HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS

Survey

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ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS

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Real teams are rare.

(Katzenbach & Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, 2006).

That quote resonates deeply with me after over 25 years as a consultant in higher education. I have had the opportunity to work with many gifted and talented leaders on more than 200 campuses, but I can only identify a handful or two of high performing teams. I can identify effective senior cabinets, task forces, and committees, but a high performing team is as rare as a blue diamond.

To build an effective team is one of the most difficult and ennobling tasks a leader can undertake. It will take both aspiration and perspiration to build a stellar team. If you can accomplish this, the leverage you will achieve will be outstanding.

Unfortunately, on most teams, a great deal of talent goes unused (Sanaghan & Eberbach, 2013). The High Performing Teams Survey will enable you to find out exactly why your team is doing well or why your team is floundering.

How Do We Define an Effective Team?

There are many different definitions for teams (Katzenbach & Smith, 2001, 2005; Hackman, 2002, 2011; Lencioni, 2002; Sanaghan, Goldstein & Trump, 2008; Sanaghan & Eberbach, 2013), but they all share common themes: having a shared vision, small group size, holding each other accountable, high levels of trust.

Below, we are going to provide our own definition of a high performing team, informed by the research. This definition creates the foundation for the High Performing Teams Survey.

A high performing team has the following characteristics:

1. It has a shared, meaningful, and clearly understood purpose or "vision."

Everyone on the team understands what needs to be accomplished *together*. This might sound simple, but talented, motivated and high-energy people can wander all over the place and interpret the team's goals in dramatically different ways. Clarity of purpose (what we are here to do together) is something that requires close attention during the entire life of a team.

We added the term "meaningful" to this definition deliberately, because you don't assemble a team to accomplish a commonplace task. The purpose of a high performing team needs to be ennobling in some way. The purpose has to make a real difference in the life of the institution and add real value in powerful ways.

2. It has the "requisite" talent to be successful in accomplishing the purpose of the team.

This goes beyond "complementary" skills. You need the *right* kind of talent (e.g. the skills, experience, knowledge, creativity, and content expertise) in order to accomplish the shared purposes and goals of the team.

For example, if you put a team of Army Rangers in a surgical room to perform open-heart surgery, they may be enthusiastic and dedicated to the task, but there is a very good chance the patient will die. Conversely, if you put a surgical team on the field of battle, despite their expertise and intelligence, they will probably be killed. Talent is not enough, the *right* kind of talent is a critical factor (Katzenbach & Smith, 2005; Sanaghan & Eberbach, 2013).

3. Team members are "interdependent."

This means that they actually need each other in order to be successful in accomplishing their shared goals. If they don't need each other, they will never become a real team, and they might not need to become a team. There are lots of work groups and task forces that achieve good things without ever becoming a high performing team. On a high performing team, *everyone is needed*. Each team member brings his/her own special "gifts" to the table, which enables the team to accomplish great things. If these "gifts" are missing, the opportunity is lost and the potential will not be realized.

4. Team members hold each other accountable and support each other.

Accountability is a pervasive theme in team research (Katzenbach & Smith, 2005; Lencioni, 2002; Hackman, 2002), but we have found that unless "support" is provided, "accountability" has a negative edge to it that makes a lot of people nervous.

Support has many elements to it: financial and technological resources, good supervision, talk time with leaders, political support, permission to network with others, effective sponsorship, knowledge transfer, and/or the sharing of best practices with other units and divisions. It is the combination of accountability *and* support that enables a group to develop into a real team.

5. Lastly, and most importantly, high performing teams have a high level of trust among members.

This is one of the distinguishing factors of high performing teams (Lencioni, 2002; Katzenbach & Smith, 2005; Goleman, 2002; Sanaghan & Eberbach, 2013; Govindarajan & Gupta, 2001; and Gostick & Elton, 2007).

Without real trust between team members, a group will never perform at high levels, ever. When we have interviewed people, and most importantly, observed high performing teams, team members often speak about the level of trust and its vital importance to team performance. Team leaders need to understand how to create, build, and nurture team trust, and how to mend it when the trust is broken.

Strategic Note

This is one of the most difficult challenges a team leader faces: when trust is damaged, how do you repair it? Paying attention to and implementing many of the statements in the High Performing Teams Survey (e.g. clarifying the decision rules, careful listening, providing constructive feedback, open and transparent communication) can help a leader develop the strategies to rebuild team trust.

When trust is high on a team, the "differences" people have (e.g. culture, gender, age, background, diverse ways of thinking about things) are considered "assets." When trust is low, differences become *liabilities* rather quickly. Never forget this essential team element, and its importance to overall team performance. Trust is one of the most fragile and enduring elements of group life, and paying consistent attention to it is essential to a team's success.

Resource

One of the very best books on group/team trust is *The SPEED of TRUST: The One Thing That Changes Everything* (2008) by Stephen M.R. Covey.

Challenges Facing Teams in Higher Education

There are several robust myths and challenges that are unique to higher education. These challenges need attention, because they can prevent and stymie a leader's efforts to build a great team on his/her campus.

Challenge #1

Campus leaders often assume that if you put a bunch of really intelligent individuals together and give them a mission to accomplish, they will somehow, magically and mysteriously, become a high performing team. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is a lot of "sausage making" when building a team, and forming that team will take real time and attention, especially on the part of the team leader, because there are no shortcuts or magic involved in building a high performing team. It is hard work.

Challenge #2

Many campus leaders hear the term "team building," and they quietly groan and roll their eyes, which usually signals their lack of comfort with that "touchy feely stuff." They then begin to snicker about trust falls and climbing walls, and singing "kumbayah." These immature reactions are symptomatic of a leader's unease with the "soft" side of teams. These leaders tend to believe that things like asking for help, admitting mistakes, showing appreciation, being vulnerable, and discussing hopes and fears are to be avoided at all costs. Let's focus on getting the job done!

