DRIVING TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

A Comparative Analysis of the Korn/Ferry T7 Model With Other Popular Team Models.

By Kenneth P. De Meuse

Key Takeaways:

- The Korn/Ferry T7 Model of Team Effectiveness was recently validated using 303 teams (3,328 participants) in 50 organizations across a variety of industry sectors.

- Overall, two conclusions are apparent. First, the six models of team effectiveness reviewed in this whitepaper have much, much similarity in the manner in which they view team functioning. Second, the Korn/Ferry T7 Model is one of the most (if not the most) comprehensive assessments of team effectiveness in the literature.

"Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology. It is teamwork that remains the ultimate competitive advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare (p. vii)." This is the way Patrick Lencioni opened his best-selling book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (2002). It has been estimated that nearly all of the Fortune 500 companies employ teams of some form or type in their business (see Dumaine, 1994; Kirkman, Gibson, & Shapiro, 2001). Increasingly, teams are being used in a variety of applications by a wide range of organizations (e.g., project teams, virtual task forces, quality circles, self-directed work teams, standing committees).

The importance of work teams appears to be gaining in strength as jobs get bigger, organizational structures get more complex, and more and more companies become multi-national in scope (Naquin & Tynan, 2003). In today's corporate environment, it appears the team – not the individual – holds the key to business success.

Teams in the Contemporary Workplace

As companies restructure, downsize, and reinvent themselves, the new roles being created tend to be team-oriented. Organizations are becoming flatter, leaner, and more agile. A prominent feature of effectiveness today is satisfying customer needs. Many jobs and projects are becoming increasingly complex, less time-bound, and global in scope. All these factors collectively are making it increasing difficult for one person to perform a single job. The contemporary workplace uses teams as the basic work unit (e.g., surgical units, airplane crews, research and development teams, production crews).

Although teams are ubiquitous in organizations, most employee-related functions are individualized (e.g., selecting, training, evaluating, rewarding). Such a disconnect between an organization's need to foster effective teams and its natural tendency to focus on the individual employee can create many problems. In addition, some research suggests a key reason why some teams fail is that employees are ill-prepared to make the transition from individual contributor to team member.

Bergmann and De Meuse (1996) investigated the implementation of self-managed work teams in a large food processing plant. They observed that employees lacked the basic team skills of problem solving, dealing with conflict, conducting effective meetings, and interpersonal communication. Eventually, the employees resisted the movement to self-managed work teams to such an extent that management returned to the old system of production after 10 months.

One of the keys to developing high performing teams is to remember that successful teams do not simply happen. They take much effort and time. They take proper guidance and support from the team leader. They require an organizational culture which enables and fosters team work. To attain a high level of team performance, we must be knowledgeable about what factors influence team dynamics and effectiveness.

In an attempt to understand how teams work, a number of authors have proposed models of team performance. Each of these models presents several variables that the author(s) posit influence the effectiveness of teams. Some of the models highlight group structure and interpersonal dynamics, while others tend to focus on the talent

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and motivation of individual team members. Still others emphasize factors external to the team itself (e.g., a company's culture). Some models were proposed more than three decades ago; some were developed within the past few years.

Frequently Cited Team Models

This whitepaper first presents and reviews the Korn/Ferry T7 Model of Team Effectiveness followed by an examination of five frequently cited team models.

- Rubin, Plovnick, and Fry (1977)
- Katzenbach and Smith (1993)
- LaFasto and Larson (2001)
- Hackman (2002)
- Lencioni (2005)

The whitepaper summarizes the differences and similarities between the models. As consultants and organizational leaders, it seems as though each of us has our favorite team model. We hope this investigation will provide some clarity regarding how the T7 Model compares to other popular team models.

As we will discover, the T7 Model presents the most comprehensive framework of all the models reviewed. Our goal is that this paper will enable us to become more familiar and confident that such an approach to assessing team effectiveness can offer client organizations a powerful framework for improving their work teams.

