Building A Collaborative Team

Where is *your* team, in the process of building true collaboration? Take the special inventory in this issue to find out. Then use the steps and guidelines provided, to help move your team into high-performing collaboration. Follow the instructions provided with the questionnaire. If you like, you may photocopy it and distribute it to your team—compile their responses and share the results at a team meeting when you can set aside enough time to digest and discuss the information. Please note: permission to copy and distribute this information is limited to your personal use and is not extended to publication or resale beyond that, without prior arrangements with the author.

The Team Culture Questionnaire

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The following questionnaire will help you and your team members identify where you are in the spectrum of team culture. Respond to each question or introductory statement by choosing one of the four responses provided—the one that best describes you; your situation; or your team. Just circle the letter to the left of the response you choose (e.g. "A" "B" "C" or "D"). Then follow the scoring instructions to tabulate the results. The section that follows the questionnaire will help you understand your team's current state, and also help you apply that information towards improvement and growth. TIP—use the inventory (and your team member's answers) to stimulate a constructive discussion about your team culture, and the possibilities of developing into a high-performing *collaborative* team.

1.	How would you describe your attitude toward the team you are on?	
A	There is no team—just other people who get in my way.	B
B	There is no team—just other people competing for the same raises and promotions.	P
C	We work together because we can't accomplish all the work alone.	O
D	We are a tight, cohesive group and we love working together!	L
2.	How would you describe your attitude toward the other team members?	
A	They're great people—I feel like I'm soaring with eagles!	L
B	They're like me—we're all stuck here together, so we just do our best to get the work done and stay out of trouble.	O
C	They're drones—I'll easily outperform them and promote out of here.	P
D	They're idiots—they just make it harder for me to do my job!	B
3.	How would you describe your attitude toward the work you are doing?	
A	It's pretty standard—with management mapping out the direction and setting all of the goals.	O
B	It's exciting, motivating, and fun—with lots of opportunity for creativity and innovation!	L
C	It's mundane and boring, with management constantly making demands and applying pressure.	P
D	It's mostly stupid and unnecessary, but we have no choice.	B
4.	How would you describe your attitude toward your role on the team?	
A	My role is to do my job; not make waves; leave on time at the end of the day.	O
B	My role is to do whatever it takes to do my work and protect my job.	B
C	My role is to do my job better than the rest of these slugs and get out of here.	P
D	My role is to make a unique contribution—one that flows from my special talents, abilities, gifts, and passion.	L

5.	**How would you describe your attitude toward upper management?**	
A	They're stupid—they're doing more harm than good.	B
B	They're ignorant—they have no idea what's really going on around here.	P
C	They're arrogant—they think they have all the answers.	O
D	They're lucky—they give us the freedom we need to succeed; to make valuable contributions; and to make them look good!	L
6.	**What is motivating you to go to work each day?**	
A	To perform well enough to get out of there and do something better.	P
B	I'm not sure I could go anywhere else or do anything different right now.	B
C	It's challenging, interesting, and fun!	L
D	It's a job. It's paying the bills. The people are okay.	O
7.	**How are decisions made?**	
A	We do a lot of thinking and talking together as a team and make collective decisions about most of the things we do.	L
B	My supervisor gets his orders and passes them on to us, and we basically go along with the program, even if we disagree with it.	O
C	By unrealistic middle-managers who are competing with their peers for recognition, resources, and staff.	P
D	By idiotic and ignorant company executives.	B
8.	**How are problems handled?**	
A	Badly. We point them out and complain, but nobody ever does anything.	B
B	We take them to our boss and hope he does something.	O
C	We put our heads together and decide what to do about it as a team.	L
D	I only have to worry if the problem is hindering my success. If it is, I usually have to find my own solutions.	P
9.	**How are team goals set?**	
A	Our supervisor sits down with us and tells us all about the new goal and gives us a pep talk.	O
B	The departments get goals handed down by some executive management group.	P
C	We talk about the project as a team and let each team member have input toward setting a goal that is big enough to be a challenge, but realistic enough to be achievable.	L
D	We get unrealistic goals to accomplish ridiculous things that have no connection with the reality of what we really have to do.	B

