set of demanding performance goals considered important by the group will lead, most of the time, to both performance and a team. Performance is the primary objective; a team remains the means, not the end.

2. Leaders can foster performance best by building a strong performance ethic rather than by establishing a team environment alone. Simply organizing around teams and calling groups 'teams' will not generate the same results as a true team.

3. Biases toward individualism exist, but do not need to get in the way of team performance. Most of us grew up with a strong sense of individual responsibility. Parents, teachers, coaches and other leaders have shaped our views and focus on individual accomplishment; rugged individualism is highly valued in US society. Building shared value and commitment are key to ensuring individualism does not get in the way.

3

4. Discipline within the team and across the organization creates the conditions for team performance. Groups become teams through disciplined action. They shape a common purpose, agree on goals, defining a working approach and develop complementary skills, and hold themselves accountable for results.

Team Size

So, what is the right size for a team to form? General recommendation is that a team be composed of representatives of the areas impacted by the problem and potential solution. More than 10 people is unwieldy – can't even agree on a time and place to meet; less than 4 and team may not possess the diversity of thought and experience needed to avoid 'groupthink.' Larger groups (25-50) can theoretically become a team, but they usually break into sub-teams.

Key Team Disciplines

Eight key disciplines have been found to improve team effectiveness:

1. **Shared purpose**. Purpose gives a team focus and direction. When the purpose is something clearly important to the individuals, they are more likely to feel their time is well spent. If the purpose is given to the team by leadership, the team must still spend time building common understanding, ownership and commitment to the purpose. If not specified, the best teams invest time up front exploring, shaping and agreeing on a purpose that belongs to them individually and collectively.

2. **Commitment to team**. Team members buy-in to the decisions and standards of the team, where buy-in is honest emotional support, not consensus. Waiting for everyone to agree is a recipe for mediocrity, delay and frustration. This requires clarity. Clarity is the removal of assumptions and ambiguity from a situation. Real clarity can only be achieved when team members can freely share ideas, thoughts and concerns in an unfiltered debate – productive conflict. Most people don't need to 'get their own way' in order to buy-in, they simply need to be heard. This type of commitment extends beyond team meetings and to communications with the rest of the organization. Committed teams take the time to clarify their agreements and action plans so their communication is consistent when they interact with others outside the team.

3. **Leverage capabilities**. Teams develop and leverage a mix of skills, including:
   - Technical/functional expertise
   - Problem-solving skills
   - Interpersonal skills
   No one team will have all the needed skills at the outset, but will have within it the capability to develop or obtain the skills needed through personal learning and development and reaching out to others in the organization for support.

4. **Communication.** As we've shared in [previous posts](#) on communication, communication is critical to execution, change management and organization culture. Communication within the team and outside the team are critical to team success. Team communication includes:

   - Team charter – a document that describes in clear, measurable terms the task the team is to accomplish, scope, timelines and membership. The team operate within the framework of the charter.

Project Title:			
Project Description:			
Business Linkage:			
Expected Results:			
Metric:			
Expected Financial Impact:	EVA $	IRR	NPV
Project Start Date:		Est. Completion Date:	

Team Members			
Employee Name	Expertise	Employee Name	Expertise

| Required Signatures			
Project Champion:		Date:	
Team Leader:		Date:	

   - Team meeting notes – document team discussions and agreements during formal meetings
   - Team action plans – document team plans for execution – what, who, when, how

   The meeting notes and action plans form the team 'memory.'

5. **Meeting Management**.   To continue to feel that time spent with the team is worth the effort, that time must be well spent through good meeting management.   Key are meeting roles, code of conduct, agenda and agreement to a decision-making process, conflict management and action planning.

Role	Responsibility
Meeting Leader	Sets agenda; keeps team focused on task at hand; ensures everyone participates.
Timekeeper	Watches the time allotted for each agenda item; notifies leader when nearing time.
Scribe	Makes ideas visible during the meeting.
Recorder	Takes notes and captures action items for follow-up after the meeting.
Process Monitor	Assures code of cooperation is followed during the meeting.