Unfortunately, these leaders will never be able to create a high performing team, because the "soft" stuff is the heart of a team (Lencioni, 2002; Goleman, 2002; Katzenbach & Smith, 2005; Sanaghan & Eberbach, 2013; Lavine, 2014; Ross, 2006; LaFasto & Larson, 2001).

As you will read below, one of the categories in the High Performing Teams Survey is *group climate*. The High Performing Teams Survey asks a lot of questions about the "soft" stuff, and this is the *most* challenging team element to improve. Team leaders need to learn how to be comfortable with the soft side or they will fail to build a stellar team. In over 25 years of consulting with teams and leaders, I have never encountered a team that didn't have the competencies to get their job done; it was the "soft" stuff that got in the way of the team's performance. Avoiding this element of building a high-performing team is silly.

Challenge #3

On many campuses, there is a real aversion to dealing with interpersonal conflict. People lack the skill or courage (or both) to deal effectively with conflict, and this inadequacy prevents most groups from becoming a real team. In addition, the "collegial" nature of many of our campuses supports this conflict avoidance, and many conflicts and disagreements go underground and fester for a long, long time.

Conflict on a team is *inevitable* and *natural*. This is one of the most important notions about teams. When you have talented, dedicated people with very different perspectives, passions and experiences on a team, there will be differences, *guaranteed*. How the team members manage the differences and inevitable conflict will determine how effective the team becomes (Goleman, 2002; Lencioni, 2002; LaFasto & Larson, 2001; Runde & Flanagan, 2007, 2008; Sanaghan & Eberbach, 2013).

We have found that high performing teams see conflict, counter-intuitively, as a *resource*. Team members can understand and learn from conflict, rather than avoid it at all costs. These special teams are actually curious about conflict, and they approach it with interest, not fear.

Resource

There is an excellent book, *Crucial Conversations* (2001), that every team member and leader can benefit from reading. The book will help members deal with differences effectively and with integrity. It is an outstanding resource.

Challenge #4

Many leaders in higher education, especially faculty, have had little experience or training in building a team. This is not meant as a criticism; it's just the way it is. These individual contributors make a real difference in many ways, but few academics in my experience have read about or been trained to be on a team, let alone are prepared to lead one.

This is especially true for department chairpersons, who have one of the most difficult jobs in higher education. These brave individuals spend years honing their craft, doing great research, and are (usually) thrust into a leadership role with little or no training whatsoever. They find themselves facilitating departmental meetings, resolving faculty conflicts, creating budgets, allocating lean resources, supervising, mentoring junior faculty and managing complex schedules. Rarely do they get real professional development or training beyond a one-day "legal problems you should avoid" orientation.

This lack of training in the basics about the relational side of people management leaves them poorly prepared for what awaits them. Expecting them to build a real team feels like "Mission Impossible." We need to invest heavily in our campus leaders, both on the academic and administrative sides of the house, if we are going to create high performing teams and accomplish great things for our campuses.

Conceptual Model for the High Performing Teams Survey

The High Performing Team Survey looks at six (6) specific categories of team effectiveness. These distinct categories will enable you to understand the complexity of how a high performing team actually operates. They are:

1. Team learning
2. Group climate
3. Collaboration
4. Team leadership
5. Discipline and focus
6. Practices and protocols

Each category is essential to a team's overall performance, and together these six create an integrated framework for stellar team performance. If one of the team elements is weak, team performance suffers. This does not mean that a team has to have high scores in everything, but the team leader and members need to consistently pay attention to all six areas if they are to become a high performing team.

1. Team Learning

Peter Senge and his colleagues popularized the term "learning organization," which describes an organization that continually adapts to changing circumstances and challenges because they have the ability to learn from their failures and successes, and to share ideas widely throughout the organization.

A high performing team *prizes* learning, and team members are open, curious, and willing to explore different perspectives in a constructive manner through discussion and dialogue. This kind of team reflects on their practice, and members actually learn from each other continually.

They have a fair amount of "failure tolerance" (Farson & Keyes, 2002) and often see mistakes as opportunities to learn how to improve. This is an essential thing to remember about high performing teams, because they realize that both success and failure leave clues and they search for those lessons, rather than beating themselves up for the mistakes that were made.

High performing teams actively seek best practices from other organizations and teams. They don't get trapped in "listening to themselves" too much, and they are open to learning from how others collaborate. They are willing to try new ideas and approaches, and to take intelligent risks, *and to learn from those risks*.

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2. Group Climate

This element refers to the relationships and interactions among team members. Do team members feel comfortable raising sensitive issues and concerns? Do they believe they can influence important decisions? Do people feel psychologically safe with one another? Do they trust one another? This last is the most important question of all.

A positive group climate generates the *relational capital* necessary to accomplish important tasks toward the team's goals. When the climate is positive, great things can happen because people have confidence in each other. This creates a constructive momentum towards achieving meaningful things. It creates a feeling that "we are all in this together," which permeates the group and sustains their efforts through difficult and challenging times.

A positive culture is marked by open and trusted communication, where people feel informed about what's going on. Team members share ideas openly, seek feedback, and take risks together.

When the group climate is negative, that is a deal breaker. People feel unsafe with each other and will not work together in a collaborative spirit. There is no sense of "we," and people do the minimum work to get by and protect themselves. This is an awful thing to witness and a terrible place to live. Improving a negative group climate is the most challenging work a leader can take on.

Team leaders need to pay continual attention to group climate because it can make or break a team.

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3. Collaboration

Collaboration is the ability to tap the collective talents of team members in service of their shared purposes and goals. Having a talented group of people doesn't automatically mean you will be able to utilize their skills, experience, and knowledge. You have to consciously create opportunities to meet, share ideas, ask for advice, make shared decisions, and collectively problem solve to address emerging challenges. This is not easy to do and will take a lot of real time and practice for all team members.