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## The T7 Model of Team Effectiveness

In an attempt to understand how teams work, Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger originally developed the T7 Model in 1995 to represent the key facets that influence the performance of work teams. Based upon their review of the research literature, they identified five factors inside the team and two factors outside the team which impact team effectiveness. Each one of the factors was named to begin with the letter "T." Hence, the name T7 Model (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

The T7 Model of Team Effectiveness
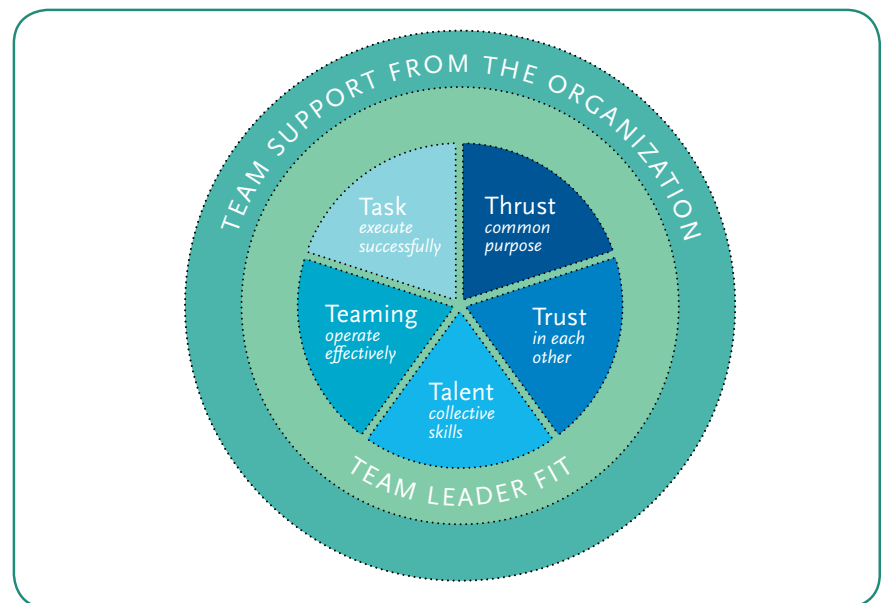
The five internal team factors include:

- **Thrust** – a common purpose about what needs to be accomplished or team goal(s)
- **Trust** – in each other as teammates
- **Talent** – the collective skills of the team members to get the job done
- **Teaming Skills** – operating effectively and efficiently as a team
- **Task Skills** – executing successfully or getting the job done

The two external team factors are:

- **Team-Leader Fit** – the degree to which the team leader satisfies the needs of the team members
- **Team Support from the Organization** – the extent to which the leadership of the organization enables the team to perform

Each of the factors inside the team can be delineated into sub-factors or dimensions. For example, "thrust" refers to agreed upon vision, mission, values, and goals among members within a team. Moreover, members employ a common strategy and tactics to accomplish goals. Specifically, thrust consists of the following three behavioral

dimensions: (a) thrust management, (b) thrust clarity, and (c) thrust commitment. In contrast, "trust" includes the following dimensions: (a) trust in truthful communication, (b) trust in actions, and (c) trust inside the team. In total, the five internal factors consist of 18 dimensions of team effectiveness (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

Inside the Team Factors and Dimensions

Internal Factor	Dimension
Thrust	• Thrust Management • Thrust Clarity • Thrust Commitment
Trust	• Trust in Truthful Communication • Trust in Actions • Trust Inside the Team
Talent	• Talent Acquisition and Enhancement • Talent Allocation and Deployment
Teaming Skills	• Resource Management • Team Learning • Decision Making • Conflict Resolution • Team Atmosphere • Managing Process
Task Skills	• Focusing • Assignment Flexibility • Measurement • Delivering the Goods

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All five internal factors have to be present for teams to be high performing. However, teams cannot be high performing unless the necessary organizational and leadership support also are provided. It does not matter how good a team is on thrust, trust, talent, teaming skills, and task skills, it must have the support from the organization and the leadership fit to be effective (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1995).