6. **Decision-making.** Effective teams intentionally decide how they will make decisions and then consistently use that method, recognizing the more involvement required for the method, the longer it will take to make the decision:

Decision Making Continuum
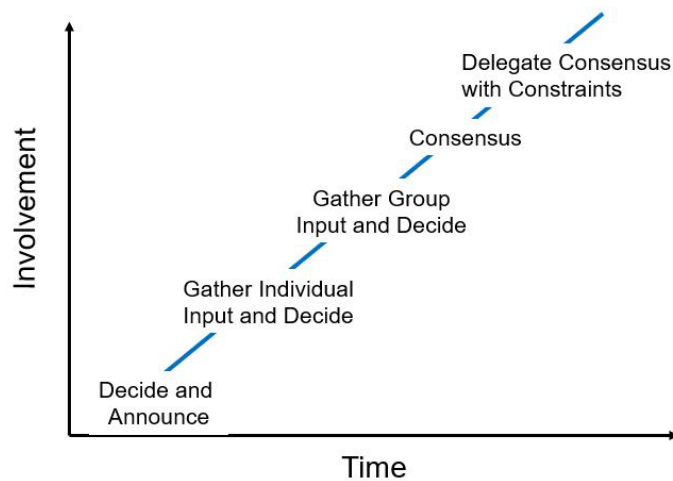
They also know when they are ready to make a decision, when they need to reach out to others for input, to reconsider or to stress-test their ideas.

Five tips for better meetings:
1) Know and communicate the purpose of the meeting – is it tactical or strategic? Brainstorming, debate issues, explore alternatives or make recommendation?
2) Clarify the stake – why is the meeting important?
3) Add drama by putting the most controversial topics first
4) Spend enough time to end with clarity and commitment; ending on time means little if the meeting ends without clarity and commitment.
5) Provoke conflict – hold productive debates to get to the bottom of issues.

7. **Conflict resolution**. Conflict is a fact of life in groups of people. It is simply a condition in which concerns of people appear incompatible; it is not good or bad in and of itself. Positive outcomes are possible when conflict creates deeper understanding of an issue; negative when it is not reconciled and results in poor decisions, deadlocks, wasted energy or apathy. It is therefore in the best interest of a team to learn to engage in productive debate – to find and hold the point between artificial harmony and mean-spirited attacks.

Conflict is actually a continuum:

Theoretically, the best place on the continuum is close to the middle. This is a point where a group is having productive debate without slipping into destructive territory. Even the best teams will occasionally step over the line. This is actually a good thing as long as the team is committed to working through it.

"**Conflict cannot survive without your participation**." - Wayne Dyer

In the heart of conflict automatic thoughts are put into our heads, no matter how irrational. These thoughts can lead to destructive responses such as arguing, gossiping/complaining about someone, belittling, being hypercritical, caving in, overpowering, defensiveness, passive aggression, dismissing others opinions, revenge, being overly dramatic, sabotage, exaggeration, sarcasm, exclusion, stonewalling, finger-pointing, or withdrawal.
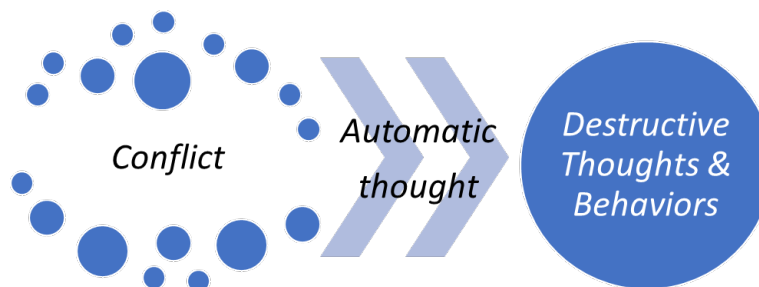

Key is to learn how to take a step back from the situation and make a productive response instead. Each time a team recovers from an incident of destructive conflict, it builds confidence that it can survive such an event, which builds trust. Trust is the foundation of creating a

7

cohesive team that is able to have productive debate, make decisions and commitments to one another, and hold one another accountable to results.

Stephen M.R. Covey defines 13 trust behaviors for building relationship trust:
1. Talk Straight
2. Demonstrate Respect
3. Create Transparency
4. Right Wrongs
5. Show Loyalty
6. Deliver Results
7. Get Better
8. Confront Reality
9. Clarify Expectations
10. Accountability
11. Listen First
12. Keep Commitments
13. Extend Trust

