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# BUILDING A HIGH-PERFORMANCE TEAM

Proven techniques for effective team working

Sarah Cook

SOFT SKILLS FOR  
IT PROFESSIONALS



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**IT Governance Publishing**

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## FOREWORD

IT is often seen as a ‘hard-skill’ profession where there is no place for soft skills. Yet the importance of soft skills for the IT professional should not be underrated; they underlie all behaviours and interactions. Both IT and non-IT professionals need to work together and learn from each other for effective business performance. All professionals, be they in IT or elsewhere, need to understand how their actions and reactions impact on their behaviour and working relationships.

This series of books aims to provide practical guidance on a range of soft-skills areas for those in IT and also for others, including those who deal with IT professionals, in order to facilitate more effective and co-operative working practices.

Each book is written by an experienced consultant and trainer. Their approach throughout is essentially practical and direct, offering a wealth of tried and tested professional guidance. Each chapter contains a team diagnostic and focused questions to help the manager plan and steer their course. The language used is jargon-free, and a bibliography and a helpful glossary of terms are included at the end of the book.

Angela Wilde, January 2009

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## PREFACE

This book is intended to provide IT managers with practical advice and tips on how to create a high-performance team.

IT managers' work cannot be achieved without collaboration and teamwork. Whether leading a team, or working as a team member or part of a cross-functional team, the successful implementation of IT projects depends on effective team working.

This book will help you to create a strong team. It is designed to assist you in understanding what the characteristics are of a high-performance team, to help you assess where your team stacks up and to develop a plan of action for realising team potential.

I hope that you will find this book informative and practical and that it provides you with the springboard to creating a high-performance team.

Sarah Cook

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As well as having practical experience of helping to create high-performance teams across the globe, Sarah is a business author and has written widely on the topic of team building, leadership, management development and coaching. She also speaks regularly at conferences and seminars on these topics.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge:

Bruce Tuckman for his four stages of team development.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, Routledge, 2008.

Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, Harper Business Books, 1994.

R. Meredith Belbin, *Management Teams: Why They Succeed and Fail*, Butterworth Heinemann, 2nd edition, 2003.

Steve Macaulay, Cranfield School of Management, for his thoughts on conflict management.

Angeles Arrien for the 'Lessons from Geese', transcribed here from a speech given at the 1991 Organizational Development Network.

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## INTRODUCTION

Isabelle had worked in the IT department of a large global organisation for the past three years. She led a small team of five programmers who had also been in the organisation for about the same time as her. In the business the team had a good reputation for delivery. They were a tight-knit bunch and got on well.

Isabelle and her team were therefore initially very dismayed to learn about the global restructuring of the IT department. This involved breaking up existing teams and reforming them on a multidisciplinary basis. Isabelle found herself heading a completely new team, spread across three geographical locations and including two homeworkers. To Isabelle it was as if she had taken on a job in a new organisation. Everything had changed and nothing was as it had been before. The morale of the new team was poor and deadlines and targets were being missed.

Isabelle's new boss had set her an objective of creating a high-performance team within the next six months. Isabelle secretly wondered if this would ever be achieved.

Does the situation seem familiar? You may not have been faced with the same challenge as Isabelle, but in the IT world today change is a constant. IT professionals are expected to work in and across a wide number of teams, be it their own team, a cross-functional team or a project team.

How do IT professionals develop a high-performance team? What are the best approaches to and techniques for harnessing the strength of the team to achieve organisational goals? How do you manage a wide

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## *Introduction*

stakeholder group at the same time as developing a great team?

This book is dedicated to people like yourself and Isabelle. It provides practical advice and proven techniques to help develop a high-performance team. You will find exercises and assessment tools as well as theory on how to build and maintain an effective team. Each chapter provides examples and ideas that you can readily put into practice.

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## CHAPTER 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF A HIGH-PERFORMANCE TEAM

I am sure that everyone in IT would like to be part of a high-performance team. This chapter outlines for you:

- The characteristics of teams that succeed.
- The benefits of teamwork.
- The role of the team leader.

It also provides you with a diagnostic tool to rate your current team performance.

### **A team or a group?**

IT professionals are often viewed as working in isolation. People who are not in the profession can view them as seeming to prefer the company of themselves and their computers and other electronic devices to that of their colleagues. Yet much of life and work involves various forms of team working; and to gain the most from this, individuals need to realise what team working is, what it means and what the benefits are for all concerned. The challenge for you as an IT manager is to turn a group of individuals into a high-performance team.

In a group each member is responsible only for their own individual contributions. He or she can work in relative isolation without too much concern about the other members of the group. They may report directly to a leader but have little interaction or dependency on other members of the group.

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Within a group there are no shared goals. Each person is responsible for their own outcomes. The potential attitude is 'I did my bit, it's up to them how they do theirs'.

So what are the characteristics of a high-performance team?

### **Definition of a team**

Let's start with the definition of a team. In their best-selling business book *The Wisdom of Teams* (Harper Business Books 1994), Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith define a team as:

- 'A small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, a set of performance goals and an approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable'

The characteristics of a high-performance team therefore are:

- A clearly defined and commonly shared purpose.

High-performance teams have a well-defined, mutually agreed and shared set of goals for which they hold themselves accountable. From a team tasked with sending a space shuttle to Mars to a medical team in an operating theatre, the teams that are effective share a common sense of purpose.

- Mutual trust and respect.

In high-performance teams members have a high degree of trust and respect for each other. There is recognition that everyone has diverse skills and backgrounds and that all contributions are valid.

- Clarity around individual roles and responsibilities.

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Have you ever been in a position in a team where roles and responsibilities are not clear? Where there may be duplication of effort or team-member responsibilities are vague and important tasks fall into a black hole? In high-performance teams everyone knows what their role is and what their individual responsibilities are.

- High levels of communication.

A high-performance team has open and high-frequency channels of communication. Information is cascaded to and from the team leader, between the team members and amongst their key stakeholders.

- Willingness to work towards the greater good of the team.

Individuals working in a high-performance team recognise that there will be times when they need to put the needs of the team before their individual goals. Captain Oates was a good example of this. He sacrificed his own life rather than be a burden on the rest of his team. In a high-performance team individuals recognise that at times they may have to make sacrifices for the overall good of the team.

- A leader who both supports and challenges team members.

Leaders of high-performance teams demonstrate a balance of supportive behaviour and challenge. They encourage their team, listen and provide ongoing recognition. At the same time they are not content with the status quo. They challenge the team to do greater and better things, question current ways of working and encourage ongoing improvement.

- A climate of co-operation.

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High-performance team members are co-operative rather than competitive. They support one another and work towards the common goal rather than being divisive.

- An ability to voice differences and appreciate conflict.

Finally, a high-performance team does not push differences under the carpet. They value challenge and openness and appreciate that conflict will help move the team forwards.

### **So how do you make people who prefer to work on their own want to be part of a team?**

Here is a simple exercise that you can do with individuals who work for you who may not be inclined to work in a team. Ask them to spend three minutes (I suggest that you time them) to write down, without looking, as many capital cities as they can think of. They should not share their list with anyone during this time. After three minutes, ask individuals, still not sharing their list, to count the number of capital cities it contains.

Next, tell the whole team that they now have three minutes to collectively come up with a list of capital cities in the world. Time the team. After three minutes ask them to count the final number. You will find that the list is much longer when everyone pools their ideas.

Hold a discussion with the team about the benefits that they see of teamwork, where best practice and innovation can be encouraged and how working together will be helpful to your stakeholders.

I suggest that you allocate specific team responsibilities to individuals who prefer to work on their own so that they

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need to interact with other people on the team and thereby come to see the benefits.

### **Lessons from geese**

One useful analogy of a high-performance team is the behaviour of geese. The 'Lessons from Geese' listed below were transcribed from a speech given by Angeles Arrien at the 1991 Organizational Development Network. It was circulated to Outward Bound staff throughout the United States Organizational Development Network. It is based on the book *Lessons from the Geese* written in 1972 by Dr Robert McNeish of Baltimore. You may like to share these facts and discuss them with your team.

#### ***Fact 1***

Geese fly in a V-formation as this helps them to move more quickly through the air. As each goose flaps its wings, it creates a slipstream for the geese that follow. This adds 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

#### ***Lesson***

People who work in a team share a common goal and sense of direction. Goals can be achieved much more quickly and easily as a team than as individuals because the team travel in each other's slipstream.

#### ***Fact 2***

If a goose leaves the V-formation it finds it more difficult to make headway as it suddenly feels the drag and resistance

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of flying alone. It soon comes back to the formation so that it benefits from the slipstream of the other birds in front of it.

### ***Lesson***

Like the geese, people in teams are able to help and support each other. Goals and objectives are more likely to be achieved if everyone is going in the right direction.

### ***Fact 3***

When the goose leading the V-formation tires, another bird takes its place. The geese take the lead in turn.

### ***Lesson***

Like the geese, everyone in a team has specific talents and abilities. It pays to take turns to do challenging tasks and share leadership, and to take collective responsibility.

### ***Fact 4***

To give encouragement to the geese at the front of the formation, geese further back honk so that they keep up their speed.

### ***Lesson***

When there is an atmosphere of encouragement, the team is more likely to achieve more. Working in an encouraging environment means that individuals as well as the team reach higher goals.

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### ***Fact 5***

If a goose becomes sick, or is wounded, and leaves the formation, two other geese accompany it to the ground. They then help and protect it by staying with it until it either dies or is able to fly again. At this point, returning geese either rejoin the formation or form another one so that they can fly on to their destination.

### ***Lesson***

In high-performance teams, team members stand by each other in bad times as well as good. They help and support each other outside the team as well as within it.

### **Benefits of team working**

So, as we have seen, a team can achieve things that individuals can't. They can use the knowledge and skills of all team members to arrive at a solution. Being part of a high-performance team generates ownership and commitment. It is a highly motivating experience. People who work in high-performance teams are more likely to be engaged with their organisation. As a result they are more likely to go the extra mile for the customer and for the benefit of the business.

### **The role of the team leader**

Leaders have a direct influence on the environment of the team. The degree to which they support and challenge their team members has a direct impact on team performance.

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Offering support means that the team leader provides positive feedback, listens, empathises and assists. The team leader provides advice, guidance and back up for others, gives them permission to act and actively helps with resources.

Challenge involves offering developmental feedback, encouraging others to do better both by the requests you make of them and by the challenges you set them. It can also mean challenging team members to rethink their actions and decisions by questioning and offering alternatives, setting stretching targets, stating positive and negative consequences of actions and confronting issues assertively.

The degree to which the team leader provides support and challenge can lead to very different working environments.

Figure 1 illustrates the resulting team climate dependent on the levels of support and challenge that the team leader demonstrates.

So what is your leadership style and how is this impacting on your team?

### **How is your team performing now?**

Here is a diagnostic tool that you can use with your team to help identify where the strengths lie in your team and where there are areas for improvement.

When you request team members to complete the assessment, encourage them to do so as honestly as possible. I suggest that you then facilitate an open discussion on what is working well and where and how your teamwork can be improved.

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<b>SUPPORT</b>	<b>High</b>	COMFORTABLE Feels easy, relaxed, comfortable, content, calm, 'stuck in a rut'	HIGH-PERFORMANCE Challenged, stimulated, Exciting, motivated, driven, know where you are going
	<b>Low</b>	APATHY Feel bored, lethargic, lazy, dull, neglected	STRESSFUL Feel pressured, worried, Pushed, tense, Out on your own
		<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>
		<b>CHALLENGE</b>	

**Figure 1: Team environment created by the leader**

The diagnostic is based on the need to have four elements in place to create an effective team:

- skills and knowledge
- work methods
- leadership
- climate.

### ***Skills and knowledge***

A team needs an appropriate blend of team skills as well as technical or functional skills to work effectively. This aspect includes:

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- Having the right balance of technical skills and know-how.
- Using previous knowledge and relevant experience.
- Knowledge of the organisational and team goals.
- Brainstorming and decision-making skills.
- Time and self-management skills.
- Interpersonal skills – for example, listening, supporting, challenging, differing, compromising.

### ***Work methods***

Teams need to have agreed systems of working together. This includes providing a structure to undertake tasks or projects, solve problems and make decisions. Also important to all teams is an effective communication framework to aid work flow. Work methods include:

- objectives
- work plans
- agendas
- guidelines
- standards
- timekeeping
- an appointed leader
- decision making
- briefings/communication frameworks
- feedback mechanisms.

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### ***Leadership***

The primary role of the leader is to provide the right amount of direction, challenge and support to the team to enable the team to perform effectively in achieving its objectives. Effective leadership includes:

- listening
- gathering information
- refocusing
- supporting
- directing
- checking and testing understanding
- summarising/recapping
- persuading
- building on ideas
- mediating.