> That redefinition [of goals and responsibilities] enables them to adjust and readjust team processes, such as decision making, conflict resolution, and work flow.
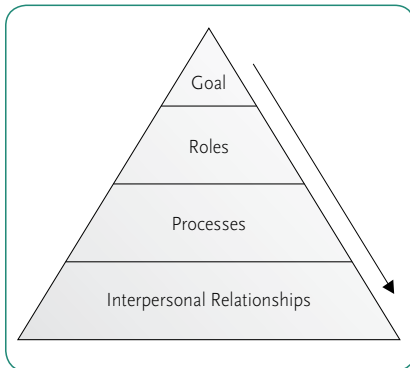

FIGURE 2

The GRPI Model of Team Effectiveness–Rubin, Plovnick, and Fry Model (1977)

T7 Model Research

The factor and dimension structure of the T7 Model of Team Effectiveness recently was validated. A total of 303 teams and 3,328 participants were administered the Team Architect® assessment. The teams were employed in 50 organizations across a variety of industry sectors (e.g., manufacturing, health care, telecommunications, finance). Whether the data were obtained from the team leader, team members, or were aggregated at the team level, the model was supported (De Meuse, Tang, & Dai, 2009).

In addition, the literature on teams was examined recently to determine whether any additional factors and dimensions were required to capture various components of team effectiveness. Based on a comprehensive review of the relevant research, it was found that no addition factors or dimensions were needed (De Meuse, 2007).

Other Models of Team Effectiveness in the Literature

Rubin, Plovnick, and Fry Model—The GRPI Model of Team Effectiveness

This model by Rubin, Plovnick, and Fry (1977) is one of the oldest models of team effectiveness. It is sometimes referred to as the "GRPI Model," which stands for Goals, Roles, Processes, and Interpersonal Relationships. The authors present their model in terms of a pyramid similar to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1954). However, unlike Maslow's theory, this model starts at the top of the pyramid.

According to the model, a team always should begin with a team-level goal. After the goal is defined, the roles and responsibilities will become clearer. As individuals work together (processes), they will see that goals and responsibilities often are not sufficiently clear. Consequently, team members will need to redefine them. That redefinition enables them to adjust and readjust team processes, such as decision making, conflict resolution, and work flow. When doing all that, they will be developing the interpersonal relationships needed to relate to other team members and the team leader. See Figure 2.

The authors provide guidance for defining components of the model.
Goal definition:
- Clarity about the main purpose of the team
- Agreement on the desired results
- Understanding of the main tasks

- Agreement on the standards and expectations
- Clarity of priorities and deadlines
- Understanding of boundaries

Role clarification:
- Acceptance of a team leader
- Understand all members' roles
- Individual responsibilities
- Shared responsibilities
- Clear boundaries
- Identify and fill gaps

Processes and workflow:
- Team processes – (e.g., how decisions are made, how the team solves problems and resolves conflict, communication)
- Work processes – (e.g., procedures and work flow)

Interpersonal relationships:
- Relating with the other team members
- Trust
- Sensitivity and flexibility with each other
- Good communication
- Collaboration in problem solving
- Effective methods for dealing with conflict

Katzenbach and Smith Model—Focusing on Team Basics

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) assert most people realize the capabilities of teams, but there is a natural resistance to moving beyond individual roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities. Individuals do not easily accept responsibility for the performance of others, or cherish others assuming responsibility for them. Overcoming this resistance requires that team members understand, accept, and apply the "the basics" of team work. Katzenbach and Smith depict these team basics in the form of a triangle (see Figure 3).
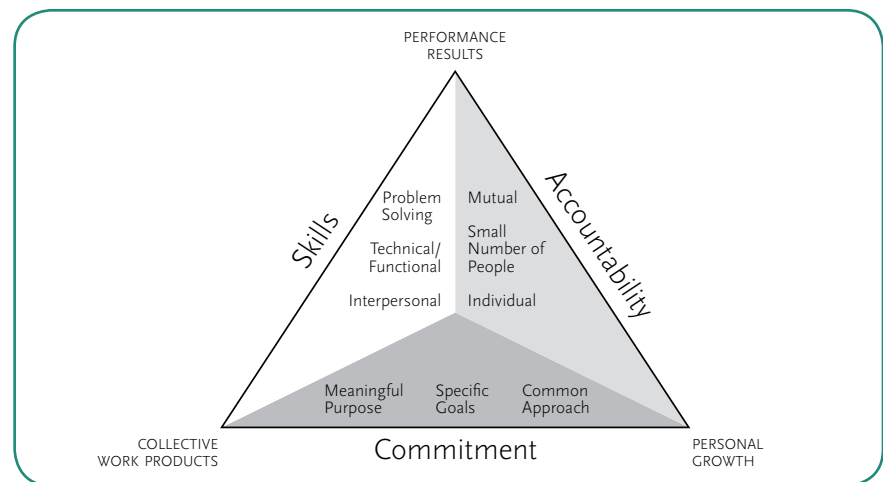
There are three overarching goals in the Katzenbach and Smith (1993) model: (a) Collective Work Products, (b) Personal Growth, and (c) Performance Results. These outcomes are presented in the vertices of the triangle and indicate what teams can deliver. In contrast, the sides and center of the triangle describe the team elements required to make it happen – Commitment, Skills, and Accountability.

