

DISFUNCTIONAL

TEAMS?

IT'S YOUR FAULT.

Society idolizes the individual – from the star quarterback to the charismatic leaders of the modern business arena. But humanity's greatest achievements – the Egyptian pyramids and Great Wall of China, the invention of modern medicine, the exploration of the outer reaches of the universe – are the result of collective effort.

High-performing teams can provide an undeniable advantage over the competition. However, most managers will tell you that although it is easy to put together a team with great potential, they rarely perform at their maximum capacity. Why? Because you're doing it wrong.

According to Dave Winsborough, managing director at New Zealand psychological consultancy Winsborough Ltd. and one of the developers of the Hogan Team Report, most managers misunderstand how teams work.

“There is significant literature devoted to creating high-functioning teams, most of which focuses on the proper mix of functional roles,” he said. Functional roles are dictated by people’s titles and reflect their hard skills – accountant, designer, engineer.

“That is sensible and shortsighted at the same time, because it ignores an individual’s psychological role,” he continued. “When individuals are formed into a team with a designated task, there is an awkward phase in which everyone is searching for how he or she fit in – his or her psychological role.”

These psychological roles are dictated by the individual personalities of the team members, and there are five psychological roles toward which people naturally gravitate.

Results - Individuals who gravitate toward the results role take responsibility for managing the team. They are comfortable taking charge, and are needed to communicate ideas, work processes, individual contributions, progress, and problems to the team.

Relationships – Team members in the relationships role tend to be concerned with harmony and cooperation. They may also be the champion of the customer and stakeholders – someone who empathizes and understands how those outside the team will see things. Personally, they tend to be upbeat, gregarious, and outgoing.

Process – Individuals who naturally focus on process are concerned with implementation, the details of execution, and the use of systems to complete tasks. They are reliable, organized, and conscientious about following rules and protocol.

Innovation – Team members who gravitate toward the innovation role anticipate problems, and recognize when the team needs to adapt. They spot trends and patterns quickly, enjoy solving problems, and generate creative solutions.

Pragmatism – Team members who are drawn to the pragmatism role are practical, somewhat hard-headed challengers of ideas and theories. They promote realistic approaches and aren’t easily swayed by the need to preserve harmony or innovation for its own sake.

A TEAM IS THREE OR MORE PEOPLE WHO HAVE A COMMON GOAL, WHOSE ABILITY TO ACHIEVE THAT GOAL IS DEPENDENT ON EACH OTHER, WHO SHARE COMMON LEADERSHIP, AND WHO SHARE SUCCESS OR FAILURE.

TO PERFORM AT THEIR MAXIMUM POTENTIAL, TEAMS NEED TO MAINTAIN A BALANCE OF TWO PSYCHOLOGICAL ROLES: COMPLIMENTARY FIT AND SIMILARITY FIT.

A BALANCING ACT

Understanding these psychological roles reveals why otherwise talented teams can fall flat, and provides the keys to unlocking their potential.

“Say I want to put together a software development team,” Winsborough said. “Using the conventional model, I would want to hire a group of programmers that were each the best at what they do – design, coding, etc. These people would all function extremely well within their individual silos, but because I didn’t pay attention to the balance of psychological roles within the team, they would probably have a hard time communicating

and working with each other, or with anyone else.”

To perform at their maximum potential, teams need to maintain a balance of psychological roles. These roles must be balanced in two ways: complimentary fit and similarity fit.

“It is impossible for any one person to fill all the roles that a great team needs,” Winsborough said. “When a team has complimentary fit, it means that it has enough diversity among its members to cover every psychological role.”

Similarity fit, on the other hand, concerns having enough individuals to provide critical mass in each psychological role.

5 WAYS TEAMS FAIL

An unbalanced team can be an operational nightmare – projects stall, ideas dry up, and morale plummets. Fortunately, unbalanced teams manifest themselves in five predictable ways, each of which can be fixed by bringing in people to fill gaps, or reassigning people where too many individuals are trying to fill a role.

1. NOBODY, OR EVERYBODY, SEEMS TO BE IN CHARGE

In order to drive performance, teams need one or two individuals who gravitate toward a results role. These individuals typically seem warm and approachable, and in a team setting they naturally assume a managerial role. Results-oriented team members are necessary to organize work, clarify roles, distribute tasks, and evaluate outcomes.

“Without someone to take charge and establish goals and timelines and hold individual members accountable to their commitments, teams tend to drift away from their goals over time,” said Ryan Ross, vice president of Global Alliances at Hogan. “Too many results-oriented team members, however, can result in infighting and competition for leadership roles, which can be equally distracting.”

2. NOBODY GETS ALONG

No matter how strong the individual members of your team, if they won't work together, it does little good. Relationships-oriented team members are important for building cohesion within the group.

“In a group, relationship-oriented team members are important not only because they maintain harmony within the group, but also because they tend to champion customers and stakeholders,” Ross said. “However, they can be overly focused on getting along rather than performance, so it's important to balance them with results-oriented members to keep the team moving forward.”

3. THEY AREN'T PRODUCING ANY BIG IDEAS

Large companies have trouble innovating – they tend to be risk averse, set in their ways, and hindered by bureaucracy and internal politics. Companies rely on small, nimble teams to drive promising ideas from conception to market, and teams rely on innovative individuals to produce those ideas.

Team members who gravitate toward the innovation role have a talent for spotting trends and patterns, identifying problems and generating creative solutions.

“These are big-picture thinkers,” Ross said. “They're great for anticipating problems and coming up with creative solutions. However, they also tend to have a problem with practicality.”

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4. THEIR IDEAS NEVER GET ANYWHERE

A team's big ideas don't serve anyone if they never make it to market. To stay productive, organized, and on schedule, teams rely on people who naturally focus on process.

"Without enough people in the process role, teams lack sufficient self-discipline and good process," Ross said.

"However, with too many people in the process role, teams can become rigid and lack the tactical agility they need to overcome obstacles as they encounter them."

5. NOBODY PLAYS THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

Every team needs a good pragmatist – a practical, somewhat hardheaded challenger of ideas and theories. They promote realistic approaches and aren't easily swayed by the need to preserve harmony or innovation for its own sake.

"Without enough of these individuals, teams tend to spend a lot of time pursuing ideas that seem great at first, but prove impossible to implement," Ross said. "The team becomes too critical and closed-minded to allow new ideas to develop."

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THE BOTTOM LINE

Achieving the right mix of skills, experience, and personality is the key to creating a productive team and satisfied workforce. To learn about how to find the right balance of personalities for your team, check out our complimentary eBook, [*The Truth About Teams*](#).