All 13 require a combination of character and competence. The first five primarily flow from character, the second five from competence and the last three are an equal mix of character and competence. The 13 behaviors work together to create balance; these behaviors exist on a continuum. Too much results in blind trust; too little results in distrust. The "sweet spot" is **Smart trust**:
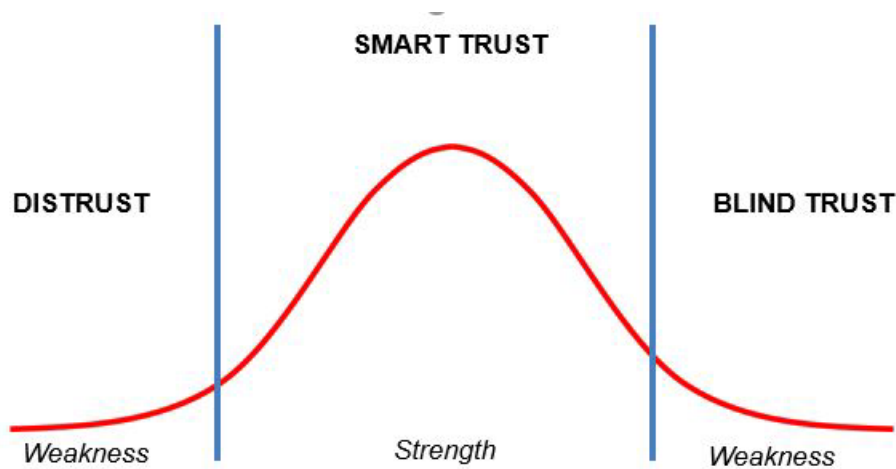
*Continuum of trust behaviors from: Covey, Stephen M.R, The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything. Free Press, 2006

Creativity, trust, and higher performance are possible outcomes of productive conflict. In order to teach a team to engage in productive conflict, it is important to understand everyone's viewpoints on and comfort levels with conflict as they can be radically different. Some people are comfortable screaming and shouting while others shutdown. A person's conflict style is determined by a number of factors – temperament, cultural background, and family norms.

One of the best ways to understand your own and others conflict profile is to use a profiling tool such as Myers-Biggs (MBTI) or Everything DiSC, both of which address how an individual's style reacts under stress. In addition, there is an instrument focused solely on identifying your conflict mode, the Thomas-Kilmann Instrument (TKI).

8. **Planning for Results.** With smart trust, productive debate/conflict, commitment and accountability systems a team can identify actions required to accomplish its goals. This typically involves creating an action plan which identifies who does what, when and how in a way that everyone understands their role, the interdependence between roles and tasks and allows team members to put aside their own ego and focus on team success. The discipline is documenting the plan, making it visible, and using it to track progress and hold one another accountable.

Accountability

> *"Accountability is the glue that bonds commitment to results"*
> - Will Craig

Accountability systems prompt and encourage people to keep promises and then monitor where those promises are kept. Accountability systems instill discipline to consistently repeat good practices. Elements of accountability systems that measure and communicate performance expectations include:
1. a select few (12-15) indicators of overall performance; including measures used to improve the process and make daily performance decisions;
2. forums for two-way transfer of information;
3. long-term scheduling;
4. a formal problem-solving process;
5. clear, defined work processes

These system elements are building blocks to communicate performance expectations and results across the organization. Such a system organizes all the small things that allow your organization's teams to accomplish anything.

These disciplines will not appear over night, but can be built over time when the team leader and members intentionally work at it. Recognize that all teams will go through natural stages of forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning:

|	Forming	Storming	Norming	Performing	Adjourning
Description	• Excitement, optimism, pride • Tentative attachment, suspicion, anxiety for work ahead • Watch leader for guidance/direction • Abstract discussions of concepts; • Impatience; some team members want to 'do it' • Uncertainty of others that want 'details' • Discussions of problems not relevant to project • Complaints about organization, tasks • Artificial harmony	• Resistance to methods of work and tasks • Fluctuations in team attitudes about project success • Arguing, defensiveness, factions leading to difficulty making decisions • Power struggles • Anxiety about unrealistic goals and excessive workload	• Sense of team cohesion, common spirit • Decision through consensus • High commitment to task • Belief in success of the project • Avoid conflict, sharing of personal information • Constructive criticism	• Members understand strengths and weaknesses of each other and team and how to leverage • Satisfaction with team progress • Close attachment to the team • Constructive self-change • Able to work through group problems and make decisions easily & quickly	• Team disbands, members redeployed • Satisfaction with job well done • Sadness, grief

Leading Team thru Phase	• Spend time together to get to know each other
	
	• Sponsors provide clear direction and purpose of team (charter)
	
	• Involve team in developing plans and roles
		• Build trust and confidence individually and collectively
		
		• Develop and implement meeting Code of Cooperation and Agenda
		
		• Set expectations on acceptable behaviors; apply consistently and equitably
			• Leverage team member expertise, experience, and gifts
			
			• Develop and implement Team Agreement for decision-making and accountability
			
			• Obtain deeper clarity on purpose, tasks, process to get results
			
			• Assign collaborative tasks, and responsibility based on clarity
				• Refine team meeting Code of Cooperation, Agenda, and Team Agreement based on team experience/ learnings to support collaboration
				
				• Help each other deal with change
				
				• Monitor work progress and celebrate successes.
					• Acknowledge each other; Celebrate
					
					• Evaluate project & team
					  • What worked; opportunities for improvement individually & collectively
					  • Capture lessons learned
					
					• Help sustain the results

What makes a good team member? Effective teams require a mix of skill: technical/functional, problem-solving and interpersonal. But is it just skill that make a good team player?

"Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."
- Henry Ford

According to Pat Lencioni, an ideal team player exhibits three virtues:

1. **Humility** is the important of the three virtues. Humble team members lack excessive ego or concerns about status. They are quick to point out the contributions of others and slow to draw attention to their own. This virtue aligns with the Work of Leaders behavior Execution: Feedback: Offer More Praise.
2. **Hungry** people are always looking for more- more to do, more to learn, more responsibility. They almost never have to be pushed by their manager to work harder or longer; they are self-motivated. Healthy hunger is a manageable, sustainable commitment to doing a job well and going above and beyond when it is required. This is analogous to the Work of Leaders best practice behavior Execution: Momentum: Driven.
3. **People Smart.** Being people smart refers to a person's common sense about people – interpersonally appropriate and aware of what is going on within the group. They have good intuition and judgement about the subtleties of group dynamics. This virtue aligns with the work of Leaders best practice behavior Alignment: Dialog: Receptive.

As Pat admits, these virtues are not new or earth shattering taken one-at-a-time. It is the combination of the three that makes them powerful. If just one is missing in a team member, teamwork can be more difficult, if not impossible.
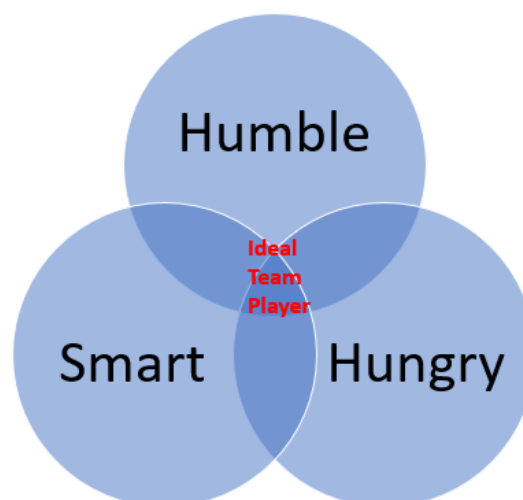
＊ From: Lencioni, Patrick. *The Ideal Team Player: How to Recognize and Cultivate the Three Essential virtues.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016

What happens if a team member only has one of the three?

Humble Only – this team member is pleasant, kind-hearted, unassuming, but does not feel or demonstrate a sense of urgency to get things done or have the ability to build relationships with others. They do not make waves but are left out of conversations and activities. Pat calls these team members "*Pawns*." The bottom line is that such team members will have little impact on team performance. Humble-only team member will survive long on teams that value artificial harmony and that don't demand performance from each member.

Hungry Only – this team member will be determined to get things done but with a focus on themselves and no understanding or concern for how they impact others. Pat calls these team members "*Bulldozers*." Hungry-only members can easily destroy a team but go unnoticed in organizations that place a high priority on results alone.

Smart-Only – this team member lacks humility and hunger but knows how to behave around others. They can be entertaining and likeable, but have little interest in the well-being of the team or results. Pat calls these team members "*Charmers*.". Bottom-line, they provide little contribution to the team.

What happens if a team member only has two of the three?

Humble and Hungry – Known as "*Accidental Mess Makers*" these team members generally want to serve he team and get results, but lack any understanding of how they impact the rest of the team and create interpersonal problems within the team.

Humble and Smart - "*Lovable Slackers*," these team members are adept at working with others and not looking for attention, but only do what is asked of them, rarely seeking more. They have limited passion and commitment to the work of the team and need motivation and constant oversight or will put a drag on the team.