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FIGURE 3

Focusing on Team Basics Model—Katzenbach and Smith (1993)

PERFORMANCE
RESULTS

Skills

Accountability

Problem
Solving

Mutual

Technical/
Functional

Small
Number of
People

Interpersonal

Individual

Meaningful
Purpose

Specific
Goals

Common
Approach

COLLECTIVE
WORK PRODUCTS

Commitment

PERSONAL
GROWTH

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The authors contend that successful teams are deeply committed to their goals, approach, and purpose. Members in these teams also are very committed to each other. They understand that the "wisdom of teams comes with a focus on collective work-products, personal growth, and performance results" (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p. 9). They assert that successful teams always are a result of pursuing demanding performance goals at the team level.

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) pose the following series of six questions to diagnose the functioning of teams and enhance their effectiveness.

- Is the size of the team appropriate?
- Do members have sufficient complementary skills?
- Is the purpose of the team truly meaningful and understood?
- Are there team-oriented goals – are they clear, realistic, and measurable?
- Does the team have a well thought-out, articulated working approach?
- Is there a sense of mutual accountability?

For teams to be effective, all six questions need to be addressed satisfactorily.

FIGURE 4

Five Dynamics of Teamwork and Collaboration Model—LaFasto and Larson (2001)

There are four necessary behaviors for members in a team setting: (a) openness, (b) supportiveness, (c) an action orientation, and (d) a "positive personal style."

LaFasto and Larson Model—Five dynamics of teamwork and collaboration

LaFasto and Larson (2001) developed a model of team effectiveness which they refer to as the "Five Dynamics of Team Work and Collaboration." They based this model upon the insights they gleaned from investigating 600 teams in a variety of industries. They theorize that there are five fundamental elements or components which must be understood and actively managed to increase the likelihood of team effectiveness. These elements are presented in Figure 4.

Similar to other model authors, LaFasto and Larson provide much definition and guidance for each of the components in their model. The authors devote an entire chapter in their book to clarifying teamwork, and then offering suggestions on how to enhance team effectiveness for each of these five components (LaFasto & Larson, 2001).

For example, the initial element is "team member." A key to team success is to begin with the right people. There are four necessary behaviors for members in a team setting: (a) openness, (b) supportiveness, (c) an action orientation, and (d) a "positive personal style." The model components are addressed in the following manner:

- What makes a good team member – the abilities and behaviors that really matter?
- What behaviors in a group foster effective team member relationships?
- What are the behaviors of teams – as perceived by their members and leaders – that cause some teams to be more successful than others at problem solving?
- What are the behaviors of team leaders – as viewed by members of the team – that foster team success or failure?
- What organizational processes and practices promote clarity, confidence, and commitment in a team?

Hackman Model—Team effectiveness model

Hackman (2002) declared that a team is most likely to be effective when the following conditions are satisfied: (a) it is a real team rather than a team in name only, (b) the team has a compelling direction for its work, (c) it has an enabling structure that facilitates teamwork, (d)

