



Handout:

Psychological safety

MODULE 2 - Understanding Teams and what makes them more and less effective

What helps and hinders team efficacy?

How teams perform is affected by many factors, including:

- The nature, style and quality of team leadership
- Team structure (is it structured and organised in the best way to address the task and make use of everyone's abilities?)
- Team size relative to the task
- Team reputation – how it is regarded by the outside world
- Resources, both internal and external
- Reward structures – do they encourage collaborative behaviour?
- Clarity of purpose (what are we here for? And who do we serve?)
- Clarity of team goals, objectives and team KPIs?
- How the team manages conflict
- Stability
- Effective processes for managing each aspect of the task and for constantly improving quality
- How the team manages its learning
- What the team pays attention to
- The team “climate” – the level of psychological safety

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What other factors would you add, from your experience?

Factors

What do we mean by a high performing team?

Consider:

- *What are the characteristics / qualities of a high performing team, compared with an ordinary one?*
- *What are the outcomes you would expect from a high performing team, compared with an ordinary one?*

	Ordinary team	High performing team
Characteristics and qualities		
Outcomes		

Team Function Focus Analysis

This simple tool was developed by Professor Hawkins to help teams reflect on how they spend their time in their team meetings and how this needs to change for the team to be more effective. There is another version that also looks at the focus of the team between meetings. The model divides team functions into seven categories:

Co-ordinating: organising how the team will operate; deciding who will do what; allocating time, people, roles, resources etc; agreeing priorities.

Briefing: communicating to the team updates on important news from other parts of the organisation or the stakeholder context.

Informing: team members feedback on their; activities, progress, and outcomes.
Decision Making: making proposals, debating them, deciding.

Planning: planning how decisions will be communicated, implemented, monitored and evaluated.

Generative Thinking: jointly creating new thinking and approaches that are more than the sum of individual team member's previous thinking.

Nurturing and Bonding: any activities that helps develop the commitment, loyalty, morale and relating within the team.

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Team Function	% Time spent on this function in our meetings	% Time we need to spend on this function in our meetings
Co-ordinating		
Briefing		
Informing		
Decision making		
Planning		
Generative Thinking		
Nurturing and Bonding		

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1. We need to decrease our time on...

2. We could do this by...

3. We need to increase the time we spend on...

4. We could do this by...

The team as a system or part of multiple systems

Whether at the level of an individual or a team, coaching fundamentally works by helping people better understand their internal context and their external context – then to have structured conversations about how those two contexts interact, with the view to improving both decisions and how they act upon them. Individual coaching often fails because it addresses only the individual, and not the systems around them. Systems theory says very clearly that, when we attempt to change one part of a system, the rest of the system works hard to re-establish the equilibrium – that is, to restore things to the way they were before.

Every team is a system and contains other systems within itself. It also interacts with and is part of a wide variety of external systems, many of which can affect its performance.

Reflecting on a team, with which you are familiar, attempt to define some of its key systems – for example, for:

- Making important decisions
- Keeping people in the team informed
- Keeping people outside the team informed
- Partnering more effectively with customers
- Partnering more effectively with other stakeholders
- Addressing technical problems
- Finding new ways of addressing adaptive challenges
- Distributing tasks and responsibilities
- Planning

Classify them as:

- Internal
- External
- Partly internal, partly external

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Consider the following questions about each system (or one or two selected systems):

- *What is this system intended to achieve? (What is it there for?)*
- *How does that purpose support the team's vision, priorities and performance?*
- *To what extent and how is this system dependent upon, or has influence upon other systems?*
- *What has changed in the environment surrounding this system?*
- *When does this system function at its best?*
- *When does it function poorly?*
- *How might we improve this system to make it more consistently effective?*

Psychological safety

Psychological safety is closely related to team performance. As a team coach, you will want to gain an early assessment of the level of psychological safety in a team, because this will affect the kind of approaches you will take. In teams, which already have high psychological safety, you can be much more challenging and experiment more. In teams with low psychological safety, you will need to contract with the leaders and the members as a whole to spend time creating openness and trust. The questionnaire below is one way of assessing the level of psychological safety.

In the past month, I have	Not once	Once	2 - 3 times	More than 4
1. Held back on giving a colleague honest and critical feedback				
2. Felt that a helpful suggestion from me might not be received positively				
3. Not admitted a mistake, which colleagues might have learned from				
4. Felt that my ideas weren't valued				
5. Been upset by a colleague's comments				

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In the past month, I have	Not once	Once	2 - 3 times	More than 4
6. Avoided mentioning something for fear of "treading on a colleague's territory"				
7. Pretended I understood something I really didn't				
8. Kept silent about something that didn't seem congruent with the team's espoused values				
9. Covered up for a colleague's mistakes				
10. Felt pressured into supporting something that didn't seem right to me				
11. Steered clear of a senior colleague, because they appeared to be in a bad mood				
12. Told a white lie to "keep the peace"				
13. Suspected that I wasn't being told the whole truth, but not confronted the issue				
14. Been made to feel isolated or disloyal when I questioned something outside of my area				

How psychologically safe is this team?

In this team	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Status is often more important than getting the job done				
2. People often form cliques to pursue their own interests				
3. It's not a good idea to question what the leader says				
4. People generally avoid honest, difficult conversations				
5. Loyalty and respect are demanded, rather than earned				
6. People say what they think others want to hear, not what they really think				

Scoring

For each item score:

0 for not once; 1 for once; 2 for 2-3 times; 3 for 4 times or more.

As very broad indicators:

50 points or more

This team is a dangerous place to be. There are high levels of stress (significantly increased risk of heart attacks and other ailments). Politics is rife.

25 - 50 points

Lack of psychological safety contributes substantially to team dysfunction.

5 - 25 points

The team members are good at papering over the cracks. There is enough goodwill and collective focus to ensure that honest conversations happen before too much damage is done, but the team is still missing out on the benefits of a genuinely open climate.

0-5 points

Nobody's perfect! But this team works hard to create an environment, where it's not just OK to speak up, but where people expect and appreciate it.

Thinking of a team you are familiar with, how would you expect the leader to complete the questionnaire? And the ordinary team members?

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