### ***Climate***

A good climate is the product of the other three elements – skills and knowledge, work methods, leadership. Climate is also a result of the depth and quality of the relationships developed between team members: the level of openness and trust, the values which team members share. An effective team climate includes:

- honesty
- trust
- openness
- stating feelings



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- One thing that would improve our work methods is ...

### ***Skills and knowledge***

- The key skills and knowledge I bring to the team are ...
  
- The strengths of other people in the team in terms of skills and knowledge are ...
  
- Where skills and knowledge are lacking in the team is around the area(s) of ...

### ***Climate***

- The climate in the team is ...

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- What I feel about working in the team is ...
  
- A strength of this team is ...
  
- One improvement I would like to see in the team is ...

### **Activities to undertake with your team**

In addition, here are some ideas for sharing the key learning points from this chapter with your team. Invite them as part of a team meeting to undertake all or some of the following activities:

- Produce a definition of a team.
- Describe the benefits of working in your team.
- Brainstorm the characteristics of an effective team.
- Rate your team on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high) against each of the characteristics of an effective team that they have described.
- Recognise what is working well in the team based on the highest ratings.

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- Identify improvements that can be made in the team based on the lowest ratings.

### **Summary**

This chapter has introduced the benefits of team working and described the characteristics of great teams. Like each of the subsequent chapters it provides you with a diagnostic tool to rate your current team performance. By the end of this book you will therefore be equipped with tools and techniques to create a high-performance team.

At the end of each chapter is a series of questions that you might want to reflect on personally or use as the basis for department or team discussions. In addition, any of these questions might serve as the basis for IT/stakeholder conversations prior to creating a new team.

- What is a current strength of your team? How can you build on this further to enhance your performance?
- What do you and others identify as a weakness of the team? How can you overcome this?
- How are you perceived as a team leader by your own team and others in the IT department? How do you know this is the case?
- What skills and knowledge are missing in your team?
- How can you enhance the work methods and climate in your team?

## CHAPTER 2: THE STAGES OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT

In this chapter I outline:

- The stages that teams go through in terms of their development.
- The steps you can take to move your team towards high performance.

### **That uncomfortable feeling**

Put yourself in Isabelle's place. Isabelle was the IT manager that we mentioned at the beginning of this book. Having worked for the same company for some time, Isabelle found herself, as a result of a restructuring of the IT department, heading a completely new team, spread across three geographical locations. Her team included two homeworkers. In addition, because the nature of Isabelle's team had changed, she was working with a wider stakeholder group and as part of several multidisciplinary project teams. This left Isabelle feeling disoriented and uncomfortable.

### **The stages of team development**

In fact, what Isabelle was experiencing reflects the first stage of team development. There are four stages in the development of any team. These can be equated to driving a car that you have not driven before.

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## *2: The Stages of Team Development*

Imagine yourself as the driver of the IT team. You get into the car and other people from the IT department get in too. You do not know very much about who they are.

You start the car and put it into first gear. Just like when you drive in first gear things are only just starting up. The atmosphere in the team may appear a bit 'clunky'. As the car is new to you, you have to get used to the gearbox and where the instruments area. You're looking round at what is outside, paying attention to the rear-view mirror, and you're cautious about driving too fast.

This is the same as the first stage of the formation of a new team. Gear 1 is characterised by:

- team members feeling more part of a group than a team,
- little exchange of ideas,
- people not socialising,
- people being guarded and not revealing much about themselves,
- little shared understanding,
- people appearing to have low commitment to each other,
- people talking over each other,
- little active listening and
- only one or two people talking in the group.

As your speed slowly increases you move into second gear. At this stage of team formation, people are beginning to open up. It could be that the driver and passengers begin to discuss their ultimate destination. Nevertheless the conversation is focused on the team inside the car.

This phase is characterised by:

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- feelings being expressed where they have not been before,
- issues being confronted when they have not been before,
- disagreements being aired,
- people starting to take risks,
- people listening more to each other and
- people starting to feel part of a team not just a group.

On to third gear, and the car is beginning to pick up speed. Relationships are established within the team and roles and responsibilities become clear.

In this phase:

- there is increased sensitivity to others in the group,
- the group sets out methods for working together,
- a work pattern is established,
- there is balanced contribution to the group and
- there is a sense of 'team'.

Finally, you move on to fourth gear. The car is motoring now, you are on an open stretch and your destination is in sight. The driver and passengers now feel very much part of the team and there is a closeness amongst its members.

This phase is characterised by:

- a shared sense of purpose amongst the team (the team having a clear vision and guiding values),
- an enjoyable atmosphere,
- people able to challenge appropriately,
- team members understanding each other well,
- people helping and supporting each other,

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## *2: The Stages of Team Development*

- individuals growing and developing in the group and
- the team achieving its objectives and becoming high-performance.

### **Which stage is your team at?**

It could be that you are the leader or a member of an IT team or of a project or programme team. Look at the descriptions of the four gears or stages through which every team moves. Now consider the stage of development of your own team.

We need to recognise that each gear in the team vehicle is necessary. It does not do the car good, for example, to move from first gear to third. To arrive at peak performance it is best to move smoothly through each of the gears. Here therefore are some practical steps that you can take to help your team reach high performance.

### ***In first gear***

- Facilitate opportunities for team members to get to know each other both socially and at work. For example, you could organise a team meal or an event such as an evening out or a jointly undertaken activity.
- Set clear goals for the team and communicate these clearly to all team members. Make sure that the goals that you set are SMART, i.e.
  - Specific
  - Measurable
  - Achievable
  - Realistic

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## *2: The Stages of Team Development*

- Timebound.
- Allocate roles and responsibilities to each team member and ensure that everyone in the team knows what they are. Make certain that you communicate who is doing what to everyone in the team.
- Agree a team vision and set of guiding values (for more on how to do this, please see the following chapters).
- Hold regular team meetings as well as regular one-to-ones with team members.
- Encourage sharing of ideas and best practice. For example, you can add an agenda item to your team meetings around sharing best practice from projects team members may have been involved in since the last meeting.

### ***In second gear***

- At your team meetings, ask team members to express how they are feeling about projects/the workload/the team, rather than just focusing on tasks. You can go round each person and ask them how they are finding things, for example at the beginning of team meetings.
- Encourage active discussion in your team meetings. See the chapter on running effective meetings for ideas on how to do this.
- Make sure that when disagreements are aired, these are not swept to one side. Facilitate a discussion on the issues and encourage different viewpoints. There are ideas in the chapter on dealing with conflict on how you might do this.

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## *2: The Stages of Team Development*

### ***In third gear***

- Encourage people to network. For example, in your team meeting ask them to sit next to people they do not know well so they get an opportunity to chat.
- Review methods for working together as a team. Recognise successes. For example, allocate someone in the team the responsibility for gathering opinions on what is going well and what could be improved in terms of your working methods. Praise the team for what is working well.
- Encourage new ideas and ways of working. Encourage the team to come up with ideas for improvement and be open to doing things differently.
- Gain stakeholders' views on what is working in your team and what can be improved. You can do this by asking them questions either on a face-to-face basis or via a questionnaire on such things as:
  - What are the top three strengths of our team?
  - What can you rely on us to do well?
  - What are the top three improvement areas of our team?
  - What are our service failures?

### ***In fourth gear***

- Recognise the achievements of the team. You can do this at team meetings, on a one-to-one basis or at a special team event. This can take the form of certificates, team awards, individual awards or just a heartfelt 'thank you' and 'well done'.

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## *2: The Stages of Team Development*

- Encourage members of the team to chair team meetings on a rotational basis. Like the ‘geese’ story, this means that everyone has a chance to take the lead. It provides a development opportunity for people in the team.
- Set the team stretching goals. What more can they achieve? What goals would be motivating and attainable?
- Ensure that all team members have a personal development plan. This encourages individual improvement and ultimately will help the team.
- Regularly review the performance of the team and set targets for improvement. Build regular review time into your team meetings.
- Encourage cross-functional team working, secondments and knowledge-sharing. Look for opportunities for team members to expand their skills and knowledge outside the group.

In addition to the ideas I have outlined above, taking time out to hold a team-building event with the team is a good way of bonding. Alternatively, or additionally, you can include a piece on how well people know each other as an agenda item on a team meeting. Here, for example, is a quiz that you could use to create a better understanding of who is in the team as well as what the focus of the team is. Team members complete this individually and then share the answers and discuss.

### ***Team quiz***

Use this quiz to help team members increase their understanding of each other.

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## *2: The Stages of Team Development*

Answer the following questions in relation to your team. Then compare your responses with those of your fellow team members.

- How would you describe the role of your team?
- What are the objectives of your team?
- Who in the team lives the furthest from your place of work?
- Who in the team is the best time-manager?
- Who in the team is the most customer-focused?
- What have been the greatest achievements of the team in the past six months?
- What have been the biggest disappointments for the team in the past six months?
- Who in the team is the liveliest?
- How could communication in the team be improved?
- Who in the team is most supportive?
- Where is there duplication of roles and responsibilities in the team?
- What is the team's approach to conflict and disagreement?
- Who is the best listener in the team?
- What is the biggest challenge for the team in the next six months?
- What would you like to improve in order for the team to work more effectively together?

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## *2: The Stages of Team Development*

### ***Activity to complete with your team***

A further activity to undertake in your team is to describe to them the four phases of team formation. Ask them to identify which ‘gear’ the team is currently in. Then hold a discussion with all the team around ideas to help the team move to fourth gear. Discuss with them some of the ideas that I have listed in this chapter around actions the team can take to move quickly to fourth gear.

### **Summary**

Each time a new member joins your team, or if you are establishing an IT team from scratch, you will notice the four ‘gears’ that your team goes through before it becomes high-performance. This is true whether you work in a functional team, a project team or a cross-functional team.

You have a key role to play in facilitating the smooth transition between each of the stages of team development.

Here are some questions that you might want to reflect on personally or use as the basis for department or team discussions:

- What opportunities are there for team members to get to know each other on a social basis? How can you increase these opportunities?
- To what extent do team members know the vision and values of your team? How can you ensure clarity on these?
- Where are there overlaps in your team in terms of roles and responsibilities? How can these be overcome?

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## *2: The Stages of Team Development*

- What do your team members feel about the frequency and the content of your team meetings? How can you verify this?
- What ideas do your team members have about improvements to the team or new ways of working? How can you encourage a climate of continuous improvement?

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## CHAPTER 3: ROLES PEOPLE PLAY IN A TEAM

Part of your ability to create a high-performance team will be to understand better the roles that people take in a team. In this chapter I describe:

- The different behaviours which characterise the various roles that people take in a team.
- How you can better understand the roles and work with them to create an effective IT team.

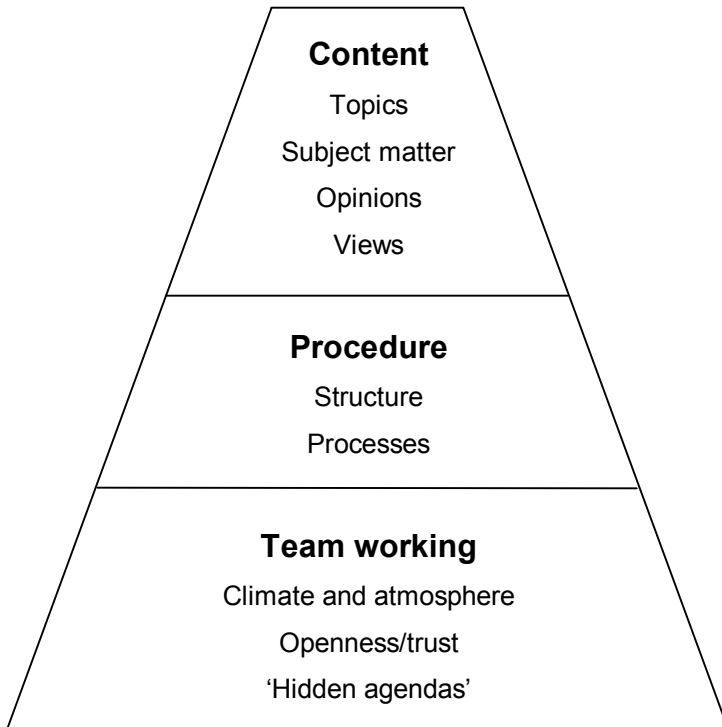
### **An effective team**

Imagine you are a fly on the wall in a project meeting looking in at a high-performance team in an IT environment. What you will probably find is that it is easy to see what the team is doing, what they are working on and what is being said (the content of the meeting). You will also probably be aware of how the team is organising itself to carry out the project or tasks, the structure or processes they are using. (I'll call this the procedure).

