The Team-Performance Model

The team-performance model, developed by Drexler, Sibbet, and Forrester (1988) offers strategies for coping with the many changes that take place in teams and in the nature of teamwork. More and more, teams today are concerned about information management and service rather than about production. Accordingly, teams are being required to change their working styles and their interactions with others. Team members are becoming highly interdependent, are engaged in complex relationships, and are working toward common goals with imperfectly matched values and ideas. The team-performance model provides methods for mapping the significant events that are happening to a team, for identifying symptoms of destructive or counterproductive activity, and for prescribing actions to move the team toward high performance.

The team-performance model is best suited to work groups whose members:

- Work as a team,

- Share common goals,

- Have different backgrounds,

- Face situations in which values may conflict,

- Choose from among various methods to achieve their goals,

- Perform complex tasks requiring a high degree of interdependence and cooperation, and

- Must perform at an extraordinarily high level in order to achieve their goals.

Development of the Team-Performance Model

The team-performance model integrates Jack R. Gibb's research on group behavior (Bradford, Gibb, & Benne, 1964) with the process theories of Arthur Young (1976a, 1976b), a cosmologist who devised a comprehensive system for understanding the relationship between physical law and the human experience. Gibb contributed the discovery that people bring the following four basic concerns to all social interactions:

1. *Acceptance concerns* about the formation of trust, acceptance of oneself and others, anxiety and how to decrease it, and confidence and how to increase it. Acceptance concerns primarily relate to issues of membership.

2. *Data concerns* about the communication of perceptions, feelings, and ideas to team members and about the social norms of how they should be expressed.

3. ***Goal-formation concerns*** about goal setting, problem solving, and decision making, and about resolving different motivations. Productivity, fun, creativity, learning, and growing are considered part of goal setting.

4. ***Control concerns*** about the regulation, coordination, and sequencing of activities

Gibb believes that these concerns remain throughout a group's existence. The way in which a group deals with one concern also affects its ability to deal with other concerns. For example, if a team has not resolved basic membership issues, it is unlikely that open and honest communication will be evident.

Young (1976a, 1976b) attempted to describe a unified field theory that integrated the major findings of science. After much research, his conclusions indicated that unity is not found by examining the level of forms and structures but by appreciating the nature of processes. He hypothesizes that all processes represent a constant balance between freedom and restriction, order and chaos. This fundamental relationship between uncertainty and certainty is the core of the study of quantum physics and also is the underlying framework of process theory

The team-performance model integrates Gibb's and Young's findings. As a newly formed team defines its work and makes choices, boundaries and restrictions are created. But when a team chooses a direction and begins to act, it appears to free itself of some of its rules. Teams that are successful in resolving their basic concerns appear to achieve the most freedom. In organizations, high performance is associated with breaking the boundaries of individual capacity. The team-performance model can help teams to explore their limits.

The illustration on page 263 depicts the basic pattern of the model. The model has seven primary elements, each representing a set of concerns that team members face as they work together. For each element, the model describes some typical behaviors that indicate whether or not the concerns of that element have been resolved.

The elements of the model are interdependent; therefore, teams do not necessarily progress through the stages in chronological order. Nevertheless, resolution of the issues of earlier stages can free the team to work through the concerns of later stages. Of course, each team member's perception of the team's issues may vary somewhat; still, members often perceive the situation quite similarly.

Stage One: Orientation

The issues in this stage are *membership* and *acceptance,* both of which are tied to each member's self-perception. The core question during this stage is, "Why am I here?" Each person who joins the team must answer this question in order to begin the process of finding his or her niche in the group. Later, the core question becomes, "Do I belong in this league?"

During the orientation stage, group members also must ask themselves, "Do I want to be here?" One must believe that the group's task is valuable and useful for the organization or for society in order to completely "buy into" the team's mission. One also must believe that the team can do the task as well as—and preferably better than—one person working alone. If this is not so, the team has no real purpose. Finally, one must believe that one's skills will be used, that one will be heard, that one's presence matters, and that one has the power to influence the direction and the outcome of the team's work.

When a team member cannot clearly picture his or her role in the team, he or she is likely to feel anxious and fearful. A member who does not feel a part of the group tends

to focus on this lack of connection and may act withdrawn or distant from the group, offer unsolicited criticism, or find little value in the team's work. In contrast, when team members feel a sense of belonging, they embrace the team's task and gain satisfaction through their participation. They are able to establish solid working relationships and to find a niche in the group. This frees them to address other interpersonal and task concerns.