High performing teams are marked by open communication and by the full engagement of team members. Everyone is involved in the team process as they collectively create strategies and approaches to the team's problems and opportunities. There is no place to hide, because everyone is needed to be successful.

The other important thing to understand about collaborative practices is that the team needs to be able to constructively work with others *outside* their team. No team is an island, so the team must work with other, external groups. Some researchers call this "boundary management." It involves knowledge management, sharing best practices with others in the organization, soliciting political support for proposed strategies, being involved in resource allocation decisions, and being informed about what is going on in the larger organization.

This is where a lot of teams find themselves in trouble, because they aren't connected to the right leaders and groups throughout the organization. When they ask for help and support, their voices fall on deaf ears, because people don't understand their charge or their purpose, and the relational bridges haven't been built between groups that can help with their efforts.

The team leader especially needs to pay attention to the different "boundaries" they must navigate throughout the organization, but all team members are responsible for being conscious about how important collaboration is to their eventual success.

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4. Team Leadership

Effective leadership is the essential element in our team model and without it, a group will never become a high performing team. The kind of leadership is what matters most. The very best leaders understand the importance of "shared leadership" and utilize it appropriately. They don't have to be "in charge" of everything; they don't see their role as simply telling people what to do. Rather, the effective team leader facilitates group interaction and production and is comfortable sharing leadership with others.

For example, there might be a team member who has deep knowledge or experience with a challenge the team is facing. The team leader recognizes this and supports the notion that given the circumstances, this team member needs to emerge as the team leader for the time being. However, the "official" team leader never relinquishes responsibility for the outcomes that the team is responsible for achieving, never.

Linda A. Hill out of Harvard provides us with a wonderful metaphor for this kind of leader: "the shepherd." Sometimes the shepherd leads from the front, coaches from the side, or prods from the back, given the changing circumstances and context. This is the art and craft of leadership. This type of leader enables others to achieve meaningful results in service of the purposes of the team.

Leadership on a high performing team needs to be deeply trusted and seen as highly competent and judicious in decision making.

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5. Discipline and Focus

You can have a talented team that doesn't produce the expected results for a myriad of reasons, but one of the key areas for a team leader to deeply understand is the team's orientation to getting the right things done. People are usually very busy. The question the team leader needs to ask is, "What exactly are people busy doing?" Their activity and efforts need to be aligned with the team's goals. This doesn't happen by chance. It takes conscious effort and attention on every team member's part to maintain focus, discipline, and a results orientation.

Consider these simple, but important ideas:

- It's critical to pay attention to the goals and purposes of the team.
- Focusing on outcomes, and not just activity, is essential to team productivity.
- Team members keeping their commitments: this is essential to team trust.
- Clarity around roles and responsibilities needs regular consideration.
- Providing support and holding team members accountable for agreed-upon goals and actions are key to team performance. Once that slips, you are in trouble.

I have witnessed several highly talented teams get caught in the "buckets of sweat" syndrome, where activity, and not results, rules the day, people appear to be rushing all over the place, meetings are constantly being called to put out fires, some team members frequently arrive late for meetings, there is a high level of stress within the team, and people aren't sure why that's the case. This is not a pretty sight to see, because talent is being wasted and bad habits are being created that are hard to eliminate.

Resource

There is an article that I strongly suggest every team read: "Beware the Busy Manager" (2002) by Heike Bruch & Sumantra Ghoshal. It is an excellent article that explains how we can get caught in a "busy trap" quite easily.

Teams need to be able to prioritize their work as circumstances change, and not just get caught "working the plan" no matter what. You don't want to be stuck executing a plan that is no longer relevant.

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6. Practices and Protocols

How a team actually operates on a daily basis dictates its success or failure. Having sensible, clearly understood, commonly held work practices is essential to team productivity. These include:

- The way the team communicates with each other.
- How information is distributed.
- The effectiveness of team meetings.
- Clarity around decision making (*who* makes *what* decisions)

These are not things to take for granted. Practices and protocols are the "nuts and bolts" of team functioning, and weakness in this area can negatively impact the other categories in the High Performing Teams Survey.

For example: fuzziness around the decision rules can impair team trust and group climate dramatically; dysfunctional communication processes can impact team learning; ineffective meetings can affect team collaboration; and not having agreed upon "ground rules" or working agreements can cause great frustration and aggravation.

These common practices are critical elements and mechanisms to create for a team, especially when first bringing the team together. But don't be fooled by their simplicity. These protocols do take some real effort to establish and maintain over time. Conducting effective meetings isn't easy; in fact, it is an ongoing challenge. Reviewing progress towards goals takes constant attention, and measuring what really matters can be challenging because there is a whole lot to measure!

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The High Performing Teams Survey

Cautionary Advice on Taking the High Performing Teams Survey

Taking the High Performing Teams Survey is not without risk, because it will clearly identify your team's strengths and weaknesses, in no uncertain terms. You might find out that you are quite strong in one or two team categories and rather weak in others. It will be like an MRI, deeply diagnosing areas of team functioning that usually are not explicitly known by most team leaders.

The team leader must be open to feedback about how the team *actually* operates, as well as to specific questions about their own ability to lead the team. This will take some real courage on the part of the team leader, because they might be surprised about how they are perceived by team members.

The High Performing Teams Survey is meant to be a *learning* tool that will help you understand how your team functions. It is *not* meant to serve as a critique that will make you feel inadequate as a team. The standards of this survey are very high, so be prepared for scores that might not meet your expectation. The High Performing Teams Survey will provide you with a comprehensive "snapshot" of your team's current capacity and ability, so it is best used as part of a learning journey towards becoming a stellar team. Please take the survey periodically to gauge your progress over time, not to beat yourself up.

Be patient with the results and with your efforts to improve your team. Do *not* try to fix everything all at once, because you will fail. Focus on paying attention to your team's current strengths and build on those. Look at improving one area that will make a real difference for your team. If you can create some positive momentum in one area, you will begin to create real success for your team. This is very important to remember: fix *one* thing at a time.

