

Building the Perfect Team

Definition of a Team

A team is a relatively small number of people (from three to twelve) who meet on a regular basis and are collectively responsible for results. The team members share common goals as well as the rewards and responsibilities for achieving them. Not every group is a team. For example, a group that appears to be a team might simply be a collection of people who report to the same manager, but who have relatively little interdependence and mutual accountability.

The Perfect Team is by definition a high-performance team.

Specific Attributes of the Perfect Team

Psychological safety – Trust – is the single most important factor distinguishing high-performance teams. With trust, people feel free to talk without fear their teammates will criticize them. Leaders who are direct and straightforward engender trust

Two additional distinguishing characteristics of the best teams are:

1. **Equal talk time.** Everyone gets a chance to speak, and in roughly equal proportions.
2. **High social sensitivity.** Members are skilled at intuiting how others feel based on non-verbal cues.

Characteristics of High-performance Teams

Wagner Consulting Group is licensed to deliver teambuilding training using *The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team* model developed by Patrick Lencioni and

powered by John Wiley's Everything DiSC software. The following is a summary of this model.

The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team Model

Below is a brief summary of the five behaviors. More detailed information follows.

- **Trust** One Another
When team members are genuinely transparent and honest with one another, they are able to build vulnerability-based trust.
- Engage in **Conflict** Around Ideas
When there is trust, team members are able to engage in unfiltered, constructive debate of ideas.
- **Commit** to Decisions
When team members are able to offer opinions and debate ideas, they will be more likely to commit to decisions.
- Hold One Another **Accountable**
When everyone is committed to a clear plan of action, they will be more willing to hold one another accountable.
- Focus on Achieving Collective **Results**
The ultimate goal of building greater trust, conflict, commitment, and accountability is one thing: the achievement of results.



Building Trust

The first and most important behavior is to build trust. Trust is all about vulnerability. Team members who trust one another can be comfortable being open, even exposed, to one another regarding their failures, weaknesses, and fears. Vulnerability-based trust is predicated on the simple and practical idea that people who are willing to admit the truth about themselves are not going to engage in the kind of political behavior that wastes everyone's time and energy and, more important, makes it difficult to achieve real results.

Team members need to be comfortable being vulnerable around one another so that they will be unafraid to honestly say things like "I was wrong," "I made a mistake," "I need help," "I'm not sure," "You're better than I am at that," and "I'm sorry." Unless they can bring themselves to readily speak these words when the situation calls for it, they will waste time and energy thinking about what they *should* say and wondering about the true intentions of their peers. For a team to establish real trust, team members, including the leader, must be willing to take risks without a guarantee of success. They will have to be vulnerable without knowing whether that vulnerability will be respected and reciprocated.

Mastering Conflict

Trust is a prerequisite for addressing the second behavior, mastering conflict. Only team members who trust one another are going to feel comfortable engaging in unfiltered, passionate debate around issues and decisions. Otherwise, they are likely to hold back their opinions.

That's not to say that some teams that lack trust don't argue. It's just that their arguments are often destructive. Team members aren't usually listening to one another's ideas and then reconsidering their points of view; they're figuring out

how to manipulate the conversation to get what they want. Or they don't even argue with their colleagues face-to-face; instead, they vent about them in the hallway after a meeting is over.

When we speak of mastering conflict, we are talking about productive, ideological conflict—passionate, unfiltered debate around issues of importance to the team.

Teams that fear conflict . . .

- Have boring meetings
- Create environments where back-channel politics and personal attacks thrive
- Ignore controversial topics that are critical to team success
- Fail to tap into all the opinions and perspectives of team members
- Waste time and energy with posturing and politics

Even among the best teams, conflict is always at least a little uncomfortable. No matter how clear everyone is that a conflict is focused on issues, not personalities, it is inevitable that at some point someone will feel personally attacked. It's unrealistic for a team member to say, "I'm sorry, but I don't agree with your approach to the project" and not expect the other person to feel some degree of personal rejection. But if team members are not making one another uncomfortable at times, if they never push one another outside of their emotional comfort zones during discussions, it is extremely likely that they're not making the best decisions for the organization.

Achieving Commitment

Like trust, conflict is important not in and of itself but because it enables a team to work on the next behavior: achieving commitment. When team members are unwilling to weigh in and share their opinions, there is a high likelihood that they're not going to commit to whatever decision is made.

Teams that commit to decisions and standards do so because they know how to embrace two separate but related concepts: buy-in and clarity.

Buy-in is the achievement of honest emotional support for a decision. Too often, consensus is not real. False consensus arises when, instead of discussing the conflict, team members just nod their agreement and move on.

Commitment is about a group of individuals buying in to a decision precisely when they *don't* naturally agree. In other words, it's the ability to defy a lack of consensus. When people know that their colleagues have no reservations about disagreeing with one another and that every available opinion and perspective has been unapologetically aired, they will have the confidence to embrace a decision.

When it comes to commitment, the most critical ground rules that team members must agree to relate to timeliness at meetings, responsiveness in communication, and general interpersonal behavior. They must also commit to other principles such as purpose, values, mission, strategy, and goals. At any given time, all the members of a team must also know what the team's top priority is and how each of them contributes to moving it forward.