What might not be as clear is what I'll call the team process: how people are working together and what is happening while the team is working. These tend to be things beneath the waterline such as the level of openness and trust there is and the roles that people take in a team (see Figure 2).

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## *3: Roles People Play in a Team*



**Figure 2: Content, procedure, team working**

When a team is working well you will see that

- the team has an effective leader,
- team members demonstrate drive and ambition,
- team members are able to complete tasks and meet objectives,
- team members develop new ideas,
- team members turn ideas into practical actions,
- team members network with stakeholders and sell ideas,

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## *3: Roles People Play in a Team*

- team members think strategically and make objective decisions, and
- team members see problems from others' perspective and generate harmony.

They also have a mixture of people who adopt different and complementary roles.

### **Our behaviour preferences**

Look at any team and you will see a mixture of behaviours and personalities. Sometimes the people in a team can be complete opposites of each other and there will be clashes; other times there will be synergy in the team. The 'process' part of the team will be very dependent on the behaviour preferences that team members display.

The management psychologist Dr Meredith Belbin was one of the first people formally to identify the different roles that people play in teams. Over a period of nine years when he was based at Henley Management College he originated the concept that we all take different roles in a team. Belbin studied the behaviour of managers from all over the world. Over time he identified different clusters of behaviour as contributing to the success of teams. He recognised that in teams there are people who take action-oriented roles. Some team members are more people-focused and others more cerebral.

What does this mean for you as an IT professional? The first step to understanding better the roles that people play in teams is to understand best the role that you prefer to take.

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## 3: Roles People Play in a Team

Just because you have the word ‘manager’ in your title does not mean necessarily that your preference in a team is to be the chairperson or co-ordinator. We all have a preference regarding our role in a team, and this can be more than one role. If another member of the team displays the behaviours which seem most natural to us (our preferred team role), then we can potentially assume other roles in order to avoid clashing with this person. If your natural role is chairperson, you may take on the role of ideas person, for example.

Finally, there are roles in a team that each person avoids. For example, if you are not into detail, you would be very uncomfortable having to take on this role in a team. Therefore you would potentially avoid this.

The work of Belbin and others suggests that there are eight different types of behaviour people display in a team. Here is my own interpretation of possible team roles:

<b>Action-orientated team members</b>	
These three roles are focused on achieving the task:	
<b>The driver</b>	This person drives the team forward to succeed. They are challenging and competitive. Future-focused, they like to overcome barriers and lead the way.  To other people who are not like this, they may appear forceful, impatient and opinionated.

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## 3: Roles People Play in a Team

<b>The handyman</b>	<p>This person's talent lies in turning plans into practical actions. Task-focused and efficient, they get things done in a team in a reliable fashion.</p> <p>To other people who are not like this, they may appear to be rigid and inflexible. Once they are up and running they are unlikely to change their plan.</p>
<b>The proofreader</b>	<p>The proofreader is a conscientious person. They deliver on time and in exact detail.</p> <p>To other people who are not like this, they may appear too focused on detail and reluctant to delegate or let go of the finer points. They are also reluctant to change.</p>
<b>People-oriented team members</b> <p>There are three roles that people-orientated team members, who invariably focus more on relationships than they do on the task, play in a team:</p>	
<b>The chairperson</b>	<p>This person tends to facilitate discussion in the group. They are adept at drawing out the opinions and views of others in the team and in chairing the discussion.</p> <p>To other people who are not like this, the chairperson can seem reliant on others to make decisions and lacking in strong opinions.</p>
<b>The accommodator</b>	<p>This member of the team is quiet, co-operative and sensitive to others' needs. They are good listeners and respectful of others. As a consequence they help build a good atmosphere in the team.</p> <p>To other people in the team who are not</p>

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## 3: Roles People Play in a Team

	like this, they can appear shy and indecisive. They don't like to be put on the spot or make decisions that go against the needs of other people in the team.
<b>The networker</b>	<p>This person is outgoing, communicative and enthusiastic. They enjoy networking and meeting other people.</p> <p>To other people in the team who are not like this, their desire for variety and new things can mean that they seem easily bored and distracted.</p>
<b>'Thinking' team members</b> Finally, there are two 'thinking' roles people can take in a team:	
<b>The evaluator</b>	<p>This member of the team thinks strategically; they are good at judging all options, being realistic and discerning.</p> <p>To other people in the team who are not like this, the evaluator's sober style can appear uninspiring. They can also appear cautious and slow to change.</p>
<b>The ideas person</b>	<p>The ideas person is good at generating options. They are creative and unorthodox.</p> <p>To other people in the team who are not like this, the ideas person can appear unrealistic and impractical.</p>

**Table 1: Roles people take in a team**

### **Recognising the different types**

Part of building an effective team is being able to recognise the different types in a team. The phrases below are

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## 3: Roles People Play in a Team

indicative and representative of different behaviour associated with different roles that people take in a team. Look at what is said and when and guess which team type this represents.

<b>Phrase</b>	<b>Said at what point in the meeting</b>	<b>Your guess</b>
'To summarise, the main points seem to be ...'	Throughout	
'So we've heard from Sue, what are other people's views?'	Throughout	
'What we have to do is ...'	Throughout	
'No, you're wrong; we need to focus on ...'	Throughout	
'How about looking at it from a different perspective?'	Beginning/middle	
'I've an idea; we could possibly ...'	Beginning/middle	
'The problem with that idea is ...'	Middle/end	
'Let's not overlook ...'	Middle/end	
'A practical way of doing this within our budget is ...'	Middle/end	
'Let's turn this into a workable plan'	Middle/end	

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'I know someone who can ...'	Beginning/middle	
'I can persuade Sales to ...'	Beginning/middle	
'I agree with Joe'	Middle/end	
'I've listened to what Sue was saying'	Middle/end	
'Let me check that we have all the detail ...'	End	
'What about Article 3, Paragraph G, Sub-paragraph iv in the ninth volume?'	End	

**Table 2: Guess who says what**

### **Effective teams**

Effective teams are made up of different types of people and they consist of different types of roles.

The mix of role types that play in a team determines their effectiveness. For example, how do you think an IT team made up of two drivers, a networker and two accommodators would perform if working together on a detailed IT project implementation?

The chances are that some of this team will talk a good talk (the drivers and the networkers), but the other two members of the team may be ignored (the accommodators). As there is not a handyman or a proofreader in the team, the detail of the project may be ignored and timescales missed. There is also no chairperson in the team, which means that potentially the two drivers' strong opinions may go

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unchecked. The networker may become bored and decide to network elsewhere!

Ideally it is useful to have a mix of all the different roles in a team. In reality this is not always possible. A healthy team will have a mixture of action-orientated, people-orientated and thinking people.

### **So what can you do to manage the roles people take in a team?**

There are a number of team diagnostic tools that can help you and your team assess the roles that you play in a team. Working with an accredited user you can discover what types each of you and your team members are. This will allow you to identify the strengths and weaknesses of your team as well as how other people may perceive your team. It will also help facilitate a discussion with the team about blind spots and how these can be overcome.

In addition, this assessment will help you identify gaps in the team which may potentially be filled via secondments or new recruitment to the team.

### **Activity to undertake with your team**

Explain and discuss the roles that people undertake in a team using my description above. Invite each team member to say which role(s) they believe best describe(s) them. Ask other people in the team for their opinions too.

Hold a discussion about the balance there is in the team around action-orientated, people-orientated and thinking people and what this means for the performance of the team. Ask the team to identify what they need to be more

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aware of or watch out for in order to make them a more effective team.

### **Summary**

How people work together as part of a team is two thirds of its success. I strongly recommend that to create a high-performance team, you take time to better understand team roles and the different behaviours which characterise these.

Here are some questions that you can ask of yourself and others in your team:

- Thinking about the ‘process’ of your current team – i.e. the climate in the team – how would you describe it?
- Looking at the characteristics of different team members, which one best describes you? (You can be a mixture of several types). Which ones best describe your team members?
- How would other people outside your team describe the characteristics of your team? How can you verify this?
- What team types are missing from your team? What actions can you take to address this?

### **Answers**

Here are the answers to the guess-the-team-type quiz:

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<b>Phrase</b>	<b>Said at what point in the meeting</b>	<b>Answer</b>
'To summarise, the main points seem to be ...'	Throughout	The chairperson
'So we've heard from Sue, what are other people's views?'	Throughout	The chairperson
'What we have to do is ...'	Throughout	The driver
'No, you're wrong; we need to focus on ...'	Throughout	The driver
'How about looking at it from a different perspective?'	Beginning/middle	The ideas person
'I've an idea; we could possibly ...'	Beginning/middle	The ideas person
'The problem with that idea is ...'	Middle/end	The evaluator
'Let's not overlook ...'	Middle/end	The evaluator
'A practical way of doing this within our budget is ...'	Middle/end	The handyman
'Let's turn this into a workable plan'	Middle/end	The handyman
'I know someone who can ...'	Beginning/middle	The networker

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'I can persuade Sales to ...'	Beginning/middle	The networker
'I agree with Joe'	Middle/end	The accommodator
'I've listened to what Sue was saying'	Middle/end	The accommodator
'Let me check that we have all the detail ...'	End	The proofreader
'What about Article 3, Paragraph G, Sub-paragraph iv in the ninth volume?'	End	The proofreader

**Table 3: Guess who says what – answers**

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## CHAPTER 4: CREATING A TEAM VISION AND A SET OF VALUES

One of the elements that binds a team together is having a clear vision and set of values. In this chapter I outline:

- Why vision and values are helpful for teams particularly in times of change.
- A process for creating your team vision.
- How to identify your team values.

### **Why create a team vision?**

When researchers look at successful teams there is one thing they frequently find they have in common: a compelling vision of the future and a set of values that underpins this. If you develop a clearly spelt-out vision and set of values it will help your team run more successfully.

All major achievements throughout history are, arguably, attributable to people with powerful dreams about the future. Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' or President Kennedy's 'Man on the moon by the end of the decade' are excellent examples of vision. In fact a vision can be a magnetic force that draws people to it and aligns them in the same direction; visions are often described as the 'skyhooks for the soul', the igniting spark that can inspire and energise people to do better.

Those teams which successfully embed vision and values take time to work and weave them into the fabric of the team; update them to ensure relevance, test them out and

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## *4: Creating a Team Vision and a Set of Values*

gain feedback on performance; and make them part and parcel of the team.

### **Vision and values in their context**

I was facilitating a team-building event for an IT department recently. The team leader had said that he wanted to develop a mission statement for the team. It was only on further probing that I discovered he was actually talking about a vision for the team.

There are a number of terms that get bandied around in relation to vision and values. Often teams say they have a vision, when in fact this is a ‘mission’.

To help clarify terminology, here is our definition of the different words used:

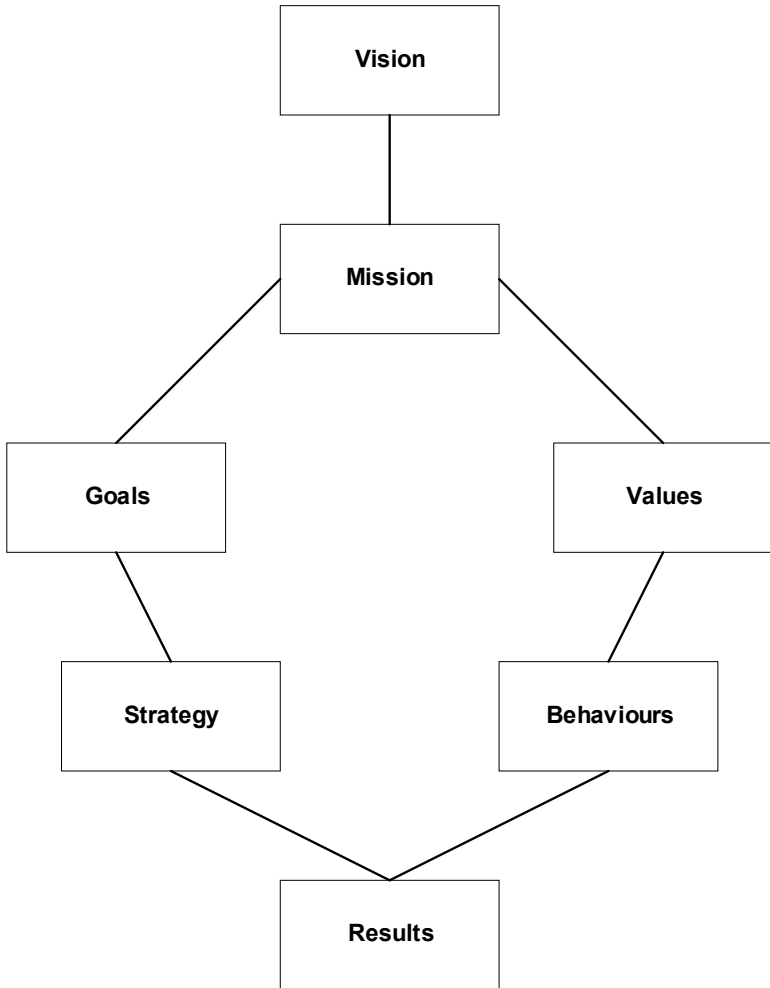
- Vision: a picture of a desired future state that is sufficiently appealing and compelling to drive change forward – the ‘where we want to be’.
- Mission: the purpose of the team – the ‘what we want to achieve’.
- Values: the underlying principles and ethics that drive the team – the ‘how we want to act to guide us towards our vision’.
- Goals: the objectives or targets that the team is trying to achieve – the ‘what we need in order to achieve our mission’.
- Strategy: the approach that the team is adopting to achieve the goals that support the strategy – the ‘how we will achieve our goals’.
- Behaviours: the way in which people in the team act in terms of what they do and say that brings the strategy

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## *4: Creating a Team Vision and a Set of Values*

and desired culture to life – the ‘what we will say and do to bring our values to life’

The ‘team diamond’ seen in the figure below explains the inter-relationships.