the team operates within a supportive organizational context, and (e) it has ample expert coaching in teamwork available.
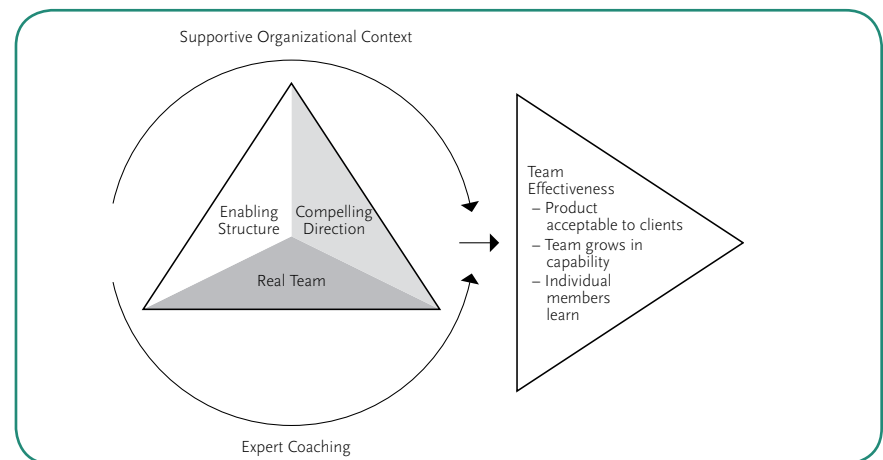
According to Hackman (2002), team effectiveness is measured by providing products or services that exceed customer expectations, growing team capabilities over time, and satisfying team member needs. These points are depicted in the model in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5

Conditions for Team Effectiveness Model—Hackman (2005)

Hackman (2002) goes on to clarify the five necessary conditions for team effectiveness as follows:

- A so-called real team has these four features: a team task, clear boundaries, clearly assigned authority to make team decisions, and membership stability.
- Possessing a compelling direction refers to whether the team has clear, challenging, and consequential goals that focus on the ends to be accomplished rather than the means the team must use to pursue them.
- An enabling structure refers to whether the team's task, composition, and norms of conduct enable rather than impede teamwork.
- Supportive organizational context refers to whether the team receives adequate resources, rewards, information, education, intergroup cooperation, and support that members need to accomplish their tasks.

- Expert coaching refers to the availability of a competent coach to help team members deal with potential issues or existing problems in order to accomplish the team tasks. Expert coaching also helps team members take advantage of emerging opportunities and improve their coordination and collaboration.

Lencioni Model—Understanding team dysfunction

One of the most interesting models of team effectiveness was developed by Lencioni (2005). According to him, all teams have the potential to be dysfunctional. To improve the functioning of a team, it is critical to understand the type and level of dysfunction. Again, a pyramid is used to demonstrate the hierarchical progression of team development. Similar to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1954), there are five levels and each must be completed to move on to the next one. See Figure 6.

There are five potential dysfunctions of a team in Lencioni's model:

Dysfunction #1: Absence of Trust
This outcome occurs when team members are reluctant to be vulnerable with one another and are unwilling to admit their mistakes, weaknesses, or need for help. Without a certain comfort level among team members, a foundation of trust is not possible.

Dysfunction #2: Fear of Conflict
Teams that are lacking trust are incapable of engaging in unfiltered, passionate debate about key issues. It creates situations where team conflict can easily turn into veiled discussions and back channel comments. In a work setting where team members do not openly air their opinions, inferior decisions result.

Dysfunction #3: Lack of Commitment
Without conflict, it is difficult for team members to commit to decisions, fostering an environment where ambiguity prevails. Lack of direction and commitment can make employees, particularly star employees, disgruntled and disenfranchised.

Dysfunction #4: Avoidance of Accountability
When teams do not commit to a clear plan of action, even the most focused and driven individuals are hesitant to call their peers on actions and behaviors that may seem counterproductive to the overall good of the team.
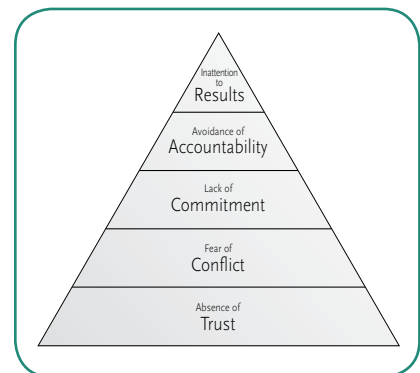

FIGURE 6

Five Dysfunctions of a Team Model—Lencioni (2005)

Without conflict, it is difficult for team members to commit to decisions, fostering an environment where ambiguity prevails.

Dysfunction #5: Inattention to Results

Team members naturally tend to put their own needs (e.g., ego, career development, recognition, and so on) ahead of the collective goals of the team when individuals are not held accountable. If a team has lost sight of the need for achievement, the business ultimately suffers.