Embracing Accountability

The fourth behavior of cohesive teams is embracing accountability. Members of effective teams hold one another accountable, and they don't rely on the leader to do so. That's because asking the leader to be the primary source of accountability is inefficient, and it breeds politics. It is far more effective when team members go directly to one another and give frank, honest feedback.

When it comes to teamwork, *accountability* means the willingness of team members to remind one another when they are not living up to agreed-on performance standards. Direct, peer-to-peer accountability is based on the notion that peer pressure and the distaste for letting down a colleague will motivate a team player more than any fear of authoritative punishment or rebuke.

Perhaps the most important challenge of building a team on which people hold one another accountable is overcoming the understandable reluctance of individuals to give one another critical feedback. The most effective way to overcome this reluctance is to help people realize that failing to provide peers with constructive feedback means that they are letting them down personally. By holding back, we hurt not only the team, but also our teammates. Sometimes this is the only compelling argument that can convince a well-meaning and caring teammate to step into the discomfort of telling someone what he or she needs to hear.

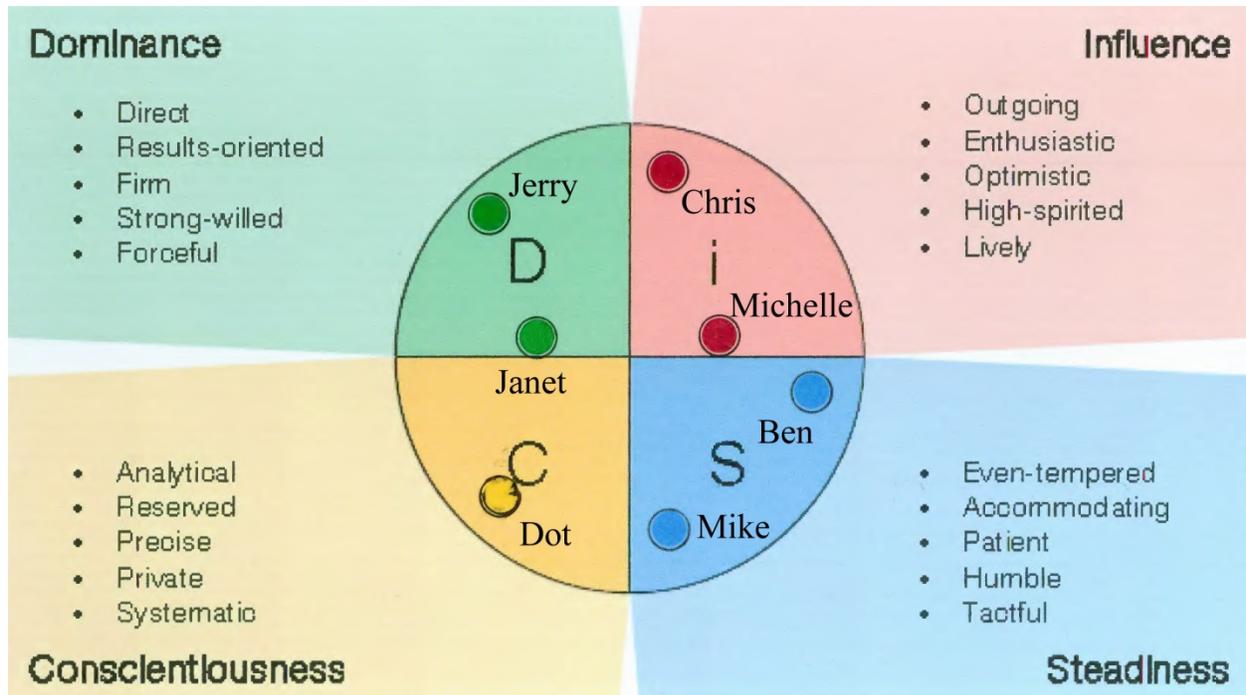
Focusing on Results

The only way a team can be certain it will remain focused on collective results is to ensure that team members are holding one another accountable for what they need to do.

Truly cohesive teams focus obsessively on the collective results of the entire organization. They are intolerant of actions and behaviors that serve the interests of individuals but that don't promote the common good. As a result, team members are willing to make sacrifices in the organizations they run in order to drive the collective results of their teams.

The key to avoiding this problem lies in keeping results in the forefront of people's minds. A good way to focus attention is to use a visible scoreboard of some kind. A scoreboard focuses everyone's efforts on one thing: winning. It provides unambiguous information about how the team is doing, and how much time the members have left if they want to improve the final outcome. Results-oriented teams establish their own measurements for success. They don't allow themselves the wiggle room of subjectivity ("Is the CEO happy with us this month?"), feelings ("I *feel*/like we're doing pretty well right now"), or outside opinions ("Did you see what that analyst wrote about us in his industry report?"). They commit early and publicly to what the team will achieve and continually review progress against those expected achievements (a.k.a. the scoreboard).

The “Perfect” Team



Building A Cohesive Team sample report: <http://tinyurl.com/hx3ed2s>