**Figure 3: The team diamond**

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## *4: Creating a Team Vision and a Set of Values*

### **Developing a vision of the future**

A vision sits at the pinnacle of the team diamond. It sets the direction for the team – where the business wants to be. Having a vision for your team means you stretch the team beyond its current state. For example, for many years Bill Gates’s vision for Microsoft was of a computer in every home. Now this is in sight, he has set another stretching vision, to empower people through great software – anytime, anywhere, on any device.

The criteria for a good vision are that it should be memorable, meaningful and inspirational. Here are some examples of organisational visions. They may not be meaningful to you because you are not employed by the organisation and familiar with the context. However, which do you find memorable?

- Healthcare team: ‘Taking care of the life in our hands’.
- Financial services team: ‘To be the first choice for customers and colleagues’.
- IT team: ‘To be the model of excellence for our customers’.

A team vision is particularly helpful if your team is about to go through change. A vision allows people a focal point during change and gives some context for why the changes are happening. Change itself is a means of helping the team get to its future state.

### **Developing a vision**

Rather than leaving the vision to you as the team manager, my recommendation is for every member of the team to have an opportunity to contribute to it. This creates greater

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buy-in and a sense of ownership. This process was recently used successfully with one IT team we worked with in helping them to define their vision – ‘Making a difference’.

We ran a series of brainstorming meetings for all the team members. The sessions focused on what sort of IT team customers, employees and other stakeholders wanted in the future. We recorded the outputs, and team members created a short, inspirational and memorable phrase that captured the essence of the responses.

The next stage was to communicate the vision to all of the organisation. The IT manager and their team held a series of meetings with their key stakeholders. This allowed them to share their vision and also to hold discussions about what they could do as a team to move further towards achieving their vision.

### **Team values**

At the same time as developing a vision, you may wish to consider agreeing with the team some guiding values. Values are the principles and ways of working in a team. If values are embedded in the team, they allow all other systems, processes and behaviours to fit together.

### **Identifying team values**

Team values show team members, customers and other stakeholders how the team intends to operate on a daily basis. Values are a set of expectations we have of ourselves and others. The values state what is important for the team.

In the same way as setting a vision for the team, I suggest that you define your values as a team. To do this, hold a

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team meeting. During the session ask team members what they consider *are* and *should be* important as guiding principles for the team. Pull together what appear to be the five or six values to which everyone agrees. In practice I find that more than six values risk becoming forgotten.

Here is an example of the guiding values from one IT team I worked with recently:

- customer focus
- innovation
- care and respect
- collaboration.

When developing values it is important to recognise that certain values will be ‘lived’ at present in the team; others will be ‘espoused’ – i.e. those that the team wishes to embody but which it may not yet be ready to do so. For example, one of the IT team’s values that I cited above was ‘innovation’. It knew from stakeholder feedback that this was not something that others saw in the team. Therefore the team had to work hard to demonstrate this value in all its dealings with stakeholders.

### **Values into behaviours**

Creating team values can be an empty exercise unless team members know how to translate the values into working practices and behaviour. Once team members understand how values link to what they do, what values look like in concrete terms, and what their positive impacts are for the team, then they will be more motivated to put the values into practice.

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## *4: Creating a Team Vision and a Set of Values*

Best practice is to facilitate a discussion about the behaviours that epitomise each value and are relevant to all team members. For example, what does the value ‘customer focus’ mean for the team?

You could also facilitate a discussion with the team, once the values have been set, around:

- Which value is currently most demonstrated in the team?
- Which value is least demonstrated in the team?
- Which values is the most challenging for team members to demonstrate?
- Which value is each team member personally most committed to?

It may seem strange at first to discuss vision and values in a technical environment, but both a team vision and guiding values give people a sense of purpose and belonging.

### **Another activity to undertake with your team**

If your team has doubts about the power of setting a team vision and values, ask each member to think of an organisation that they admire and to list what they admire about it. Next, allocate them some time to go on the Internet to research that particular organisation’s vision and values (you can find these on most companies’ websites).

At your next team meeting ask each person to discuss who they chose and what they found out. If there was no information available for a company on the Web, ask the team member to describe what they think the organisation’s vision and values are from their perceptions of the business.

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## *4: Creating a Team Vision and a Set of Values*

Hold a discussion on the value of having a vision and a clear set of values. Link this discussion to the development of your own team vision and set of values.

### **Summary**

Creating a vision and a set of supporting values will help you create a strong sense of team. The best visions are short, memorable and inspirational. Both a vision and values are most meaningful when they are developed by everyone in the team, who is then much more likely to bring these to life.

To quote an ancient Chinese saying, ‘When planning for a year, sow corn; when planning for a decade, plant trees; when planning for life, train and educate men’.

Questions to ask yourself and team members:

- How would you like key stakeholders to perceive the team?
- How different is that from how they see you now?
- What is important to you outside work in terms of your personal values?
- What should the guiding values be for your own team?
- Do you know what your company’s vision is? (If not, how can you find this out?)

## CHAPTER 5: EFFECTIVE TEAM MEETINGS

In this chapter I outline:

- How to prepare for an effective team meeting.
- Defining the purpose of a team meeting.
- Establishing the agenda.
- Tips on chairing the meeting.
- Encouraging participation at team meetings.
- Making robust decisions.
- Evaluating your current team meetings.

### **How effective are your team meetings?**

Do your team meetings seem dull and tiring? Are you making the most of the time that is allocated to them? Do you hold team meetings at all?

Many times I have come across managers of IT departments who have poor meeting habits with their teams. Either they hold very few team meetings and rely on e-mail and phone communication to pass on information to their team members; alternatively, the team meetings that they do hold are long and unproductive. Which category do you fall into, if any?

### ***Team meeting preparation checklist***

A good meeting is all about preparation. Look at the following 10-point checklist of good practice in preparing

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## *5: Effective Team Meetings*

for a team meeting. Now think of the last team meeting that you had.

Can you honestly be sure that you did these things?

- Be sure of the objectives of the team meeting - what is being discussed and why, and what is the desired outcome.
- Prepare an agenda outlining the topic headings in logical sequence.
- Consult with team members to see what they would like to put on the agenda.
- Group urgent items and deal with these first. Put longer items for discussion later.
- Always inform team members in advance of timing, venue, agenda, duration and what they need to bring.
- Circulate useful information in advance of the meeting; for example, the agenda and supplementary documentation.
- Keep meeting size to no more than eight people and decide whether they all need to be there all the time.
- Plan time limits for agenda items and for the meeting as a whole.
- Choose a comfortable venue which is convenient and of an appropriate size and where you will be uninterrupted.
- Book refreshments and any equipment required.

### ***Defining the purpose of the team meeting***

One of the difficulties with many team meetings is that they just happen without much thought being given to why. Some key questions to ask are:

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## 5: *Effective Team Meetings*

Is the team meeting concerned with strategy (big picture)?	
Is the meeting concerned with tactics (detailed implementation)?	
Is the meeting for fact-finding?	
Is it for information?	
Is it for consultation?	
Is it for decision making?	
Does everyone need to attend the meeting all the time?	
Is there a quicker way of arriving at the same output?	

**Table 4: Defining the reason for the meeting**

### **Establishing the agenda**

Once you have defined why you are having the meeting, the agenda serves as a useful tool for keeping the meeting on track. As well as stating what each item is about and indicating how long it will be, it is helpful to show who wants the item tabled. Some useful tips are to:

- Put short, easy items at the beginning of the agenda.
- Put hard items in the middle.
- Leave information-only items to the end.
- Start and finish with an item that involves everyone.

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## *5: Effective Team Meetings*

### **Chairing the team meeting**

Is it always you who chairs your team meeting? Have you considered what the impact may be if you rotated the chair of the meeting? One IT manager I know made a conscious decision a year ago to appoint people from her team to take on specific roles at the start of each meeting. These include someone chairing the meeting, another person being the note-taker and a third a timekeeper. The result was that the quality and levels of participation increased at the team meeting and there was more commitment to the actions agreed.

### **Encouraging participation at team meetings**

Allocating roles and responsibilities is just one example of how to encourage participation at team meetings. If your team meetings are stilted and only a few people make a positive contribution, here are some techniques that you can use:

#### ***Subgrouping***

Introduce the agenda item. Then divide participants into mini-groups and allow five minutes for discussion on the topic. Take feedback from each group. You will find that quieter people prefer discussion on a one-to-one basis than in front of the whole group. In this way you get their views too.

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## *5: Effective Team Meetings*

### ***Round robin***

Announce the agenda topic and allow two or three minutes for individual thought. Then go round the group at random and ask for opinions. Make sure that you include everyone in the team.

### ***Use brainstorming principles to generate ideas***

Offer team members the opportunity to brainstorm solutions to issues. Remind participants of the ground rules for brainstorming:

- there should be no criticism of ideas
- one idea should bounce off another
- the quantity of ideas, not quality, is the first requirement.

Ensure that you write down all the ideas that are generated. Where possible, come back to review the ideas at a later time during or after the meeting so that they are not immediately rejected out of hand.

### ***Mind Mapping<sup>®</sup>***

Mind Mapping<sup>®</sup> is another way to encourage participation. To do this, take a large piece of paper. Write the topic area in a circle in the centre of the paper. Put the paper on the wall and ask people to write their thoughts on the paper. Join similar ideas or thoughts together with lines. Again, encourage freewheeling so that one thought bounces off another.

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## *5: Effective Team Meetings*

### ***Post-it<sup>®</sup> notes***

Encourage individuals to write their ideas on Post-it<sup>®</sup> notes. Use one Post-it<sup>®</sup> note per idea. After a suitable period, ask everyone to put their Post-it<sup>®</sup> notes on the table or wall. Group these into clusters of ideas and then discuss the idea.

If you use these ideas in practice, you will find that the levels of participation at your team meetings increase.

### ***Making robust decisions***

Part of your role as team leader is to ensure that sound decisions are made in your IT team. How does your team make decisions? What process do you use to do this?

One framework that you may find useful is the six-step process for making decisions:

### ***Step 1: Define the problem***

The first step in the process is for the team to identify the root cause of the problem, not just the symptoms. You can use cause-and-effect analysis to do this.

Cause-and-effect analysis breaks down a problem or an effect into its component parts. The causes of the problem are categorised so that the completed diagram looks like the skeleton of a fish. This enables team members to use their personal knowledge to categorise the causes of the problem. It also provides ideas for data collection and/or the root cause of the problem.

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## *5: Effective Team Meetings*

How to do it:

- 1 Write the problem or effect in a box on the right-hand side of a flipchart. Draw a large arrow across the sheet pointing to it.
- 2 Draw arrows indicating the main categories and pointing towards the central arrow at an angle.
- 3 The main categories are typically People, Process, Systems and Environment, but others may be used.
- 4 Brainstorm for specific details of the root causes of the problem, ensuring that everyone participates. Attach each root cause to an appropriate main category.
- 5 Break down the details further by brainstorming.
- 6 Gather and evaluate data on the possible causes.

In most cases, it's not of great importance where on the diagram you put a particular detail; it is identifying the detail of the root cause that matters. Cause-and-effect diagrams are very useful when displayed publicly. You can invite people to add details, and you can show what progress is being made.