To ensure honest responses, it is important that each team member fill out the High Performing Teams Survey *anonymously*. This will increase the chances that you will get an accurate and truthful assessment of your team's performance. It is almost always helpful to have the team leader score the survey and keep their results separate from the team member's scores. This way you can compare and contrast how the team leader and members experience their actual performance.

The compilation of the survey results should be conducted by a trusted third party (e.g. Human Resources, an external consultant or a leader from a different school or department) and not by the team leader.

Later in this guide, we will show you how to conduct an intensive Item Analysis of your team's scores that will clearly reveal the team's strengths and weaknesses in a coherent manner and enable you to focus on improving the things that really matter.

What the High Performing Teams Survey will not be effective in assessing: There has been some real interest in "Self-Managing Teams" (SMT) over the past decade. Although I have had several in-depth experiences working with these kinds of teams, I never saw a high performing one.

That doesn't mean that there are none; this just notes the limits of my experience with them. The High Performing Teams Survey will *not* be useful for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of a self-managed team. In our conceptual model, there is an identified and highly competent "team leader," and although team leadership can rotate as circumstances change, the leadership and talents of the "official" team leader can make or break a stellar team.

Directions on How to Take the Survey

Please read each statement carefully, and on a one (1) to ten (10) scale, please put your answers on the scoring sheet on page 24.
The scale:

1 = You strongly disagree with the statement.

2

3

4

5 = You are "neutral" about the statement.

6

7

8

9

10 = You strongly agree with the statement.

Only use whole numbers, no fractions or decimals (e.g. use 1 or 2, not 1.45). Just use your common sense and trust your instincts with your answers. This usually takes about 10 minutes to score. If you're finding yourself fretting over the statements, step away for a while and then finish scoring it. This is a very simple survey to take; don't overcomplicate it.

Once you have your answers, total the categories and divide by 10, and you will have an "average" for each category. This will give you an informed "snapshot" of your team.

We also recommend doing a thorough item analysis. You can find directions for this on pages 26 - 30.

The Survey

Score 1 - 10

☐ **1)** The purposes and goals of this team are clear and understood by all team members.

☐ **2)** Overall, our team meetings are a good use of my time.

☐ **3)** I trust my team leader's intentions and judgment.

☐ **4)** There is a high level of trust on this team.

☐ **5)** I understand the talents and skills of my fellow team members.

☐ **6)** Regular feedback among team members is a normal practice on this team (e.g. *peer reviews, people seek feedback about their performance*).

☐ **7)** We hold each other accountable for achieving our agreed upon tasks and goals (e.g. *deadlines are met, we are willing to have a "difficult" conversation when someone drops the ball, people ask questions to find out where things are going wrong*).

☐ **8)** Our decision-making processes are clear and understood by all team members (i.e. *how we make decisions*).

☐ **9)** Our team leader has a high level of "emotional intelligence" (i.e. *they understand who they are, what motivates them and others, understands their impact on others*).

☐ **10)** I feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues on this team.

☐ **11)** You can ask for help on this team (i.e. *team members are very helpful and supportive*).

☐ **12)** We are good at experimenting with new ideas and practices.

☐ **13)** We consistently meet our goals and objectives.

☐ **14)** We have effective working "ground rules" or working agreements that help us work together well. (e.g. *one person talks at a time in our team meetings, people come prepared to our meetings, we clarify the decision rules before we make important decisions*).

☐ **15)** Our team leader uses their "formal" authority effectively (e.g. *holds people accountable for negotiated goals, intervenes if there is a problem with a team member, gives strong and clear guidance when necessary*).

☐ **16)** Team "spirit" and morale is very good on this team (i.e. *people like being a part of this team*).

☐ **17)** We value learning from others outside of our team, developing informal networks, and discovering and sharing best practices.

☐ **18)** We rely on a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data to understand what we need to do to solve problems.

☐ **19)** I understand what is expected of me.

☐ **20)** Our communication process and protocols are effective and efficient (i.e. *I feel informed about what matters, I know how to get the information I need, and there is a great deal of transparency in our communications*).

☐ **21)** Our team leader can make tough decisions.

☐ **22)** We really listen to each other.

☐ **23)** There is a high level of collaboration on this team (e.g. *we help each other out, share best practices, use each other as thought partners*).

☐ **24)** We can adapt and change our approaches and practices when factors in the environment change.

☐ **25)** Overall, we have an implementation mentality (e.g. *we want to get the right stuff done well*).

☐ **26)** We know how to "measure what matters" regarding our team performance (i.e. *we focus on measuring the most important things and not everything*).

- [ ] **27)** I believe that our team leader is interested in building the capacity of our team members (e.g. *good delegator, effective supervisor, good coaching and listening*).
- [ ] **28)** People on this team demonstrate respect for each other.
- [ ] **29)** We are able to effectively utilize the collective talents of our team members.
- [ ] **30)** Team members are committed to continuous learning in support of our team's goals (e.g. *professional development, learning from others, researching best practices*).
- [ ] **31)** Team members know how to prioritize their work in an ongoing manner (e.g. *as things change, we can reprioritize our work, we are good at focusing on the most important things*).
- [ ] **32)** We review our team's progress on stated goals on a regular basis to make sure we are working on the right things and implementing effectively.
- [ ] **33)** Our team leader deals with poor performance issues quickly and effectively.
- [ ] **34)** We simply do not tolerate "bad" behavior (e.g. *being disrespectful, gossiping about other team members, personal attacks, sabotaging others*).
- [ ] **35)** We are good at collaborating with others throughout the organization to get our purposes and goals accomplished (e.g. *we have good relationships with others outside the team that support our work, cooperation with others is expected*).
- [ ] **36)** We proactively seek feedback from many sources about our team's performance and contribution (e.g. *internal stakeholders who use our services, other work groups we work with, external stakeholders and clients*).
- [ ] **37)** We focus on results and outcomes and don't get caught with busyness or non-productive activity (e.g. *we focus on the important, not just the urgent*).
- [ ] **38)** Our reward and recognition system is considered fair by team members (e.g. *our incentives, rewards and recognition are aligned with our stated goals*).
- [ ] **39)** I believe in the competence of the team leader (i.e. *character, expertise, and experience*).
- [ ] **40)** We resolve conflict effectively on this team.
- [ ] **41)** Professional development and training in collaborative practices is provided to us (e.g. *shared decision making, communication styles, conflict resolution, dealing with differences, cross boundary work*).
- [ ] **42)** We view failure as a resource and learn from it.
- [ ] **43)** When faced with problems and challenges, we focus on finding solutions (i.e. *not blaming or finding fault*).
- [ ] **44)** Our team's planning processes are effective and productive (i.e. *we strike a good balance between long-term and short-term thinking*).