Stage Two: Trust Building

The focal question during the trust-building stage is, "Who are you?" The hidden concern is, "What will you expect of me?" Many questions need to be answered about fellow team members. Are they reliable? Are they good at what they do? Are they dedicated to their work? Do they have any hidden agendas? Asking these questions and being able to answer affirmatively builds trust. If the questions cannot be answered affirmatively, the group members may tend to be suspicious of one another or to be skeptical about one another's abilities. Group members who trust one another tend to interact spontaneously and without censorship. Trusting groups also often have a norm that any valid feedback is acceptable.

When a team is more heterogeneous, issues of trust can become more complicated. In task forces, for example, members may bring hidden agendas from their individual departments to the task force. These hidden agendas can interfere with the productive functioning of the task force until they are revealed and dealt with.

The level of trust within a group may vary over time. Changes in personnel, especially additions of new team members, often affect trust levels as the group rebuilds itself and as the new members and the existing members appraise one another.

Stage Three: Goal/Role Clarification

Some teams are directed to complete specific tasks. More often, teams are free to manage themselves and are instructed only to accomplish broad goals. Therefore, it is important that the team clarify its mission and assign tasks to each member. This is not always as easy to accomplish as it may sound; a seemingly simple goal may involve many possibilities and choices. During this stage of goal clarification, team members primarily are concerned with issues such as identifying issues and options and managing the accompanying decisions.

Although team members may agree on the group's goals in a broad sense, many differences of opinion may exist about what should be done to accomplish those goals. Teams usually benefit from clarification of their goals and from the reaching of some consensus about their purposes.

When a team's mission or methods have not been addressed sufficiently, it tends to be plagued either by apathy or by irrelevant arguments. These "fight/flight" symptoms often persist until the group agrees on its mission. Teams that cannot resolve the issues of this stage rarely create or sustain the energy needed to perform at a consistently high level. Instead, members' energies are absorbed by tangential or conflicting activities or by struggles for dominance.

It is important to address not only the team's goals but individual goals as well. Personal goals that are not revealed and shared later may hinder the group in the form of hidden agendas. If members' personal goals are acknowledged early in the teamwork process,

members' energies will be freed to achieve personal goals rather than to hide or rationalize them.

When a group can define its agenda clearly and can reach consensus on it, it has created a common vision to guide the organization of its work. Its energies then can be directed outward toward the task, setting the stage for both structure and creativity.

Stage Four: Commitment

At this point, the team finally is ready to take action. The core questions at this stage are, "How?" and "Which way?" Decision making involves much constraint.

In the commitment phase, the team chooses the directions that its work will take and selects a method for dividing responsibilities. After a team has chosen its approach, it often experiences a sense of freedom as things begin to happen and progress begins to be made. The team must be sure to test its agreed-on approach through some system of rigorous planning and reality checking. If it does not, errors affecting the team's ability to achieve its goals will be made.

If the team cannot reach consensus on its goals and on the delegation of responsibilities, it may suffer from *dependence* and *counterdependence*. Dependence is evidenced by the "yes-person" who agrees with others' suggestions without expressing his or her own opinions. Consequently, the work and the responsibility tend to stay with only a few team members. Counterdependence also is a result of passive uninvolvement but is expressed with hostility and antagonism. Both dependent and counterdependent behavior are symptomatic of a lack of understanding of work schedules, of priorities, and of members' roles.

Stage Five: Implementation

The primary issue in this stage is reflected in the questions, "How will things be done; who does what, and when and where?" The sequencing of the work is a major concern. A team in stage five attempts to impose order on its work and to commit itself to a schedule. After a work schedule has been agreed on, team members' energies and attention can be devoted to the tasks themselves.

During the implementation stage, the team must integrate related tasks into a cohesive operation. Sequencing and timing must be carefully planned, and tasks must complement one another. PERT charts, Gantt charts, and the critical-path method can be helpful to a team that is trying to put a complex plan into action. It is most important to remember that one must allow time for the process to get under way. Teams must set schedules and adhere to them.

Team members who have resolved implementation-stage issues know the sequence of events and know their parts in well-ordered processes. If implementation-stage issues are not resolved, tasks are accomplished on a hit-or-miss basis. Team members are confused, argumentative, and late in meeting deadlines.

Team leaders must take care not to take implementation concerns too far. If a team leader schedules such rigid deadlines that the work becomes too segmented or that people feel excessively pressured, team members may feel burned out and may cease to keep abreast of one another's progress. The team leader must ensure that team members continue to feel integrated and that they are informed of the entire project's progress.

Applications of the Model

Realizing the potential applications of the team-performance model, Drexler, Sibbet, and Forrester (1988) developed a corresponding instrument, the Team-Performance Inventory, to enable work teams to monitor their performance without the assistance of an outside consultant.