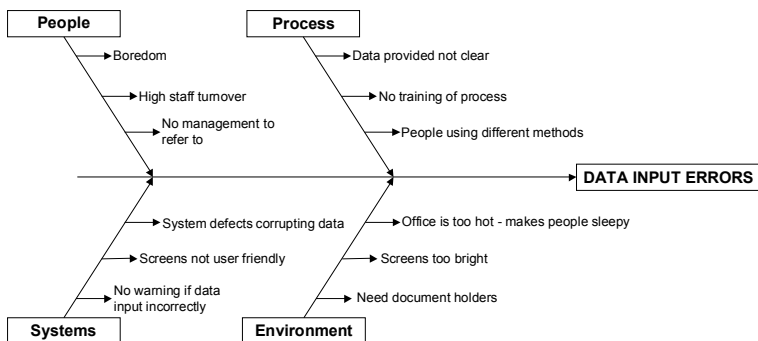
You may want to make further cause-and-effect diagrams based on the first by choosing more specific main categories and breaking these down further. Once you have identified the roots of the problem, you may need to gather data to substantiate these.

Figure 4 is an example of the cause-and-effect analysis that one IT team generated when they were asked to investigate data input errors by the sales admin team. You will see that only part of the problem relates to systems. The IT team needed to work with the sales admin manager to help ensure that the other root causes of the issues were tackled too.

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## 5: *Effective Team Meetings*

### EXAMPLE OF CAUSE & EFFECT ANALYSIS A high level of data input errors within the Sales Admin Team



**Figure 4: Example of cause-and-effect diagram**

### ***Step 2: Generate options to overcome the issues***

Once you have identified the root causes of the problem, encourage everyone on the team to brainstorm their ideas for improvements to address the root causes. Start by addressing the area on the cause-and-effect analysis which appears to have the biggest impact on the problem. Ask all team members to get paper and pen and to spend five minutes on their own, writing their ideas on how to address this issue.

Next, hold a brainstorming session by going round the group and asking each person in turn to call out an idea. Write this on the flipchart on the left-hand side, ensuring that there is enough space allowed on the right-hand side for the later evaluation exercise (see next page). Continue the process until every idea has been written up. If anyone has not got an idea to add, they just say ‘pass’.

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Encourage as many wild and non-conventional ideas as possible; anything goes at this stage.

Ensure that there is no evaluation of ideas during the process.

### ***Step 3: Evaluating the options***

The next stage in the process involves the team evaluating the options that they have brainstormed. Ideally you should do this at a separate team meeting so that the team has a chance to reflect on the options and does not reject them out of hand.

Here are two techniques that you can use to do this:

The first technique is suitable for smaller issues and when it is important to make a swift decision. It does not necessarily imply a unanimous vote, or a majority vote, but the result will be a proposal that no team member opposes.

Review the ideas that have been generated from step 2. Allocate each team member 10 points to 'spend' on their favoured idea(s). Each person can share out the points; for example, five, three and two or four, three, two and one. Any combination which adds up to 10 is acceptable. No one idea can have more than five points.

Ask each person to allocate their points to the ideas on the flipchart. Make sure that everyone distributes all their points before moving on to step 3 in the process.

An alternative approach, which is useful for business-critical issues, is to undertake an evaluation of the ideas using a criteria matrix. In order to do this you need to have first established the criteria that you will use to evaluate the options. These can be, for example,

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## 5: *Effective Team Meetings*

- customer satisfaction
- employee satisfaction
- cost
- timescales (for example, possibility of implementing within the timescale set).

Check that everyone is happy with the criteria and that all team members have a good understanding of what these are before you start the evaluation process.

Next draw a matrix on the right-hand side of the ideas flipchart, outlining the criteria in a box. You will need to also agree a ranking scale; for example, one (low) to five (high). Attention: if using this ranking in terms of cost the scale needs to be inverted so that the cost scale is one (high) to five (low).

Here is an example of a criteria matrix:

Idea	Customer satisfaction	Employee satisfaction	Cost score	Time-scales	Total score

**Table 5: Example of criteria matrix**

The team then ranks each idea against these criteria. I find that it is useful if this is first done individually or in pairs and then discussed so that anyone in the team with a strong opinion does not sway the others and so that quieter members of the team are encouraged to take part.

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## *5: Effective Team Meetings*

### ***Step 4: Select the option(s)***

Once the team has undertaken their evaluation, ensure as team leader that the options which are selected to overcome the problem are the ones which most benefits your stakeholders and which all the team are committed to.

NB: before moving to step 5, the action-planning phase, check whether the team may need to involve customers and employees in confirming that these actions are the most appropriate.

### ***Step 5: Implement the option(s)***

Once the options have been agreed, discuss the specific actions that need to be undertaken to complete them. Allocate a timescale for their completion, and decide who will be responsible and how the action will be undertaken.

### ***Step 6: Monitor and review***

Action plans are only as good as their implementation. Make sure that you regularly monitor progress and review this with your team.

## **Evaluating your current team meetings**

‘If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you always get’. This adage applies as much to team meetings as it does to anything else. Here are a meeting checklist that you can use to obtain feedback about the team meetings that you hold. You can circulate it to team members after the meeting and then use it for discussion on how your meetings can be improved.

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<b>Rate your team meeting</b>	
Rate the degree to which your team meeting was effective against the following criteria:	Yes/No
<b>Preparation</b>	
The agenda for the meeting was circulated beforehand	
Participants knew what they had to prepare for the meeting	
The appropriate people were invited to the meeting	
The organiser had considered whether everyone needed to be at the meeting all of the time	
The appropriate number of people were invited to the meeting	
An appropriate venue was chosen for the meeting	
Equipment and refreshments had been organised for the meeting as appropriate	
<b>Opening the meeting</b>	
There was a chairperson for the meeting	
The meeting started on time	
There was a clear objective for the meeting	
There was a structure for the meeting	

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## *5: Effective Team Meetings*

There was a timescale set for the meeting	
The chairperson appointed a note-taker and a timekeeper as appropriate	
<b>During the meeting</b>	
The chairperson let everyone contribute	
The chairperson listened actively to all contributions	
The chairperson used effective questions	
The chair summarised on a regular basis	
The chairperson intervened as appropriate to smooth conflict	
Participants stated their honest opinions	
Participants made suggestions	
Participants listened to other people's opinions	
Participants built on other people's opinions	
Differences of opinion were resolved in the meeting	
Consensus was reached	
Participants timed their contributions well	
Participants avoided interruptions	
Participants and the chair displayed attentive non-verbal behaviour	

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## 5: *Effective Team Meetings*

<b>At the end of the meeting</b>	
The chairperson ensured that action points and responsibilities were agreed at the end of the meeting	
The meeting ran to time	
The objectives for the meeting were met	
Participants felt that the meeting had been worthwhile	
<b>In summary</b>	
What was positive about the team meeting?	
What could have made the meeting more effective?	

**Table 6: Rate your team meeting**

### ***Another activity to undertake with your team***

Here is a further activity that you can undertake with your team with their agreement. Invite one person from your team to act as an observer at your next team meeting. Explain that this person will not take part in the meeting.

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## *5: Effective Team Meetings*

They need to sit to one side of the meeting (i.e. not at the meeting table but so that they can discretely see what is happening in the team). They do not take part in the team discussion.

Ask the observer to note down the following:

- What behaviour is the team displaying which is helpful to the team?
- What behaviour are team members displaying that is unhelpful?
- Who speaks most in the meeting and what is the impact of this on the team?
- Who speaks least in the meeting and what is the impact of this?

Ask the observer to note specific examples of what was said and done.

At the end of the team meeting, ask the observer to feed back their observations to the group as a whole. Recognise what is working well in the team. Encourage a discussion about what the team can do more of to encourage participation and to improve the quality of your team meetings.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I've outlined tips and techniques for you to prepare and chair an effective team meeting. I've also given you ideas on how to encourage participation at team meetings and make robust decisions as a team.

Here are some questions that you can ask yourself and your team members in relation to your team meetings:

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## *5: Effective Team Meetings*

- How satisfied are you and your team members with the current structure of your team meetings?
- Who chairs your team meetings currently and is this the most appropriate person?
- To what extent do team members participate in your meetings? How can you improve this?
- How would you describe the decision-making process in your meetings? What else can you do as a team to ensure that your decision-making process is robust?

## CHAPTER 6: DEALING WITH CONFLICT IN A TEAM

In this chapter I provide you with an overview of techniques that you can use to effectively manage conflict in a team. I address this from three angles:

- How to deal with conflict between the team leader and a team member.
- How to deal with conflict between two team members or a team member and someone outside the team.
- How to deal with conflict about the future direction of the team.

### **Conflict can be healthy**

Many people shy away from conflict or disagreement in a team. Disagreement can create bad feelings and a poor atmosphere in the team. On the other hand, disagreement can also be a healthy thing. I was helping the team of a large organisation put together a new process for programme and project management in their business. My role was to facilitate the team discussions. There was a member of the project team from IT who was adamant that one aspect of the new process would not work. The other team members became increasingly frustrated with him, talked over him and eventually ignored him because they did not agree with his point of view. By the third meeting the other team members verbally abused and ridiculed him when he had something to say. In fact, when the person was allowed to explain his thoughts and opinions fully and be listened to by the others, what he was saying made sense.

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The team needed to consider his opinion, and, although not everyone totally agreed with it, they recognised that there were elements in what he was saying that they needed to take into account for the project to be successful.

So disagreement can be a healthy thing for a team, as long as it is managed well and in an adult fashion. What often happens is that people forget to remain in 'adult' mode when they disagree. They can sulk or lose their temper or actively take steps to sabotage the other person's ideas.

In conflict situations people take up and defend positions. This makes the problem worse or more extreme. People stop hearing one another. They blame others rather than express their views.

The impact of conflict on ourselves can be stress, demotivation and negativity. The impact on others can be co-operation difficulties, strained relationships and hostile attitudes. Overall conflict can lead to loss of confidence in the team, loss of customers, interdepartmental strife and loss of efficiency.

An estimated 370 million working days are lost in the UK each year as a result of personality clashes, stress and heavy workloads. Lack of effective leadership is seen as a key element in poor conflict resolution in teams. So what can you do to address underlying tensions before they escalate?

Here are some practical things that you can do if conflict arises in your team.

### **Conflict between the team leader and a team member**

The first aspect I would like to address is your own approach to conflict or disagreement. There may be

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occasions when disputes arise between you and another member of the team. You may have disagreements or arguments, you may simply just not get on.

What stance do you adopt? Do you talk it out and come to some agreement? Do you get angry and let your emotion show? Do you ignore the situation and avoid talking about it? Do you agree with what the team member is saying – ‘anything for a peaceful life’.

### *Approaches to conflict management*

There are four approaches that you can adopt when dealing with conflict:

<b>Satisfying own needs</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Competition</b> I strongly insist that my own needs and rights prevail	<b>Negotiation</b> I recognise that we both have equal rights and needs
	<b>Low</b>	<b>Avoidance</b> I do not express my own needs and I ignore the needs of others	<b>Compliance</b> Others' rights and needs take precedence over mine
		<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>
		<b>Satisfying needs of others</b>	

**Figure 5: Approaches to conflict management**

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The competitive approach is one where you put your own needs above the other person's. You are right and they are wrong, no matter what happens.

An alternative approach is to avoid the issue, not to communicate or express what you are feeling. This opt-out only tends to prolong the dispute and can make matters worse.

Compliance is another way to deal with conflict. You, as the team leader, simply go along with what the other person wants or needs. You give in to them – 'anything for a quiet life'

The fourth option is one where you adopt a win-win approach. You recognise that you and the other person both have rights and needs. You negotiate to arrive at a workable outcome for you both.

### ***Which approach do you take?***

Read the situations below and tick the style you would typically adopt in each:

#### *Situation A*

Someone in your team disagrees strongly with you about something that really matters to you at work. Do you:

- Walk away rather than express your views?
- Express your opinions in as strong a fashion as the other person?
- Soothe their feelings rather than start an argument?

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- Listen to what they have to say and state your feelings in a rational manner?

### *Situation B*

You are negotiating with someone over the cost of some equipment. They refuse to bring the price down. Do you:

- Tell them what you are willing to pay and say that's final?
- Accept the price they offer?
- Let someone else do the talking?
- Question the price and seek a more favourable exchange?

### *Situation C*

A team member who works for you has not performed a task to the standard that you were expecting. Do you:

- Mention it in a roundabout way so as not to hurt their feelings?
- Put off telling them?
- Tell them directly and forcibly what they have not done?
- Ask them the reason for the performance shortfall, and explain the consequence of this and how you would like things to change?

### *Situation D*

Conflict has arisen in your team. At the next team meeting do you:

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- Help the team find a compromise solution?
- Not say anything during the team meeting?
- Concur with the majority view?
- Put your own point across strongly?