- ☐ **45)** Our team leader supports other members in taking on leadership roles as appropriate (e.g. *when a specific content expertise is needed; when a team member has prior experience with a challenge or problem; lets members lead team meetings*).
- ☐ **46)** We celebrate successes and accomplishments on a regular basis.
- ☐ **47)** I believe I can influence the important decisions on this team.
- ☐ **48)** We have a lot of curious people on this team.
- ☐ **49)** We pay attention to both the task (*what needs to get done*) and the process (*how things get done*) in a balanced manner.
- ☐ **50)** We have an effective onboarding process for new team members (i.e. *new team members feel welcomed and integrated into the team*).
- ☐ **51)** Our team leaders enables and supports creative solutions, doing things differently, and taking intelligent risks.
- ☐ **52)** Team members feel recognized for the gifts and talents they bring to the team.
- ☐ **53)** I have a fair amount of autonomy about how I do my work on this team.
- ☐ **54)** We use a variety of creative problem solving methods to deal with our ongoing challenges (i.e. *we don't get stuck in one way of doing things, or trapped by past practices*).
- ☐ **55)** Roles and responsibilities are understood by everyone on this team.
- ☐ **56)** We have an effective and supportive supervisory and performance appraisal process.
- ☐ **57)** The team leader's "style" encourages a real sense of ownership and buy-in for the team's goals and mission.
- ☐ **58)** We value differences on this team (e.g. *different backgrounds, experience, gender, race, and ways of thinking*).
- ☐ **59)** I believe that each team member is essential to achieving our goals and purposes.
- ☐ **60)** Periodically, we take the time to reflect on how we are doing as a team (e.g. *look at past decisions, review our performance against similar teams*).

High Performing Teams Survey Scoring Sheet

	Discipline and Focus	Practices and Protocols	Team Leadership	Group Climate	Collaboration	Team Learning
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.
	19.	20.	21.	22.	23.	24.
	25.	26.	27.	28.	29.	30.
	31.	32.	33.	34.	35.	36.
	37.	38.	39.	40.	41.	42.
	43.	44.	45.	46.	47.	48.
	49.	50.	51.	52.	53.	54.
	55.	56.	57.	58.	59.	60.
Total						
Average (Divide by 10)						

Scoring at a Glance

For a quick visual look at scoring, color in the averages from the previous page on this sheet, to create a visual bar chart.

10						
9						
8						
7						
6						
5						
4						
3						
2						
1						
	Discipline and Focus	**Practices and Protocols**	**Team Leadership**	**Group Climate**	**Collaboration**	**Team Learning**

Item Analysis

Conducting a careful Item Analysis will take some real effort and time, but it will provide you with deep insight about how your team actually functions. Although we have worksheets on page 24 - 25 that helps you score the averages for each category and plot them visually, this by itself will not be enough.

For example, look at the scoring of the following High Performing Teams Survey statements:

For Item #29 ("We are able to effectively utilize the collective talents of our team members"), conducting an item analysis might reveal the following scores:

Team Leader scored it 8

Team Members (n=7) gave the following scores: 4,4,6,4,8,10,6

As you can see, there is a dramatic "scatter," with the scores ranging all over the place. Just noting the *average* score (in this case, 6.25) will not tell you the entire story. Most folks can live with a 6.25, reflecting that while it's not too good, it isn't too bad, either; it's okay. But when you look at the *range* of scores, it becomes obvious that team members experience this statement very differently. This is important for the team members to know, because it looks like they are not able to "tap" the resources in the group, and until they find out how to do this, they will not be successful. An average will not tell you this.

In another example, Item #1 ("The purposes and goals of this team are clear and understood by all team members") gets the following scores:

Team Leader scored it 8

Team Members (n=7) gave the following scores: 8,8,10,10,8,8,8

The item analysis, in this case, reveals great scores for such an important item. If instead we had found a lot of scatter with this item, the team would likely stumble and fumble along. In fact, if this one item doesn't get excellent scores, the rest don't really matter.

On pages 27 - 30, we have each category with its corresponding set of questions organized so that you can more easily conduct an item analysis. Once this data has been organized, a team meeting should be conducted to discuss the findings and look for possible actions and solutions.

This is where the team leader's maturity level and openness to feedback will be critical. Due to the high standards of the High Performing Teams Survey, there is a good chance that some of the scores for certain categories might be lower than expected. Pay attention to the strengths as well as the weaknesses that the survey reveals. Don't focus solely on what is not working, because that will demotivate the team, and will make the journey to improvement a more difficult slog.

Make sure that you discuss some ways to continue to build on your strengths and identify ONE area to focus on improving. Once again, trying to tackle too much will result in failure. It is almost always a good idea to have a neutral facilitator conduct this kind of meeting; that way, the team leader can fully participate in the discussion and manage the expectations of the team members.

Discipline and Focus

1) The purposes and goals of this team are clear and understood by all team members.

7) We hold each other accountable for achieving our agreed upon tasks and goals (e.g. *deadlines are met, we are willing to have a "difficult" conversation when someone drops the ball, people ask questions to find out where things are going wrong*).