10.	**How are goals achieved?**	
A	I do what I decide to do, in order to do my *real* job—regardless of whatever new "program" is being promoted.	B
B	We do just well enough so we don't look bad in front of all the other teams.	O
C	Our department head just keeps applying the pressure and dangling some stupid carrot in front of us.	P
D	We shoot for the stars—even if we miss, we land in the trees where it ends up being a lot higher than where we started at "ground level."	L
11.	**How are resources allocated?**	
A	We come up with creative ways to accomplish really cool things on a shoestring.	L
B	A lot of brown-nosing seems to help.	O
C	It's dog-eat-dog between the other departments and teams.	P
D	I have to fight for every little thing I need.	B
12.	**How does work get done?**	
A	I/we work just as hard as necessary (and no more) to stay ahead of the rest of the pack.	P
B	I try to stay out of everybody's way and work on my own as much as possible.	B
C	It's a part of the great fun we have, making creative and challenging things happen.	L
D	We just work until we're finished (as long as we don't generate any overtime).	O

Scoring Instructions

Take each circled response and go to the far right column to circle the letter that describes its "category." You'll be looking for a "P" or a "B" or an "L" or an "O." Add up the number of responses in each of these lettered categories, and go to the next section to record that number in the appropriate spaces. Use the interpretations provided to guide your reflection and discussion of the results.

ComBative = 𝔹   My score _____

Scores of 6 or more in this category are significant; 4 or higher are cause for concern. A Combative team environment is marked by disagreement, dissension, resistance (passive *and* aggressive), and out-and-out rebellion. Work gets done *in spite of*, rather than *with the help of,* the team and the rest of the organization. Team members often withdraw from the rest of the team and isolate themselves into their own separate areas of work and responsibility, with an adversarial stance toward others—supervisors, top management, and even their fellow team members. Open conflict is not uncommon, but keep your eyes open for passive-aggressive behavior as well—when team members agree to go along with things, and then just do what they darn well please anyway! Their attitudes are often marked by cynicism, skepticism, suspicion, anger, and outright hostility. The good news: they're angry because they *care* about their work! Their passionate *anger* is better than the dispassionate *apathy* of workers who are "unplugging" completely. Their passion means that Combative workers can often be the easiest to motivate, *if their supervisors know what to do.* (More about that later!)

ComPetitive = ℙ   My score _____

Again, scores of 6 or more in this category are significant; any higher than 4 certainly means that your team has Competitive characteristics (or at least, *you* do!) The Competitive team struggles with rivalry and competition between its members. (On a *macro* scale, a company may struggle with a competitive culture *between* its various teams and team leaders. That presents some problems, as well). The challenge here, is distinguishing between the different *kinds* of competition that exist. Morris puts it in perspective for us: *"Competition can be energizing and productive, or distracting and exhausting. It can sometimes even take on many traits of combat, in which case it degenerates quickly into an unhealthy struggle with many negative consequences."[1]* One of the biggest mistakes managers make is to use competition in an *unhealthy* way that ultimately works against good team dynamics and great individual performance. When the wrong kind of competitive spirit invades a team, members become more concerned about their own individual performance than the team's performance; more focused on their own recognition and advancement than the team's; more focused on what other people are doing, than on what they are supposed to be doing; and ultimately distracted from the kind of critical thinking that addresses problems, opportunities, and outcomes in a creative and innovative way.

CoOperative = ⦿   My score _____

In many respects, this is closer to the ideal… but… it is also insidiously counter-productive in many other ways. So… if your team has a score of 4 or more, that may be as much bad news as good. You will have to do some very careful thinking and leading, to guide your team in the right direction. The Cooperative team is definitely more of a team than not—members pitch in to get the work done, and there is no outward sign of rebellion, resistance, or disagreement. But be careful…   Cooperative team members often are a disaffected bunch, with very little passion for their work. Most of them share an attitude of passive compliance and listless acquiescence. They are easily distracted by other things that trigger their passion: a new hobby, relationship, or social outlet. And so their work loses the best of their creative thinking and focused energy. Moving them into an energized "Collaborative" state isn't as easy as it seems. Because, if you're leading them, you may also have been lulled into a state of false satisfaction—not by what they are telling you, *but by what they are **not** telling you.* Things look great because they're going along with your decisions. Here's the problem—they're not telling you what they *really* think. So… if your team members aren't talking, then how do you know when you're dealing with this kind of situation? Here's a hint: one of the most common defining characteristics of a Cooperative team is the existence of an outside, "upper" decision-making entity that hands down edicts and directives from "above." Instead of being allowed to participate meaningfully in the decisions that shape their work, Cooperative team members just "go along with" the decisions that are made by others. Take a look at recent events in your own organization. If you find yourself having to "sell" management's "programs" to your team, you may be creating this kind of culture.

