

Promote Better Team Effectiveness

Treca Stark Bourne and Krister Lowe



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You most likely have seen it in your work or personal life: a team that clicks.

It could be in the office, on the court, in the arena, or as part of a local community group; it seems that each member understands their role, knows the goals, and builds off the strengths and capabilities of the others. They support each other and are willing to do what it takes to make the project a success.

You probably have seen the opposite as well: a team with a lack of knowledge sharing, too many individuals trying to make the decisions rather than rolling up their sleeves to do the hard work, and team members bickering about what they should prioritize. All that behavior is to the detriment of the initiative at hand.

What contributes most to a team's effectiveness? Is it the team leader, the top performer, or the trust among members? While those factors play a role, research shows that a set of structural drivers do the heavy lifting when it comes to team effectiveness. According to Harvard University, up to 80 percent of team effectiveness is explained by six conditions, which are organized into two categories: the Essentials, which consist of a real team, compelling purpose, and right people; and the Enablers, made up of a sound structure, supportive context, and team coaching.

Whether a team comes together for a one-off performance goal; collaborates for a few weeks or months on a project; or provides direction for a whole department or organization for a year or more, a team's structure drives the behaviors that lead to great results.

This TD at Work will help talent development professionals understand and facilitate team coaching, whether within the TD function or with other departments. We will discuss how to:

- Confirm that a team is real, create a compelling purpose, and determine whether the team has the right talent.
- Ensure a sound team structure, assess whether it operates within a supportive context, and identify a team coach.
- Make the case for using a science-backed team effectiveness framework throughout the team life cycle.
- Replicate case studies of teamwork while highlighting the six conditions of team effectiveness in practice.

A team's structure drives the behaviors that lead to great results.

The Importance of Teams

Why are teams so critical to the way people work, interact in a community, or function within a household? "A team environment allows individuals to bring their diverse perspectives to problem solving, which in turn

increases their success at arriving at solutions more efficiently and effectively," answers a Yale University article, "We Know Teamwork Is Important, but How Important?"

Further, in "The Importance of Teamwork (as Proven by Science)," Atlassian contributing writer Tracy Middleton writes that "teamwork is more important than ever" due to a team's significance to problem solving and how teams add to the potential for innovation, employee happiness and personal growth, and smarter risk-taking.

Remember those critical benefits when working to create the conditions for team success.

Begin With the End in Mind

When thinking about how an effective team works to bring a project to its successful completion, many people point to the relational elements. But, based on research on team effectiveness, Harvard University Professor Ruth Wageman asserts that good relationships are the result of good performance, not the converse, and working with a team to improve relationships is a misplaced focus of team coaching.

Good team performance, according to Hackman and Wageman, includes task performance, quality of group process, and member satisfaction. That is to say:

- The task output meets or exceeds the needs of the team's clients.
- The team becomes an increasingly capable performing unit over time.
- Members foster personal learning and growth due to their experiences within the team.

Consider a software development team that comes together to implement a technology solution. The team could agree to goals of beta testing the software by a specific date, conducting a pilot, and following up to address blips and improve the pilot based on user feedback. The team aims to release the product ahead of time and below budget. The group may determine that one individual's skills are better for project management than the original person managing the initiative, which builds confidence in the new project manager and expands their career horizons.

To decide what team effectiveness will look like, understand that team members working in the same unit but without a clear and compelling purpose, lacking clarity on what it would take to meet the client's needs, or seeing no room for growth or development are less likely to be effective.

The Essentials

With the results of team effectiveness defined, focus on the small number of conditions that collectively motivate and align a team: real team, compelling purpose, and the right people. Build those essential conditions from

6 Team Conditions Framework: How It Works

Using the three essentials (real team, compelling purpose, and the right people) and three enablers (sound structure, supportive context, and team coaching) as the basis, a coach can conduct a diagnostic survey of how strong and effective a team is. (Note, however, that the 6 Teams diagnostic survey is not critical to using the teams framework.)

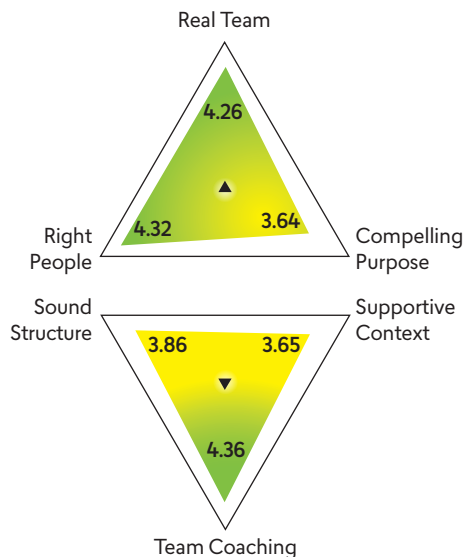
The coach should apply a rating between one and five to determine the mean scores of the team in the areas of each of the six essentials and enablers, along with the three key task processes (effort, strategy, and knowledge and skill) and three team effectiveness qualities (quality of group process, task performance, and member satisfaction).

A team may have a high mean score in the area of being a real team if it is stable, interdependent, and convenes to truly interact and share resources.

A compelling purpose score evaluates such areas as everyone understanding the impact or consequence of their work, whether the work stretches team members but is not overly challenging, and whether members know what success looks like.

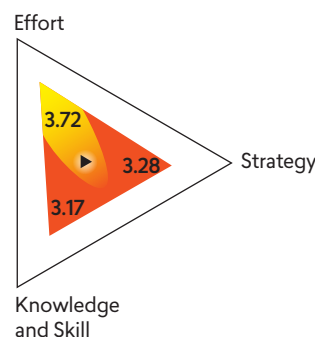
A completed survey may look something like the diagram below. A team is likely to be stronger in some areas (shown in green) and in need of development and coaching in others (shown in yellow and red).

The Essentials

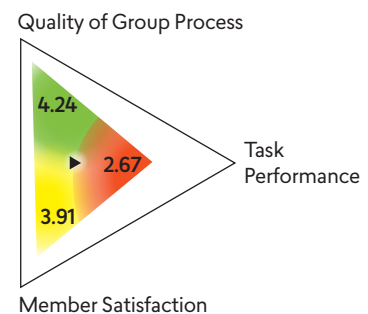


The Enablers

Key Task Processes



Team Effectiveness



Source: 6 Team Conditions, "Team Diagnostic Survey," 2022