13) We consistently meet our goals and objectives.

19) I understand what is expected of me.

25) Overall, we have an implementation mentality (*we want to get the right stuff done well*).

31) Team members know how to prioritize their work in an ongoing manner (e.g. *as things change, we can reprioritize our work, we are good at focusing on the most important things*).

37) We focus on results and outcomes and don't get caught with busyness or non-productive activity (e.g. *We focus on the important, not just the urgent*).

43) When faced with problems and challenges, we focus on finding solutions (*not blaming or finding fault*).

49) We pay attention to both the Task (*what needs to get done*) and the Process (*how things get done*) in a balanced manner.

55) Roles and responsibilities are understood by everyone on this team.

Practices and Protocols

2) Overall, our team meetings are a good use of my time.

8) Our decision-making processes are clear and understood by all team members (i.e. *how we make decisions*).

14) We have effective working "ground rules" or working agreements that help us work together well (e.g. *one person talks at a time in our team meetings, people come prepared to our meetings, we clarify the decision rules before we make important decisions*).

20) Our communication process and protocols are effective and efficient. (i.e. *I feel informed about what matters, I know how to get the information I need, and there is a great deal of transparency in our communications*).

26) We know how to "measure what matters" regarding our team performance (i.e. *we focus on measuring the most important things and not everything*).

32) We review our team's progress on stated goals on a regular basis to make sure we are working on the right things and implementing effectively.

38) Our reward and recognition system is considered fair by team members (e.g. *our incentives, rewards and recognition are aligned with our stated goals*).

44) Our team's planning processes are effective and productive (i.e. *we strike a good balance between long-term and short-term thinking*).

50) We have an effective onboarding process for new team members (*new team members feel welcomed and integrated into the team*).

56) We have an effective and supportive supervisory and performance appraisal process.

Team Leadership

3) I trust my team leader's intentions and judgment.

9) Our team leader has a high level of "emotional intelligence" (i.e. *they understand who they are, what motivates them and others, understands their impact on others*).

15) Our team leader uses their "formal" authority effectively (e.g. *holds people accountable for negotiated goals, intervenes if there is a problem with a team member, gives strong and clear guidance when necessary*).

21) Our team leader can make tough decisions.

27) I believe that our team leader is interested in building the capacity of our team members (e.g. *good delegator, effective supervisor, good coaching and listening*).

33) Our team leader deals with poor performance issues quickly and effectively.

39) I believe in the competence of the team leader (i.e. *character, expertise, and experience*).

45) Our team leader supports other members in taking on leadership roles as appropriate (e.g. *when a specific content expertise is needed; when a team member has prior experience with a challenge or problem; lets members lead team meetings*).

51) Our team leaders enables and supports creative solutions, doing things differently, and taking intelligent risks.

57) The team leaders "style" encourages a real sense of ownership and buy in for the team's goals and mission.

Group Climate

4) There is a high level of trust on this team.

10) I feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues on this team

16) Team "spirit" and morale is very good on this team. (i.e. *people like being a part of this team*)

22) We really listen to each other.

28) People on this team demonstrate respect for each other.

34) We simply do not tolerate "bad" behavior (e.g. *being disrespectful, gossiping about other team members, personal attacks, sabotaging others*).

40) We resolve conflict effectively on this team.

46) We celebrate successes and accomplishments on a regular basis.

52) Team members feel recognized for the gifts and talents they bring to the team.

58) We value differences on this team (e.g. *different backgrounds, experience, gender, race, and ways of thinking*).

Collaboration

5) I understand the talent and skill of my fellow team members.

11) You can ask for help on this team (i.e. *team members are very helpful and supportive*).

17) We value learning from others outside of our team, developing informal networks, and discovering and sharing best practices.

23) There is a high level of collaboration on this team (e.g. *we help each other out, share best practices, use each other as thought partners*).

29) We are able to effectively utilize the collective talents of our team members.

35) We are good at collaborating with others throughout the organization to get our purposes and goals accomplished (e.g. *we have good relationships with others outside the team that support our work, cooperation with others is expected*).

41) Professional development and training in collaborative practices is provided to us (e.g. *shared decision making, communication styles, conflict resolution, dealing with differences, cross boundary work*).

47) I believe I can influence the important decisions on this team.

53) I have a fair amount of autonomy about how I do my work on this team.

59) I believe that each team member is essential to achieving our goals and purposes.

Team Learning

6) Regular feedback among team members is a normal practice on this team (e.g. *peer reviews, people seek feedback about their performance*).

12) We are good at experimenting with new ideas and practices.

18) We rely on a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data to understand what we need to do to solve problems.

24) We can adapt and change our approaches and practices when factors in the environment change.

30) Team members are committed to continuous learning in support of our team's goals (e.g. *professional development, learning from others, researching best practices*).

36) We proactively seek feedback from many sources about our team's performance and contribution (e.g. *internal stakeholders who use our services, other work groups we work with, external stakeholders and clients*).

42) We view failure as a resource and learn from it.

48) We have a lot of curious people on this team.

54) We use a variety of creative problem solving methods to deal with our ongoing challenges (*we don't get stuck in one way of doing things, or trapped by past practices*).

60) Periodically, we take the time to reflect on how we are doing as a team (e.g. *look at past decisions, review our performance against similar teams*).

Appendix A

The Five Biggest Mistakes Team Leaders Make

by Patrick Sanaghan

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to work with over 100 senior teams and cabinets in higher education. Overall, the experience has been quite positive due to the intelligence, dedication, aspirations, and integrity of those veteran leaders.

Unfortunately, about 10% of teams I have worked with just never performed well, despite great effort and talent. This informal paper is an attempt to conduct a "post mortem" on the teams that just didn't make it.