Summary of the Models of Team Effectiveness

The most striking observation is the amount of similarity across all the models. For example, all the models examine issues related to (a) thrust, (b) trust, and (c) teaming skills. Four of the five models also identify member talent as an important factor in team effectiveness. Likewise, four of the five models indicate that team-leader fit needs to be considered. Perhaps, one should not be surprised with the substantial overlap of factors among the models. Table 2 highlights the similarities and differences among the five models of team effectiveness relative to the T7 Model. Both factor-level and dimension-level comparisons are provided.

Goals and goal setting activities have been recognized as a key ingredient to high performance for decades (see Latham & Locke, 1979). For the past several decades, psychologists have been contending that mutual trust and open communication are the foundation for any successful relationship. It also is logical that how one resolves conflicts, makes decisions, and deals with resource issues would be highly related to team effectiveness.

The LaFasto and Larson (2001) and Katzenbach and Smith (1993) models most closely mirror the T7 Model. LaFasto and Larson address all seven factors of the T7 Model as well as 17 out of the 20 dimensions. Katzenbach and Smith examine five of the seven factors and 16 of the 20 dimensions. The Lencioni (2005) model has the least correspondence with the T7 Model, with four common factors and 11 common dimensions.

Overall, two conclusions are apparent. First, the six models of team effectiveness have much, much similarity in the manner in which they view team functioning. Second, the Korn/Ferry T7 Model is one of the most (if not the most) comprehensive assessments of team effectiveness in the literature (see Table 2).

The most striking observation [among the five popular team models] is the amount of similarity across all the models.

Korn/Ferry's T7 Model is one of the most (if not the most) comprehensive assessments of team effectiveness in the literature.

TABLE 2

Comparing the T7 Model with other Team Effectiveness Models in the Literature

Factor / Dimension	Rubin, Plovnick & Fry (1977)	Katzenbach & Smith (1993)	LaFasto & Larson (2001)	Hackman (2002)	Lencioni (2005)	Total
Thrust	■	■	■	■	■	5
1. Management	o	o	o	o	o	5
2. Clarity	o	o	o	o	o	5
3. Commitment	o	o	o		o	4
Trust	■	■	■	■	■	5
4. Truthful Communication	o	o	o	o	o	5
5. Trust in Actions	o	o	o	o	o	5
6. Trust Inside Team	o	o	o	o	o	5
Talent	■	■	■	■		4
7. Acquisition/Enhancement	o	o	o	o		4
8. Allocation/Deployment		o	o			2
Teaming Skills	■	■	■	■	■	5
9. Resource Management		o		o		2
10. Learning			o			1
11. Decision Making	o	o	o		o	4
12. Conflict Resolution	o	o	o		o	4
13. Team Atmosphere	o	o	o	o	o	5
14. Managing Process	o	o	o	o		4
Task Skills			■		■	2
15. Focusing	o			o	o	3
16. Assignment Flexibility		o				1
17. Measurement		o	o			2
18. Delivering the Goods			o		o	2
Team Support from Organization			■	■		2
19. Organization Support			o	o		2
Team-Leader Fit	■	■	■	■		4
20. Team-Leader Fit	o	o	o	o		4
Total Factors [■]	**5**	**5**	**7**	**6**	**4**	
Total Dimensions [o]	13	16	17	12	11	

Successful teams become stronger when members learn to work together. They have clear, acceptable goals. The members trust and respect one another. They communicate often and openly. Members have talent. The leader "fits" the needs of the team. The organization supports the team.

The Secret to Successful Teams

Supposedly, Native American Chief Tecumseh once declared that "a single twig breaks, but a bundle of twigs is strong." Successful teams become stronger when members learn to work together. They have clear, acceptable goals. The members trust and respect one another. They communicate often and openly. Members have talent for creating and implementing ideas. The leader "fits" the needs of the team. And the support and resources from the wider organization and community are provided.

Teams have the potential to be one of the most powerful drivers of success in an organization today. However, highly performing teams simply don't happen. They take time to evolve and mature. They take proper leadership. The T7 Model provides the framework by which to analyze the operations of a team. The Team Architect® assessment enables you to systematically collect the perceptions of team members as well as obtain the views of relevant others. It is up to you to understand how teams function, and then improve the cohesiveness, chemistry, and productivity of the team. Talent is not enough! After all, as noted major league baseball coach Casey Stengel use to say: "It's easy to get good players. Getting 'em to play together, that's the hard part."

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