Hungry and Smart – "*Skillful Politicians'* these team members are ambitious and so skilled at team dynamics they often appear humble, but in reality, they manipulate and scare other team members. These team members do well in organizations in which individual performance is valued over teamwork.
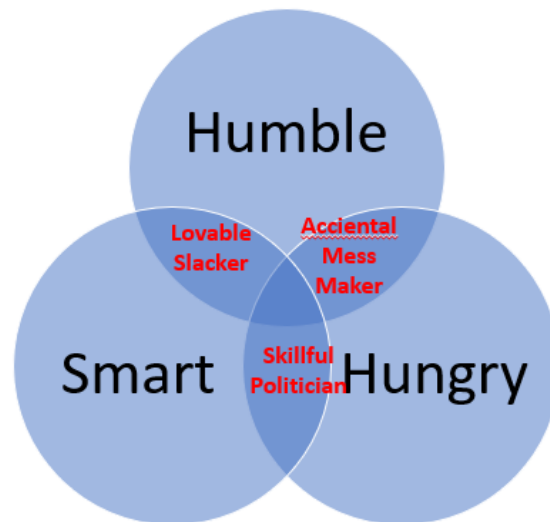
* From: Lencioni, Patrick. *The Ideal Team Player: How to Recognize and Cultivate the Three Essential virtues*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016

WARNING: It is not easy to identify these virtues and should not be done flippantly.

There are two areas where leaders should apply these three virtues:

1) <u>Hiring Team Members</u>. The most reliable way to ensure teamwork in your organization is to hire only ideal team players. Ask specific questions to tease out these virtues in candidates. Have a small group individually interview each candidate, share responses and observations. Don't ignore hunches as they will come back to haunt you later.

2) <u>Developing Team Members</u>. While the three virtues are character behaviors versus competence behaviors, they can be developed/improved.

   <u>Developing Humility</u> - This is the most nuanced of the three virtues and usually related to insecurity, maybe something rooted in childhood, family situation or a function of style. A manager may be able to help such an employee identify the root cause and admit the situation and then coach the employee to practice it. With practice, the employee may feel more comfortable with it.

   <u>Developing Hunger</u> - A manage should give such an employee immediate, unambiguous feedback, repeatedly regarding their hunger behavior, or lack thereof. Praise the employee publicly when they exhibit signs of hunger.

Developing Smarts – Make it clear to the employee that it is not about intention that they do not recognize group dynamics or their impact on others, but quickly and lovingly get their attention to the situation so they can see and practice it appropriately.

In all three cases, it is most important for the leader to model the behaviors themself.

Once employees are hired with the three virtues and provided coaching to further develop them how does a leader embed these virtues into the culture and further ensure team effectiveness and results?

1) Be explicit and bold with expectations for teamwork and the three virtues.
2) Catch people doing it and hold them up as examples.
3) Address any behaviors that violate these virtues, small and large. Provide opportunities for constructive learning.

References:
* *Everything DiSC Productive Conflict* training, John Wiley & Sons, 2017
* Folkman, joseph. "The 8 Great Accountability Skills for Business Success," Zenger-Folkman, November 2019.
* Karlgaard, Rich and Michael S. Malone. *Team Genius: The New Science of High-Performing Organizations*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2015.
* Katzenback, Jon R. and Douglas K. Smith. *The Wisdom of Teams*.   Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1993.
* Patrick Lencioni, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable. Jossey-Bass, 2002.
* Lencioni, Patrick. *Death by Meeting: A Leadership Fable*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2004.
* Lencioni, Patrick. *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A field Guide for Leaders, Managers and Facilitators*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
* Lencioni, Patrick. The *Ideal Team Player: How to Recognize and Cultivate the Three Essential Virtues*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016
* Pollack, Jeremy. "When Conflict Strikes, Don't Run the Other Way," *Industry Week*, July 11, 2019.
* Scholtes, Peter R., Brian L. joiner, and Barbara J. Streibel. *The Team Handbook, 2nd edition*. Madison, WI: Joiner & Associates, 1996.
* Thomas, Kenneth and Ralph H. Killmann. Thomas-Killmann Conflict Mode Instrument. CPP, Inc., 1974.
* Thomas, Kenneth and Gail Fann Thomas. *Introduction to Conflict and Teams: Enhancing team Performance using the TKI*. CPP, Inc., 2004.
* Thomas, Kenneth. *Introduction to Conflict Management: Improving Performance using the TKI*. CPP, Inc., 2002.
* Thorne, Jon. "Accountability is a System" *Industry Week*, February 23, 2016.

∗ Wallace, Doug. "Building Accountability to Drive Continuous Improvement," *Industry Week,* September 15, 2015Zenger, John H and Joseph R. Folkman. *The New Extraordinary Leader: Turning Good Managers into Great Leaders*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2020.

Transforming small US Manufacturing workplaces into places that work for all and COMPETE today and tomorrow