These mistakes go beyond some of the essential elements of stellar team performance, such as having a shared purpose, holding each other accountable, open and trusted communication, and high levels of trust (Katzenbach & Smith, 2005, 2006; Lencioni, 2002; Sanaghan, Goldstein & Trump, 2008). All these are very important, but the absence of these was not responsible for these talented teams' failures.

The following five "mistakes" may sound like common sense, but they are often overlooked when leaders are building their teams.

1. The team leader falls prey to the "comfortable cloning" syndrome.

"Comfortable cloning" describes our natural tendency to seek out other team members who are similar to us or who we expect will think similarly to us. They may share our educational background, culture, gender, or race. These individuals are "comfortable" to us because they are so familiar and easy to work with. We use them as thought partners or solicit feedback from them about our ideas and decisions. But this "sameness" can hinder a team's performance in dramatic ways.

Exceptional leaders seek diversity in their team composition, not because this is a "nice" or politically correct thing to do, but because the diversity creates the foundation for exceptional team performance (Ancona, Bresman and Kaeufer, 2002; Hackman, 2002; Boynton & Fischer, 2005). We have found that when a team leader actively seeks diversity in the composition of a team, several things tend to happen:

- Solutions to complex challenges and problems will be more effective because you have multiple perspectives at the table.
- Natural blind spots (those things we simply cannot see because of our limited perspectives and experience) become apparent to us through the eyes of others.
- Team plans usually get implemented because different ideas have been vetted, debated, and argued from the varied perspectives of different team members. There tend to be better solutions to the team's challenges and a shared commitment to actually execute the team's decisions.

2. The team leader never establishes explicit "ground rules" or working agreements that help the group perform at high levels.

Almost everyone comes into a group or team situation with tacit expectations for other members. For example:

- "Everyone should come to our meetings on time and prepared."
- "In our meetings, one person should talk at a time."
- "We should 'actively listen' to others when there is conflict on the team."
- "We should have a prioritized agenda for all our team meetings."

The problem with these *implicit* expectations is that they usually stay in our heads, and people continually violate these hidden expectations while remaining unaware of their infractions. Effective team leaders understand that these tacit expectations need to be made explicit so that everyone understands them. Once the hidden expectations are in full view, the team can negotiate them and agree upon a *small* set (3-4) of ground rules. These *shared* expectations help create the human infrastructure for stellar team performance (Katzenbach & Smith, 2006; Guttman, 2008; Sanaghan, 2012; Sanaghan & Lohndorf, 2014).

3. The team leader never learns how to manage conflict within the group.

High performing teams realize that conflict is inevitable and a natural part of group interaction (Lencioni, 2002; Goleman, 2006 Katzenbach & Smith, 2006; Hill & Lineback, 2011). When you have dedicated, talented and bright people on your team, there will be vast differences of opinion and perspective. This is a given and team leaders need to realize this. Conflict isn't going away any time soon. It's here and leaders need to learn to deal with it effectively.

Exceptional teams are "curious" about conflict and see it as a resource, something they need to learn from, not avoid. It takes both courage and skill to deal with conflict. Therefore, team leaders need to develop their own conflict resolution skills as well as help build the capacity of their team members to resolve conflict constructively. I recommend the book *Crucial Conversations* (2011), which is an excellent resource for team leaders and team members who are interested in building their conflict resolution skills.

Resource

Patterson, Kerry, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler. *Crucial Conversations Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011.

4. The team leader never clarifies the decision rules for the team.

When there is a lack of clarity about *how* decisions are made on a team or about *who* makes *what* decisions, this creates confusion and conflict within the group (Cialdini, 2007; Guttman, 2008; Hill & Lineback, 2010; Sanaghan, 2012; Hackman, 2002). The team leader must take responsibility for making sure everyone on the team understands the decision rules.

The following simple decision-making model has worked well on many campuses (Sanaghan, 2012):

- **Level One decisions**
  The leader communicates that a particular decision is his/hers to make. They don't need input or discussion from others. It is an autocratic decision, and this level of decision making should be utilized very carefully.

- **Level Two decisions**
  In this case, a team leader solicits the ideas and opinions of others on the team, usually in a one-to-one discussion. The key here is to manage the expectations of the individual team members, because there is a natural tendency for those whose advice is solicited to assume that the leader will listen to their ideas and then implement them. Yet, this may well not be the case; the team leader might want to test their thinking, hoping to reveal a blind spot in their thinking or to enhance their understanding about a particular situation. These are all good intentions, but the team leader needs to communicate clear intentions to all team members involved.

  For example:

  - "Rahim, I really respect your experience with a problem I am wrestling with and need to make a decision about. Can I use you as a 'thought partner' and share my current thinking with you and get some feedback?"

  - "Maryann, I like the creative approach you take in solving problems. I have an important decision to make and would really appreciate the opportunity to brainstorm with you about it for a few minutes."

  The key here is that the team leader is very specific about how he/she wants to utilize the team member's expertise and skill – to help the leader make a decision, not to make a decision with them.

- **Level Three decisions**
  In this level, the team leader states up front that they have an important decision to make and will be seeking lots of input and feedback from multiple sources before ultimately making a decision. It is key to communicate that the team leader will make the final decision.

- **Level Four decisions**
  The team leader agrees to be a "peer of the realm" and have one "vote," just like everybody else on the team. This is usually a sign of a high performing team because the decision-making is shared, not top down. The key thing to remember with Level Four decisions is that the team leader needs to still establish how the final decision will be made. For example, the final decision could be made:

  - **By consensus:** Make sure you define "consensus!"

  - **By super majority:** If 75% of the group agrees with the decision, it's a go.

  - **By legislative majority:** The decision will be implemented if 2/3 of the group agree to it.

- **Level Five decisions**
  These are often called "delegated decisions" because in these cases the leader fully delegates the decision to the team or to specific team members. Here, the leader is not part of the decision making process. The team leader needs to communicate several items up front:

  » What the "givens" are (e.g. budget constraints, time table)

  » How he/she would like to be informed about the progress of the decision (e.g. communication protocols)

  » Identify a "problem resolution" process that will be implemented when **challenges or problems** occur

  The other key in a Level Five decision is to be wary of micromanaging the decision process. The team leader gives responsibility to others to successfully carry out the task/decision.