The Team-Performance Inventory is a seventy-item questionnaire in an agree-disagree format. The items are divided into seven scales of ten items each. The items represent a range of potential behaviors or attitudes that vary in intensity and polarity. The inventory contains a secondary five-team scale of questions about the team leader's performance. The instrument also assesses the level of interdependence required by the team to achieve maximum effectiveness.

Team Performance™ Inventory and Profile

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Although the Model provides a framework, everyday team management requires good data and a common implementation language. The Team Performance™ Inventory is an efficient, seventy-two-question, normative instrument that can be taken at the beginning, middle, or end of a team process. It provides a team profile, which shows how much of each stage the team has mastered, from its members' own observations. The profile then provides feedback by stage and substage, and includes questions that a manager can use in discussions to analyze what the team needs to do to improve its performance.

The inventory and profile can be used in many applications, from quick checks to major reorientation meetings and retreats, depending on the needs of the team.

The fact that the instrument provides feedback on norms—against either the total base of teams who have taken the inventory or against company norms—allows the team to remain conscious of its connection to the larger organization and business environment.

References

Bradford, L., Gibb, J., & Benne, K. (1964). *T-group theory and laboratory method.* New York: John Wiley.

Drexler, A.B., Sibbet, D., & Forrester, R.H. (1988). The team performance model. In W.B. Reddy & K. Jamison (Eds.), *Team building: Blueprints for productivity and satisfaction.* Alexandria, VA: NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science, and San Diego, CA: University Associates.

Young, A. (1976a). *The geometry of meaning.* New York: Delacorte Press.

Young, A. (1976b). *The reflexive universe.* New York: Delacorte Press.

Teams in which all members understand the "big picture" and how they fit into that picture usually are the most productive.

Stage Six: High Performance

The issue of high performance is less clear-cut than the preceding issues. Each team has different criteria with which to assess performance, productivity, and synergy.

It appears that high performance is brought about in one of two ways. In a time of crisis, a team may rise to the occasion. For example, a work group whose members usually operate independently may lose a member unexpectedly. To fill the gap, the remaining members may band together and share the burden of the extra workload. Crisis-induced high performance is an enormous energy drain and usually can be sustained for only short periods of time.

A longer lasting and less frantic type of high performance is achieved through the resolution of the stages of the team performance model, combined with a little chemistry, timing, and luck. This second kind of high performance is more permanent, although it may ebb and flow. Ideally, each team member believes that he or she is essential to the work effort and feels responsible for his or her contributions.