### *Situation E*

Your boss gives you some feedback on something he believes you did wrong. Do you react by:

- Shrugging your shoulders and walking away?
- Agreeing with him that it was wrong?
- Telling him loudly that you disagree?
- Asking him for reasons why he thinks this was wrong?

### *Situation F*

You have been waiting in a queue for 20 minutes and someone in front of you butts in. Do you:

- Say, 'Go away! You've got a cheek!'
- Say, 'I've been waiting here 20 minutes, please don't butt in'?
- Say, 'If you really need to be in front of me, that's OK'?
- Let them take the place in front of you?

Each of the answers represents a different approach to conflict. Turn to the answers at the end of this chapter to see which approach best typifies your conflict management style.

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### ***What is the best approach?***

Although the model that I have introduced can be situational, in practice the best conflict resolution is *negotiation*. This means taking time to sit down with the team member and listening to their view point. It also means controlling our own emotional triggers. You can do this by consciously relaxing and thinking positively. If you meet to resolve the situation feeling angry or upset, you are not likely to arrive at a workable agreement.

Here is a process that you can use to address personal conflict:

- Begin the discussion by recognising that there has been some difficulty between you.
- State your own feelings and concerns.
- Ask the other person for their perspective.
- Actively listen to what they are saying and do not interrupt.
- Summarise their position and ask questions where appropriate.
- Agree the problem.
- Suggest alternatives and respond to the other person's concerns.
- Ask the other person for options on how to resolve the issue.
- Aim for a win-win solution.

Above all, focus on solving the problem, not the person.

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### **Conflict between team members and outside the team**

There may also be occasions when you notice that there is conflict between team members or that a team member may be in dispute with someone outside the team. As a team manager, you have a role to play in helping to resolve the conflict if the parties involved are not already doing this themselves.

It could be that you have to act as mediator or step in to interrupt the dispute if the conflict behaviour is becoming unhelpful or destructive to the team.

Where possible it is a good idea to get the two parties together to talk things through. It is helpful to empathise and acknowledge both parties' feelings. Ask one of the two to explain their perspective on the situation. Encourage the other to listen and not interrupt, and, where possible, to put emotions to one side. Then ask the other person to state their point of view, now with the first person listening and not interrupting.

Your role should be to get both sides considering the wider consequences of continuing the conflict and generating some options for possible ways forward.

It is not an easy role that you have to play, but if the conflict or dispute is not tackled it can fester. Like a wound on a body that becomes poisonous, the poison can spread through the body of the team. So the sooner it is out the better.

Here are some practical actions that you can take if you spot conflict in your team:

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### ***Stage 1: Spot the signals***

The first stage must be to spot the signs that damaging conflict is beginning and has the potential to get out of hand. These signals may include:

- Customer service deteriorating as other internal and personal goals, such as settling scores, become of overriding importance.
- People becoming tense and angry.
- The team splitting into opposing camps.
- A person being persistently attacked, which diminishes their contribution.
- Differences or debates dragging on and not getting settled.
- Negativity and uncooperativeness being displayed in the team

Conflict may manifest itself as emotion-fuelled fights, debates and discussions, sometimes rational, sometimes passionate, where there is argument on the basis of facts, opinions and values, or as competitive game playing and rivalry. There is a need to identify all the parties involved since there may be covert players hiding in the wings.

The danger signals that you may notice are hearing words such as 'It's not fair', 'I don't agree', 'What you don't understand is ...', 'That's your problem'. Comments will get increasingly personal, there will be frequent interruptions and lack of listening, and you may see some forceful gestures such as finger-wagging.

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### ***Stage 2: Plan the response***

To help develop conflict management, here are five basic tactics to handle conflict. Each one is situational. The tactic you use depends on the people involved and the context in which the conflict takes place. My advice, therefore, is to consider each option and develop a plan.

#### *Keep the peace*

This puts relationships first, even at the expense of getting the job done. This tactic is most useful if the people involved are working on an activity that is critical to the team and needs to be managed within a short length of time or if the issue at stake is not important to the team but the relationship is.

#### *Do nothing*

This involves leaving the problem alone and letting the parties involved or other members of the team sort it out. It is a positive tactic only if the problem is not serious and does not have a large impact on the team.

#### *Force the issue*

This requires you to hold firm to your point of view with the intention that you get your way and the other people have to back down. It is useful if you have the power to win and you are prepared to sacrifice the long-term relationship if necessary.

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### *Split the difference*

This requires you facilitating a discussion with both parties and encouraging them to give a bit and take a bit. Whilst the issues and the relationship are addressed with some satisfaction on both sides, they are not fully dealt with and problems may flare up again in the future. It is essentially a pragmatic solution.

### *Collaboration*

This is a high-involvement, highly goal-oriented approach where you facilitate a discussion to ensure that both people's needs are fully explored and met. It has the advantage of gaining considerable commitment to a more lasting agreement but the disadvantage that it takes a long time to reach that agreement.

### ***Stage 3: Implement the response***

Having identified an appropriate tactic, putting it into practice requires considerable skill. Some suggestions on how you can approach conflict situations include:

- Keep your attention on the other person(s), their needs and interests and put yourself in their shoes.
- Focus on interests and expectations, not fixed positions.
- Keep an open mind – look for information which supports or modifies each individual's original viewpoint.
- Be prepared to take on board different ideas and ways of resolving the situation.

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- Restate or paraphrase what you've heard to demonstrate active listening.
- Treat each person with courtesy and respect.
- Admit any mistakes on your part.
- Find things you can agree on, rather than focusing solely on disagreements.
- Control your emotions, don't let them control you.
- Separate the people from the problem.
- Ask questions and explore options for mutual gain.
- Identify objective criteria to agree success.

The best overall stance I suggest is to avoid aggression, listen to all points of view and help both parties to try and understand them, resolving situations through agreements which both parties can live with.

### ***Stage 4: Review the response***

Monitoring and reviewing the success of any action to resolve conflict is an important but frequently neglected stage. Plan a review with the parties involved so that you are able to discuss such questions as:

- Were the signals identified soon enough?
- Has this revealed some personal blind spots?
- Are there changes needed in the team structure, roles or processes?
- Have any training and development needs been identified?
- Is there a need for team development or bridge-building with affected groups?

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- Have weaknesses been understood and remedied in communication channels?

### **Conflict about the future direction of the team**

In my experience of working with teams, there are also occasions when the team cannot reach agreement on its future direction. There may be conflict about how to move the team forward or how to promote the services of the team and gain greater stakeholder approval. Here is a process that you can use to help resolve any disagreement and unify the team. It is based on assessing where the team is now and where it would like to get to, and on setting a plan for how to do this.

The process of doing this can help unify the team and overcome disputes and conflicts, as everyone has a shared stake in the future direction of the team.

### ***Where is the team now?***

The first stage in the process involves undertaking an objective assessment of where the team is now in terms of its strengths and weaknesses. It involves reviewing current and past performance in the eyes of customers, team members and other key stakeholders. It also involves auditing and comparing the team with teams offering competitive services both inside and outside the organisation.

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### ***Where do we want to be?***

This phase involves an analysis of future opportunity and the discussion of options going forward. What do customers need and expect in the future? What are likely employee and other stakeholder demands? Once a strong vision has been created of where the team wants to be in the future, the goals, strategy and plans of the team can be aligned with this.

### ***How will we get there?***

This phase involves the development of a strategy to achieve the team's objectives. It also necessitates a risk assessment and the development of a plan to move the team forward towards the achievement of its goals. You will need to consider as a team the future structure and processes that may need to change to support the new strategy.

### ***Tools and techniques***

There are a number of tools and techniques that can help you to audit the external and internal environment in which the team operates and draw conclusions that will help shape your future strategy.

Organisations and teams are impacted by two sets of external factors: the macro-environment and the micro-environment. Sometimes called the near and the far environments, these forces for change can be summarised as follows:

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**Figure 6: The macro- and micro-environment**

### *PESTEL: The far environment*

Start your analysis by reviewing the macro-environment. Discuss with your team the far or macro-environment and potential trends. Influences may be

- Political
- Economic
- Sociocultural
- Technological
- Environmental

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- Legal.

These influences may impact your team, now or in the future.

*Political* influences relate to government or constitutional policies that may affect your business. For example, potential government legislation or the recent expansion of EU boundaries.

*Economic* influences relate to the economy as a whole. Rates of interest have an impact, for example, on levels of borrowing. The strength of the stock market has an impact on types of investment made.

*Sociocultural* influences encompass such factors as class, age, gender and demographics, as well as such issues as culture – both local and international – and diversity. For example, the drinking habits of people in France are different to those in the UK.

You will probably be aware, given the profession you are in, of the *technological* influences which may have an impact on your team. List these in your analysis too.

Many businesses are impacted today by *environmental* issues. Corporate social responsibility is now higher on the public's agenda.

*Legal* constraints also affect team performance. In the UK the Working Time Directive, paternity leave and the minimum wage are examples of this.

### *The near environment*

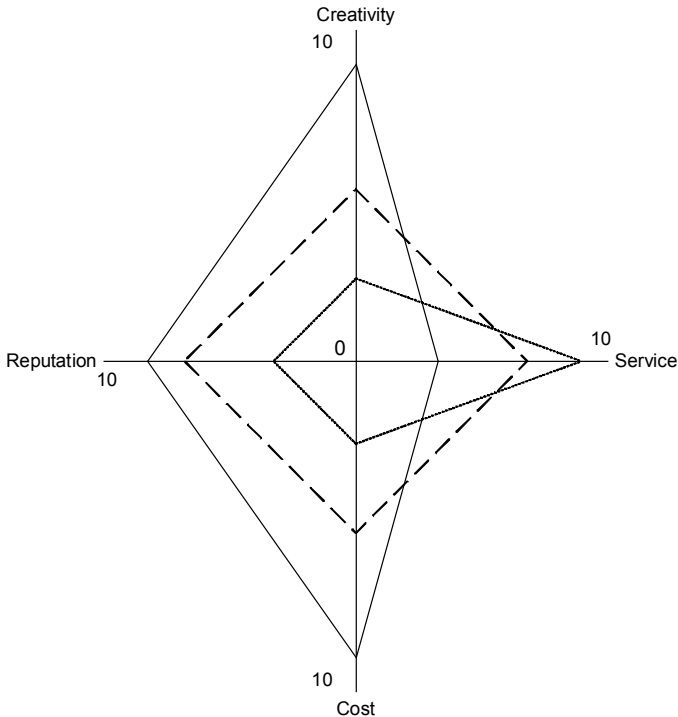
Next undertake an analysis of the forces nearer to home that influence change. These are:

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- Customers
- Competitors
- Suppliers.

*Customer* requirements are constantly changing, as are their expectations of the quality of the service that they require. Ask your customers about their future needs and how these differ from today. Identify trends and ask questions about possible future scenarios and what-ifs.



**Figure 7: Example of competitor analysis for three competitive services**

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Identify who are your internal and external *competitors*. Arrange a meeting with each customer so that you and the appropriate team members can discuss with them what you are doing well and where your team can make improvements. Share and pool with the team the feedback that you receive from each customer so that you can assess what your team can learn and do better.

Discuss with the team who are your key *suppliers* (internal and external). Assess the bargaining power of suppliers and the actions they take that can influence your team. Review your supply chain and identify areas for improvement. Analyse what their strengths and weaknesses are, how much you are paying for their services and whether there are better alternatives elsewhere.

### *Internal analysis*

As well as looking externally, make an overall assessment of your own team. Ask your team:

- What are we doing well?
- What could we do differently?

This could include the following areas:

- Customers
- People
- Processes
- Learning and innovation.

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<b>People</b>	<b>Customer</b>
<b>Processes</b>	<b>Learning and innovation</b>

**Figure 8: Example of balanced scorecard**

The balanced scorecard is a tool that encourages teams to assess their progress in each of the four areas above. This means you asking the team what is working well in each of the four areas and gaining their honest opinion on what can be improved. List their opinions under each section; the sections do not need to be evenly balanced. The idea is that there need to be improvements happening in all four areas.

### *SWOT analysis*

Once you have completed your assessment as a team, produce a SWOT analysis of your findings by filling in the spaces.

A SWOT analysis is a helpful tool for summarising the results of an internal and external audit. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Strengths and weaknesses are internal to the organisation and can be used to capture a summary of the internal audit

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that you have undertaken. Opportunities and threats relate to the external environment (macro and micro).

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>

**Figure 9: Example of SWOT analysis**

Ask the team, from the analysis that they have undertaken, to summarise

- the team's strengths
- the team's weaknesses
- opportunities for the team's future
- threats that the team faces.