5. The team leader never asks for help.

This is one of the traps that really smart people fall into over and over again. These individuals are surrounded by talented people, many of whom have respect and affection for the team leader, yet the team leader almost never reaches out to ask for advice or help. Leaders have access to great resources, yet these resources remain untapped and this is a blind spot for many team leaders. Often, team leaders get "trapped" in their offices, struggling with a complex problem or challenge all by themselves, while help is right outside the door.

There are several reasons for this:

- Sheer pride is often a culprit. Team leaders don't want to appear lacking in knowledge. They fear that by asking for help, they might appear ineffective or incompetent to their team members.
- They get caught up in the notion that they must be all-knowing, an expert at everything, and that asking for help would reveal that they aren't the "expert" that people thought they were.
- Stubbornness. Some team leaders have a "lone ranger" attitude and will try mightily to do it all themselves, because that style may have worked well for them in the past.

Whatever the reason for it, the notion that you have to "go it alone" is an ineffective idea to harbor, because team members almost always will provide the necessary support and advice that is needed. But you have to ask! They want to be helpful, and often they will find being asked a compliment. Never forget this: *for the most part, people want to help*.

For those team leaders who find it difficult to ask others for help, I suggest that you read a great article: "Smart People Ask for (my) Advice: Seeking Advice Boosts Perceptions of Competence" by Alison Wood Brooks, Francesca Gino & Maurice E. Schweitzer (2015). This article demonstrates that asking for help is a positive leadership behavior, one that improves people's impressions of you! I have had several colleagues send this article anonymously to a struggling team leader, and it motivated that leader to seek the support of other team members.

To build a real team is a noble and difficult task. It will take great perspiration and aspiration, but if you can do this, you will have made a difference for your campus. I recommend reviewing these with your team members and discussing practical applications for your own team. Raising awareness about how team leaders get into trouble keeps everyone vigilant about what can go wrong and helps everyone stay the course.

Appendix B

Does Your Team Have Effective Organizational Support? (An Informal Survey)

What do you do when your overall team scores on the High Performing Teams Survey are pretty good, but you are still not producing the results you want? This is not as rare as you might think. Even high performing teams need more than just high performance. They need organizational support if they are to be successful. J.R. Hackman, (1990, 2002, 2011) was recognized as a leading academic researcher on teams, and was one of the very first experts to identify the importance of organizational support. Other researchers (Luecke, 2004; Lombardo & Eichinger, 1995; Pearce, 2004; Kohn & O'Connell, 2013) are all supportive of Hackman's findings.

If a team doesn't receive the appropriate support, it will be swimming upstream each and every day, will become exhausted, and feel disconnected from the larger organization. I have witnessed several teams that were treading water and floundering for a long time. It's an awful thing to see dedicated, talented people fail slowly.

The **High Performing Teams Survey** looks carefully at the *internal* dynamics and processes of a team and here follows an informal survey that will allow you to look closely at the external (meaning organizational) factors that might be hindering your team's efforts. We do address a few of these external factors in the "collaboration" category of the High Performing Teams Survey, but the following questions will help you explore the complexity of organizational factors more completely.

How to Complete this Survey

All team members should fill out this brief survey anonymously, to ensure you receive the most honest answers as possible. It is also a good idea to have the team leader score the survey separately; don't include the leader's answers in the mix. This will allow you to compare and contrast how the team leader and the rest of the team have assessed their organizational support. Please use a 1-10 scoring system to capture your thinking about organizational support:

1 = You strongly disagree with the statement.

2

3

4

5 = You are "neutral" about the statement.

6

7

8

9

10 = You strongly agree with the statement.

Only use whole numbers, no fractions or decimals (e.g. use 1 or 2, not 1.45). Just use your common sense and trust your instincts with your answers.

1) Our team sponsor (this is the leader ultimately responsible for the team's performance and outcomes) is an effective supporter of our work.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2) The senior leadership team of our division/unit demonstrates support for our team's purpose and goals.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3) Other important stakeholders (defined as those people who can help us or hurt our efforts) understand what we are charged to accomplish.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4) There is effective coordination of our team's work with other work groups and teams in the organization.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5) I believe that the organization provides enough resources (e.g. technology, space, access to quality information, knowledge management, and money) for us to be successful.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6) We have an effective external network throughout the organization that we can utilize when we need help and support (e.g. we can ask others for help, solicit political support, share best practices with others, and we know who to go to for additional resources).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7) Our Human Resources division is a helpful resource to us (e.g. HR provides appropriate training in conflict resolution, team building, making good decisions, having difficult conversations, etc.).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8) We have effective communication processes that keep us informed about what is going on in the larger organization (e.g. we can find important things when needed).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9) I believe we have both good "political" awareness and support for our team's efforts (i.e. in other words, we know who has power and how to access them to gain their support for our efforts).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10) Our organization's recognition and reward system clearly supports our efforts and goals.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Analysis

As with the High Performing Teams Survey, conducting an item analysis for each statement, rather than only working with averages will help you pinpoint areas of strong organizational support and areas where more support is needed. For example, you might find that you have good sponsorship support, but effective coordination with other teams and groups needs real attention.

Although this is an informal survey, it will reveal powerful and insightful information, especially if your team is struggling and you aren't sure why. Without the appropriate level of organizational support, you will probably fail. Or, in that scenario, if you do create some success, it will likely take extraordinary effort to do so.

Pay attention to the external factors because they can crush your efforts. If you find that your results are poor, share these findings quickly with the team's sponsor and with other higher-ups who can impact your team's performance. Things will not somehow get better all by themselves, so make senior leaders aware of the situation. That way, they can do something about it.

GOOD LUCK!

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