In a high-performing team, everyone feels a sense of harmony and excitement in being part of the team. The members of such teams can read one another's thoughts, much as people in solid, long-term relationships can. The ability to communicate intuitively appears to result from openness and from a consistency in the team members and their behavior.
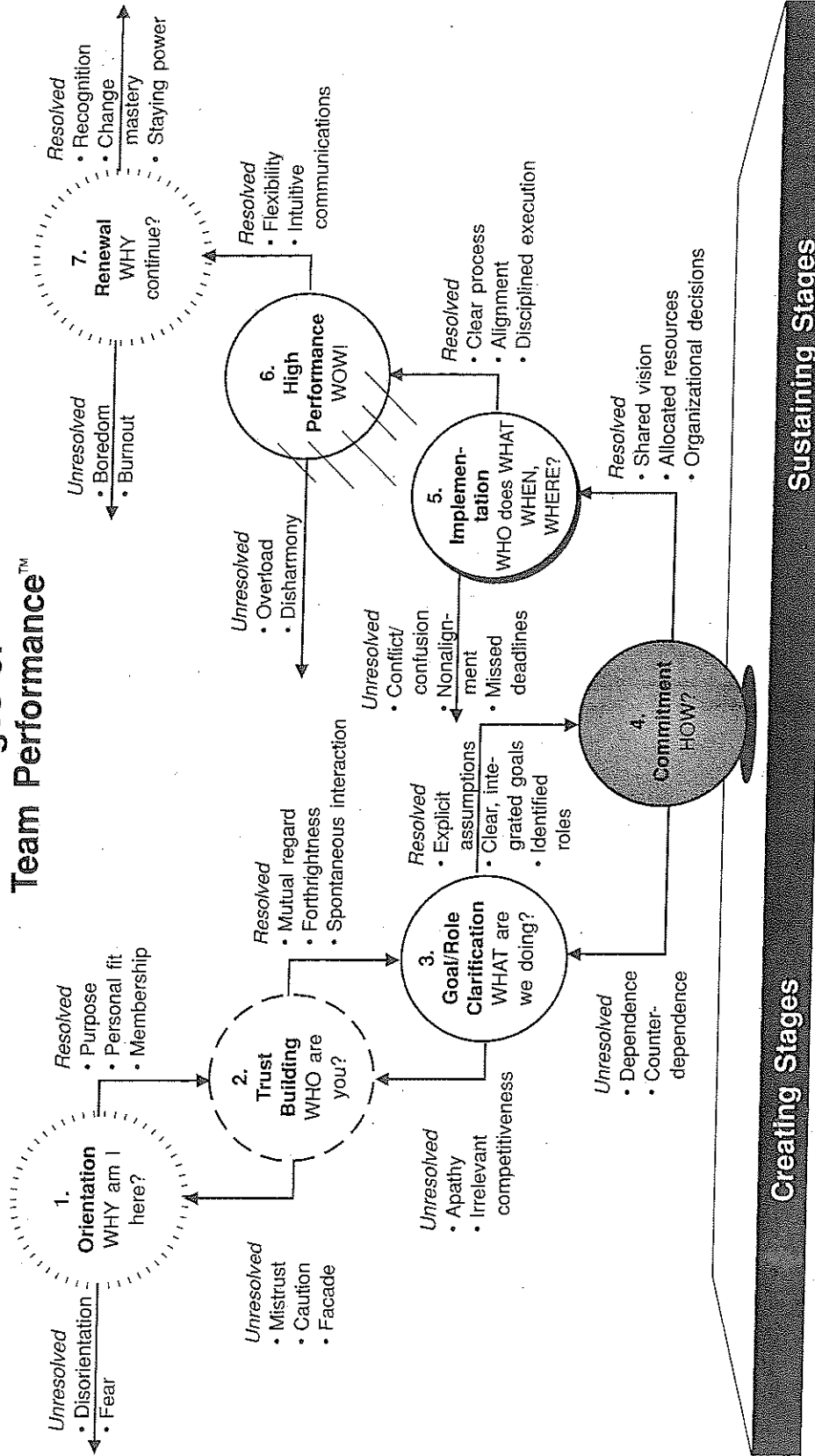
Ironically, it is not necessary or even desirable for all teams to aspire to the highest levels of performance. If a team is required to work interdependently and with extraordinary creativity and dedication, striving for high performance may be appropriate. However, teams that complete routine tasks requiring little creativity may be better off not pushing for superlative performance. If such teams' work patterns are well established and are acceptable to all concerned, the extra energy and time required to increase the level of performance may be wasted.

Stage Seven: Renewal

The renewal stage allows the team to ask itself, "Why continue?" It also allows the team members to examine their jobs and to ask themselves whether the jobs suit their lifestyles and their career plans. To a certain extent, stage seven is similar to stage one, the orientation stage. In both stages, people are trying to assess where they are, why they are there, and what needs to be done. Positive responses to these questions usually energize the questioners and renew their sense of commitment. If the responses are negative, indicating an unwillingness to continue the work, the renewal stage serves to free the questioners to move on.

Work teams can benefit from addressing the issue of renewal from time to time. It is important to find out whether congruence exists between team members' work, the team's work, and the team members' definitions of meaning and value in their lives. If the team realizes that what it is doing is what it wants to do, this realization will produce enthusiasm and harmony. If there are discrepancies, some discussion about whether to continue is warranted. It is not likely that discrepancies would occur without some prior warning signs such as boredom and burnout.

Stages of Team Performance™

Unresolved
- Disorientation
- Fear

1. Orientation WHY am I here?

Unresolved
- Mistrust
- Caution
- Facade

Resolved
- Purpose
- Personal fit
- Membership

2. Trust Building WHO are you?

Unresolved
- Apathy
- Irrelevant competitiveness

Resolved
- Mutual regard
- Forthrightness
- Spontaneous interaction

3. Goal/Role Clarification WHAT are we doing?

Resolved
- Explicit assumptions
- Clear, integrated goals
- Identified roles

Unresolved
- Dependence
- Counter-dependence

4. Commitment HOW?

Resolved
- Shared vision
- Allocated resources
- Organizational decisions

5. Implementation WHO does WHAT WHEN, WHERE?

Unresolved
- Conflict/confusion
- Nonalignment
- Missed deadlines

Resolved
- Clear process
- Alignment
- Disciplined execution

6. High Performance WOW!

Unresolved
- Overload
- Disharmony

Resolved
- Flexibility
- Intuitive communications

7. Renewal WHY continue?

Unresolved
- Boredom
- Burnout

Resolved
- Recognition
- Change mastery
- Staying power

Creating Stages   **Sustaining Stages**

Drexler/Sibbet Team Performance™ Model

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TEAM PERFORMANCE MODEL