### *Developing goals for the future*

Once you have carefully assessed where the team is now, you can make informed choices about where you want to be in the future. Once you have decided as a team where you want to be, you can set goals to help achieve this. Ask the

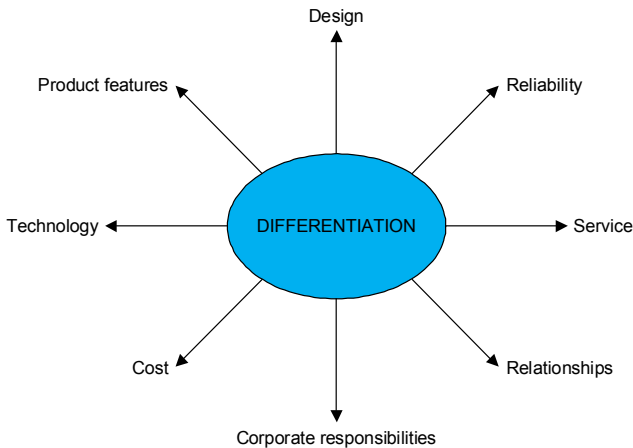
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team what goals fall out of the SWOT analysis, and where the team needs to get to under each aspect.

### *Developing strategies to achieve the goals*

Having established team goals, you can then develop a strategy for achieving those goals. There are various options that lead to differentiation in the market place and hence competitive advantage.



**Figure 10: Sources of differentiation**

These can generally be broken down into cost and other differentiators, such as service, reliability and relationships. You can ask the team, for example,

- How can we enhance or change the features of our product or service in order to differentiate?

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- What can we design into our product or service to add value?
- What more can we do to be reliable for our customers?
- How can we enhance the service that we offer?
- What can we do to better develop relationships?
- Is there anything we can do in terms of corporate social responsibility to differentiate the team?
- What can we do to differentiate ourselves in terms of cost?
- What new technology can we offer our customers?

There may not be answers to all of these questions, but it should prompt discussion on how you can differentiate.

### *Structure*

The strategy that a team adopts also informs its structure. Consider, for example:

- Should I outsource my customer-related activities?
- What impact will it have on the customer?
- Can we achieve better service?
- Will outsourcing save me money?
- Can the outsourcer provide a better service?
- Can I afford necessary technology advances for call centres and e-commerce?
- Can I take the risk on behalf of my customers that it might all go sour?

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Once strategic options have been generated and assessed, measure the size of the gap that is present between the current and desired states.

Discuss as a team what you need to stop, start and continue doing in order to implement change.

### *Another activity to undertake with your team*

Ask the members of your team to each take a piece of paper and a pen. Invite them to imagine the team as a mode of transport (for example, a boat, car, plane). Ask them to draw or write in words how they see the team as this mode of transport. Ask them also to draw or write where they see the team heading. Allow time for everyone in the team to undertake the activity. Then ask each person to share what they have written or drawn. Compare and contrast the pictures and words. Discuss these as a team. Then help the team to draw some conclusion around commonalities in the words and pictures about where the team is heading. Lead a discussion about how the team can all head in this direction.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have provided you with some processes and techniques for addressing and resolving conflict, either when people are in dispute with you, when others in the team are in conflict or when the team as a whole cannot agree on its future direction.

Here are some questions to ask yourself and your team members in relation to this chapter:

- What situations cause you to be in conflict with others in the team? What can you do to address these?

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- When disputes arise in the team, how do you normally approach them? What can you do differently?
- How can you use an assessment of the macro- and the micro-environment to help shape some team goals in the future?
- What have you learned about your own approach to managing conflict and how can you adopt more of a win-win approach?

### **Answers**

#### *Situation A*

- Walk away rather than express your views.

#### *Avoidance*

- Express your opinions in as strong a fashion as the other person.

#### *Competition*

- Soothe their feelings rather than start an argument.

#### *Compliance*

- Listen to what they have to say and state your feelings in a rational manner.

#### *Negotiation*

#### *Situation B*

- Tell them what you are willing to pay and say that's final.

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## *6: Dealing with Conflict in a Team*

### *Competition*

- Accept the price they offer.

### *Compliance*

- Let someone else do the talking.

### *Avoidance*

- Question the price and seek a more favourable exchange.

### *Negotiation*

### *Situation C*

- Mention it in a roundabout way so as not to hurt their feelings.

### *Compliance*

- Put off telling them.

### *Avoidance*

- Tell them directly and forcibly what they have not done.

### *Competition*

- Ask them the reason for the performance shortfall, and explain the consequence of this and how you would like things to change.

### *Negotiation*

### *Situation D*

- Help the team find a compromise solution.

### *Negotiation*

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## *6: Dealing with Conflict in a Team*

- Not say anything during the team meeting.

### *Avoidance*

- Concur with the majority view.

### *Compliance*

- Put your own point across strongly.

### *Competition*

### *Situation E*

- Shrugging your shoulders and walking away.

### *Avoidance*

- Agreeing with him that it was wrong.

### *Compliance*

- Telling him loudly that you disagree.

### *Competition*

- Asking him for reasons why he thinks this was wrong.

### *Negotiation*

### *Situation F*

- Say, 'Go away! You've got a cheek!'

### *Competition*

- Say, 'I've been waiting here 20 minutes, please don't butt in.'

### *Negotiation*

- Say, 'If you really need to be in front of me, that's OK'.

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## *6: Dealing with Conflict in a Team*

### *Compliance*

- Let them take the place in front of you.

### *Avoidance*

Look at how you have responded. Identify the style(s) you have used most. This is how you prefer to handle conflict.

## CHAPTER 7: CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAM WORKING

Increasingly, IT professionals need to work in cross-functional teams. In this chapter I outline:

- The importance of cross-functional team working.
- Why it is important to be aware of political influences in cross-functional teams.
- How to produce a stakeholder map.
- Diagnostic tools that you can use to make improvements in the way a cross-functional team is working.
- The importance of reviewing team performance.

### **The importance of cross-functional team working**

Increasingly in business today, individuals need to work in a wide range of functions. This is true of the IT department, who often provide a service to other parts of the organisation. The ‘business partner’ approach which many organisations have adopted for IT means that any member of the IT team may be assigned to provide a service to another part of the business while still remaining a member of the IT team. In addition, IT professionals are also involved in programmes and projects to effect change across the organisation. Again you and your team may therefore be part of other cross-functional teams.

So how is working in a cross-functional team different to working in a normal team?

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## *7: Cross-functional Team Working*

All of the characteristics of team working – in terms of the characteristics of a high-performance team, the stages that a team goes through in its formation and the roles people play in a team – are applicable when you work in a cross-functional team. The key differences are that, unlike your own functional team, in a cross-functional one you need to be more aware of the political influences in the team.

### **Being aware of the political influences in cross-functional teams**

Every organisation is ‘political’, but the word also carries negative connotations, such as self-seeking manipulation, that lead managers to shy away from its existence. In order to make a positive contribution to a cross-functional team, the IT professional needs to be politically intelligent.

Political intelligence as I define it involves

- being aware of power bases,
- understanding sources of power,
- recognising levers of influence during change,
- developing strategies for influence and
- gaining buy-in from stakeholders.

In the business world it is easy to be a lamb (someone who is unable to read the political situation but pleased to be part of the flock). Lambs make perfect prey for wolves – people who can read the political situation but who are out for their own ends. It is best to adopt the role of the owl in the team – wise to the political situation and focused on the good of the organisation. What you don’t want to be is an ass – someone who reads the political situation incorrectly and makes a fool of themselves.

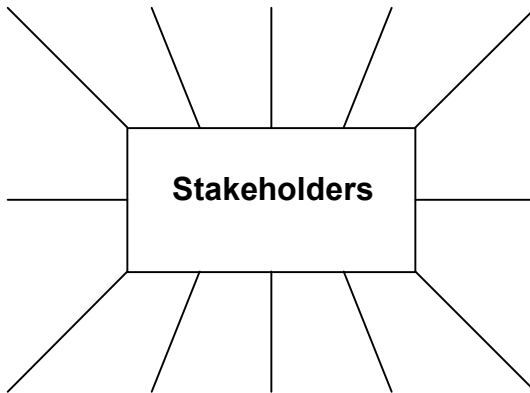
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## 7: Cross-functional Team Working

### Identifying stakeholders

Typically, cross-functional teams are put together in businesses in order to make some kind of change. The output of any project or programme is change and change impacts people. These people who have a ‘stake’ and are affected by change influence to a great extent the effective implementation of the change.

In order to be politically aware, for the good of the organisation rather than one’s own gain, you need to openly recognise who will be affected by change. In any change there are winners and losers. There are people who may help the change process and others who may hinder it. So a key part of being in a cross-functional team is identifying people’s positions – both in the team itself and outside – in relation to change. It is then possible to take action to influence others in a positive manner.



**Figure 11: Blank stakeholder map**

Stakeholder mapping (Figure 11) is a useful technique that allows you to identify who will be instrumental in the success of change. The technique involves using a blank

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sheet of paper to brainstorm who will be impacted by change. A useful tip is to break down large stakeholder groups into smaller discrete areas. So, for example, instead of putting ‘all employees’ as a stakeholder, divide these into separate groups that may be affected.

Having brainstormed different stakeholder groups, the next phase is to identify who will be winners and who will be losers as a result of the change. (There may be groups that are not affected – they are neutral, or may be both winners and losers.) Next, consider who will actively help the change and who will hinder it. Make a note of winners, losers, helpers and hinderers on the stakeholder map that you have drawn.

Figure 12 shows a stakeholder map drawn by an IT manager who was part of a cross-functional team responsible for relocating one organisation to a site five miles away from the existing location and transferring the customer service department to Dundee.

A quick glance at this brainstormed map tells us that there will be some clear winners from the proposed move:

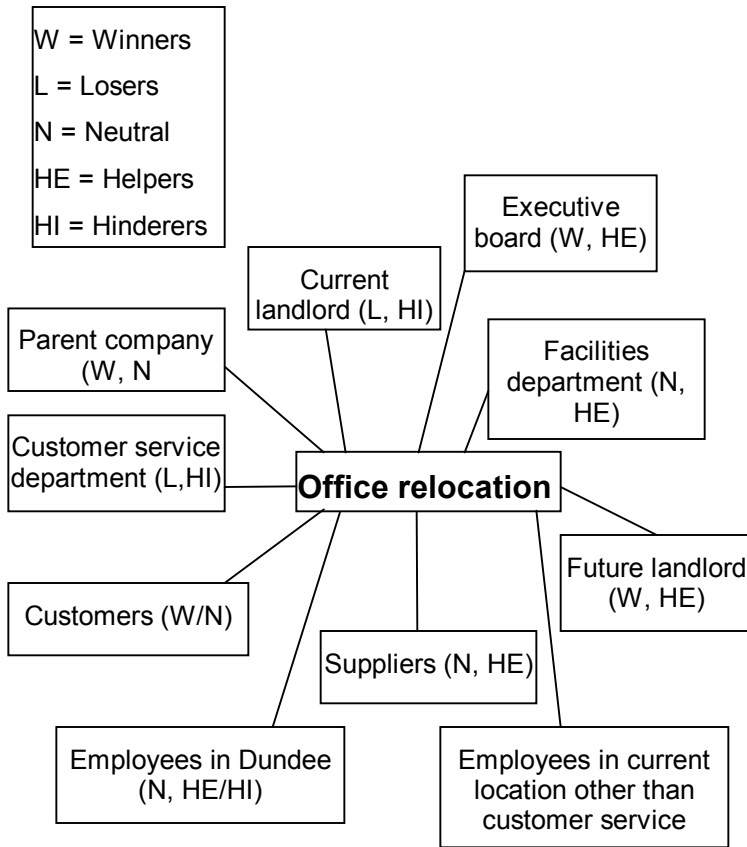
- customers
- executive board
- parent company
- future landlord.

It also identifies some losers, such as:

- current landlord
- current customer service department employees.

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**Figure 12: Stakeholder map for office relocation**

In addition, the map helps identify where there will be people who will help the change, such as the facilities department, and people who may potentially hinder the change, such as the current landlord of the premises and people in customer services who may potentially decide not to transfer to Dundee.

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There are also some people that may be both helpers and hinderers depending on their personal circumstances; for example, employees in the current location.

### **Taking account of the stance stakeholders may take during change**

Having identified the stakeholders in any change, the next step is to consider the stance that they will take towards the change. Consider the following questions to help identify possible approaches to the change:

- What happened during the last change? What lessons can you learn from this?
- How ready are the team for change? What do they know about the proposed changes? What has been discussed with them already? What have been their reactions so far?

It may be that you need to ‘sound people out’ about the change to gauge their likely position.

It is helpful to summarise each stakeholder group’s stance towards change. Will they:

- Be in favour?
- Prefer to keep the existing state?
- Prefer to adopt another option?

Likewise, it is useful to assess the degree of their likely response to the change; for example, will they:

- Champion the change?
- Be positive?
- Be neutral?

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- Be negative?
- Be antagonistic?

Table 7 is a stakeholder template that allows you to summarise each stakeholder's position. It also asks you to assess their degree of influence and propose the action to take to enhance their views positively towards change. We will cover how to assess degrees of influence and how to exert positive influence in the next sections.

By identifying key stakeholders during change you are able to decide the approach that you will take to working with them to effect change. For example, in the stakeholder template that I produced above, during change you may need to take a different approach to dealing with the customer service department than you do with, say, employees already in Dundee.

The other aspect to recognise if you are in a cross-functional team that plans to bring about change is that you are probably likely to encounter resistance.

Just as in any change process there are stages that each individual will go through as they are confronted with change. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross was a therapist who worked extensively with people who were going through change, often as a result of bereavement (see Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, 2008). She identified that when people go through change there are a number of distinct reactions:

- Shock – this accompanies the realisation that change is going to happen.
- Denial – where people tend to ignore the change that is going to happen and continue on as they are.

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<b>Name</b>	<b>Stance</b>	<b>View</b>	<b>Influence</b>	<b>Strategy</b>
List key stakeholders	List whether their stance towards change will be: I = In favour K = Keep existing state O = Other option ? = Don't know	List whether their view is: + 2 Champions + 1 Positive 0 Neutral - 1 Negative - 2 Antagonistic ? Don't know	What is their degree of influence: H = High M = Medium L = Low	Actions to reduce risks or enhance positive views

**Table 7: Stakeholder template**

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- Anger – emotion that is felt towards self or others when something has to change.
- Letting go – when the individual lets go of their old patterns of behaviour and accepts that change will happen.
- Testing – when people test a new behaviour or situation.
- Integration – when the new behaviours are integrated into the individual's repertoire of behaviours.

It is likely that your stakeholders in the project will go through all these states as they hear about the changes and realise the implications for them. What is important to recognise is that the rate people accept change cannot be dictated by the organisation or the cross-functional project team. Some people may go through the stages of change within two weeks, others two years. If you are part of the project team you may have readily accepted and been instrumental in setting up the change, other people are likely to be further behind you so you will need to manage expectations around successful implementation of your project.

### **Recognising team-working issues in a cross-functional team**

As we have seen in a functional team, part of the role of the team leader is to recognise and raise awareness amongst its members of the team-working issues that impact on how well the team is working together. This is particularly important in the case of a cross-functional team where the only time they may meet is at team meetings or if one or two of its team members need to work together.

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It is therefore useful to ensure that the team has an opportunity to review how they are working together. This will help to provide a temperature gauge for the team and ensure that it is on the right track to meeting its objectives. Reviewing where people are at and how they are feeling can be as simple as taking five minutes at the beginning or end of the meeting to do this. One cross-functional team I worked with, who were very successful, took five minutes at the beginning and end of each project meeting to ‘check in’ and ‘check out’ with each member on how they were feeling about working on the team and any team-working issues that they would like to raise. They used a traffic light method – green for all systems go, amber for some slight concerns and red for needing to express major issues. The team leader asked each member to give a traffic light colour at the beginning and then again at the end of the project meeting to ensure that everyone felt they were working well.

### ***Gaining feedback from members of the cross-functional team***

Another method of identifying whether the cross-functional team is working well, is to gain feedback from each team member via a questionnaire. Here is an example of one designed to help cross-functional teams identify how well they are working together and where they need to improve. It looks at issues of commitment, communication, contribution and collaboration across the team.

Issue the questionnaire to all team members for them to complete, then compare scores.

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## 7: Cross-functional Team Working

<b>Rate your cross-functional team working</b>		
<p>Think about how the cross-functional team works together at the moment. Read each statement and decide how you would rate your team's current performance. Please be honest.</p> <p>Use the following rating:</p> <p>Agree 4</p> <p>Agree slightly 3</p> <p>Disagree slightly 2</p> <p>Disagree 1</p>		
		<b>Your score</b>
1A	We share a common objective as a team	
1B	We support each other as team members	
1C	We share common values in the team	
1D	We are committed to achieving our targets as a team	
2A	We communicate well in the team	
2B	We keep everyone informed about what is going on	
2C	Roles and responsibilities are clear in the team	
2D	When there are disagreements and conflict in the team, we address these openly	
3A	There is a spirit of co-operation in the team	

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## 7: *Cross-functional Team Working*

3B	We trust each other in the team	
3C	When people are busy, others in the team help them out	
3D	If I ask another person in the team to do something, I can be sure that they will do this	
4A	Everyone makes an equal contribution to the team	
4B	We celebrate success in the team	
4C	People are open and honest about each other's contribution to the team	
4D	We compliment each other's strengths in the team	

### **Score sheet**

The statements in category 1 relate to Commitment

The statements in category 2 relate to Communication

The statements in category 3 relate to Co-operation

The statements in category 4 relate to Contribution

Plot your scores on the wheel below. Go to each category and for each question A, B, C and D plot on the circle below whether you have scored 1, 2, 3 or 4. Mark each score with a cross. When you have plotted all your scores, join the crosses together so that they form a shape. Next compare and contrast your responses and the shape you have drawn on the completed wheel with the rest of your team



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## *7: Cross-functional Team Working*

### ***Suggestions to improve cross-functional team performance***

Here is a further self-assessment diagnostic which can again be used with a cross-functional team. The beauty of this diagnostic is that it provides an overall score for team performance as well as giving you some feedback on your leadership style if you are the leader of a cross-functional team. Again, it is intended that the questionnaire be filled out individually and then scorings shared and discussed amongst the team.

### ***Cross-functional team effectiveness***

Use this questionnaire to promote a discussion on the strengths of your team and possible blockages to effective teamwork.

Score the questionnaire by yourself. Have other members of your team do the same so that you can compare results.

### ***Cross-functional team effectiveness questionnaire***

Consider each of the following statements. Award points to each statement to indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree, where 1 = agree strongly, 2 = agree somewhat, 3 = disagree somewhat, 4 = disagree strongly.

- 1 Decisions are made by consensus in the team.
- 2 We have sufficient information to do our jobs well.
- 3 When one person in the team is under pressure other members help out.
- 4 People say what they think.
- 5 Our leader values our individual contributions.

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- 6 There are opportunities for personal development within the team.
- 7 Relationships with other groups are good.
- 8 We receive feedback on our performance as a cross-functional team.
- 9 The objectives of the team are well defined.
- 10 We talk about delicate issues in the team.
- 11 Commitment to decisions is high.
- 12 We have regular team meetings.
- 13 There is a great deal of loyalty to the team.
- 14 There are not many taboos in the team.
- 15 Our leader has a strong view of what is expected of everyone in the team.
- 16 Team members are encouraged to learn new skills.
- 17 Opinions from people outside the team are welcomed.
- 18 We give each other feedback in an open and honest fashion.
- 19 People are clear where we are going as a team.
- 20 When there is conflict in the team, it is not brushed under the carpet.
- 21 Decisions are taken at the right level.
- 22 Information is shared sufficiently in the team.
- 23 We work together well.
- 24 People are encouraged to speak out.
- 25 Our leader sets a positive example.
- 26 The output of the team is constantly improving.
- 27 We work effectively with other teams.
- 28 Effort is recognised in the team.

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- 29 Individual roles and responsibilities are clear.
- 30 Disagreements are not allowed to fester in the team.
- 31 I am consulted about issues which affect my work.
- 32 When I disagree I feel I can speak my mind.
- 33 I trust the other members of the team.
- 34 There are not many secrets in the team.
- 35 Our leader has a strong belief in what we are doing.
- 36 We are encouraged to learn from our mistakes.
- 37 The rest of the organisation understands what we are trying to achieve.
- 38 I receive sufficient feedback on my performance.
- 39 I know what the organisation is trying to achieve.
- 40 We are not afraid to tackle conflict in the team.

### *How to score*

Transfer your scores to the grid in Table 8, then total each column.

Questions	1	2	3	4	Total A
Score A: Decision making					
Questions	1	2	3	4	Total B
Score B: Communication					
Questions	1	2	3	4	Total C
Score C: Support					
Questions	1	2	3	4	Total D

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Score D: Honesty					
Questions	1	2	3	4	Total E
Score E: Leadership					
Questions	1	2	3	4	Total F
Score F: Development					
Questions	1	2	3	4	Total G
Score G: Inter-team					
Questions	1	2	3	4	Total H
Score H: Feedback					
Questions	1	2	3	4	Total I
Score I: Aim					
Questions	1	2	3	4	Total J
Score J: Conflict					
Now total your scores					Grand total

**Table 8: Score sheet**

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## *7: Cross-functional Team Working*

### *How to interpret your score*

Look at your final score.

Score under 80: This score indicates that your team displays the characteristics of an effective cross-functional team.

Score 80–120: Your cross-functional team effectiveness could be improved. Look at the areas where you have given a high score to identify where this can be.

Score over 120: This score indicates that your cross-functional team performance is poor. You and your team members will need to work hard to create a more effective team.

### ***Identifying blockages to effective cross-functional team working***

To enable you to identify where you can make improvements in your team, look at the scores that you have given to each of the characteristics of effective teamwork:

- A Effective decision making
- B Open communication
- C Support and trust
- D Honesty
- E Effective leadership
- F Opportunities for development
- G Effective inter-team relationships
- H Feedback
- I Clear understanding of aims and objectives
- J Conflict management.

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Areas where you have scored 12 or more for each category indicate that improvement is needed.

### *What actions do you suggest to improve team performance in these areas?*

Here is a team action plan to help you do this.

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Action needed</b>	<b>Person responsible</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Review date</b>

**Table 9: Cross-functional team improvement plan**

### *Another activity to undertake in your cross-functional team meetings*

One of the activities I strongly recommend, if you are working in a cross-functional team and you do develop a team action plan for improvement, is to take time to plan in advance when the actions will be reviewed.

So often it is easy to agree to undertake improvements, but because we are by nature very task-focused, team improvement actions can drop by the wayside. Therefore I suggest that you plan in time your cross-functional team

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meeting to review the actions that have been taken. This will enhance the sense of continuous improvement in the team.

### **Summary**

As the world of work moves towards more matrix management, the ability to work in a cross-functional team becomes more important. In this case you need to be more aware of the political influences that can impact the outcome of the team. Stakeholder mapping can be a useful tool to read the political situation. In addition, I have provided you with several diagnostic tools to help identify how your cross-functional team is working and what improvements can be made. Finally, whether you are working in a cross-functional or an IT team, do not forget the importance of taking time out to review how you are working together and encouraging ideas for improvement.

Questions to ask yourself and members of your cross-functional team:

- What differences do you notice between working in your own team and a cross-functional team? Why is this?
- Who are your key stakeholders and what degree of influence do they exert over the desired outcomes of your team?
- How often do you take time out in your cross-functional team to review how well the team is working together?
- How can you build a review process into your cross-functional team working to capture learning and improvements?

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## GLOSSARY

*Active listening*: the skill of listening in a focused manner to an individual and of indicating to them that you are listening both verbally; for example, via summarising what they have said, and non-verbally, via cues such as eye contact and nodding.

*Behaviours*: the actions that individuals take either through words, tone or body language.

*Brainstorming*: the activity of generating a large quantity of ideas.

*Continuous improvement*: the technique of encouraging improvement, growth and development in the workplace on an ongoing basis.

*Cross-functional team*: a team made up of people who represent different functions or departments.

*Developmental feedback*: providing feedback to an individual on what they can improve, do differently or change.

*Functional team*: a team made up of people who all work in the same department or with the same function.

*Matrix management*: where an individual works horizontally as well as vertically in the organisation; for example, they are part of a departmental team and they provide a service to and are part of another department.

*Mission*: the purpose of the team or organisation; what they are striving to achieve.

*Purpose*: a goal or objective.

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## *Glossary*

*Stakeholder*: anyone who has a ‘stake’ in the service or product that the team or organisation provides.

*Strategy*: the approach that the team or organisation is adopting to achieve the goals that support the strategy; the ‘how we will achieve our goals’.

*Synergy*: the co-operative interaction amongst the team members that creates enhanced combined effects.

*Values*: the underlying principles and ethics that drive the team or the organisation; the ‘how we want to act to guide us towards our vision’.

*Vision*: a picture of a desired future state that is sufficiently appealing and compelling to drive change forwards: the ‘where we want to be’.

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