CoLLaborative = ⌞ My score _____

This is nirvana for team culture. If you have more scores in this area than not, you are doing well. How is this different from simple cooperative effort? If cooperation means a multiplication of *hands* to get the work done, then Collaboration represents a multiplication of *heads* and *hearts* that engages the passion and creativity of every team member. A truly Collaborative team, therefore, is marked by "…community, creativity, learning, building, and pioneering."[2] The whole team is actively involved in key areas of planning, problem-solving, resource-allocating, decision-making, goal-setting, strategizing, and implementation. The Collaborative team actively applies Ken Blanchard's mantra—*None of us is as smart as all of us*—and constantly proves the age-old leadership aphorism—*We most loyally support that which we ourselves create.* You know you have arrived at this state when you begin to experience the rare phenomenon of *synergism*—when team members perform and contribute *in the team* in ways that they simply could not on their own, individually. *And the team performance reflects these new possibilities.* In other words, the whole becomes more than the sum of the parts. There's another important by-product that also appears—a *corporate spirit*—an improvement that is not just in what the team members *do*, but in what the team members *become* as people. This is the evolutionary result of Collaborative teams—they create more fulfilling and productive *relationships* among team members.

Where Do I Go From Here?

So… how do you move toward a more Collaborative team culture? We'll walk you through some important steps, and give you some practical tips on how to do this. The key principle—start with the most basic steps, no matter where you are in the process; no matter how "good" your score was in the inventory; no matter how great you think your team is already.

Start Here – *Especially* If Your Team Is In Combat Mode

Step 1 – Say It

Identify where your team is right now, and *speak up about it.* Let your team know what you are seeing and how you want to change it. Bring your perspective, agenda, and values out into the open—for discussion and team-wide implementation.

Step 2 – Raise It

Raise the bar. Establish a new value: Teamwork and a Win/Win mindset. Who wins? *Everybody wins!* Let everyone know that the new game plan is to work together in such a way that everyone at the table gets some-thing they want: the company wins; the team wins; *and individual team members get something important for themselves as well.*

Step 3 – Know It

Know what makes your team members tick—*individually.* Identify their unique strengths, gifts, abilities, and passions. Need some help? Use Marcus Buckingham's *Five Questions* to learn what motivates and inspires them; how best to manage them; how best to *reward* and *recognize* their contributions; and what kind of work environ-ment best suits them. There's a lot more to learn, of course, but this will give you a good start.

Step 4 – Grow It

Grow your team dynamic by constantly keeping their eye on this ball: *How can we help each other succeed?* Make sure your people know that you are as committed to their *individual* success as you are to their *collective* impact.

Step 5 – Show It

Demonstrate what you're trying to get them to embrace. Above all, model trust. Like this:
(1) Protect their personal revelations, and keep them in confidence; (2) Never, and I mean NEVER throw one of your people under the bus! (3) Give them the support that they need, to do their jobs well; (4) Run interference for them, to remove obstacles and cut through bureaucracy and red tape; and (5) Follow through with your promises—be sure to deliver the goods to your team, and *do what you say you will do.*

Step 6 – Gung Ho It

Link your team projects with the company values and priorities. Show them how their responsibilities fit into the greater whole of the company mission. Help them align their efforts with values that you will later use as the basis for even more creative team efforts.

Turn Competition On Its Head

Sometimes the Competitive culture exists in an organization in the "macro" form of team versus team; department against department; division vying with other divisions for resources and staff. What's a leader to do? Follow these suggestions, and recast the competitive spirit into a more productive common effort. NOTE: You can also use these suggestions to address a competitive attitude *among members of your own team.* The ideas are easy to adapt.

Say It

That's right. Identify the competitive culture, and talk about it *with other team leaders*. Challenge them with a new value: Teamwork and a Win/Win mindset.

Raise It

Raise the issue and raise the stakes. Recast the competitive "spirit" with an emphasis on the corporate values of the organization (e.g. "We're all here to help the *company* compete *in the marketplace.*") Focus on the potential for mutual success through common efforts. But show other team leaders how they will benefit. (Remember the WII-FM acrostic—"What's In It For Me?")

Ask It

Ask for their input, ideas, and suggestions. Use *The Boss Doctor's* Customized Management Questions to pave the way for better management—team leader-to-team member AND manager-to-team leader. NOTE: These questions are powerful windows into your team members' experiences and attitudes. But they come with an important caveat: Don't use them unless you are serious about *listening* to their answers, and *taking appropriate action!*

Reward It

A lot of managers try to use competition to motivate people on the basis that people want to gain the recognition that "winning" affords them. The problem: only one winner is possible. Thus, the winner gains the recognition and everyone else gets bupkiss,[3] even though they may have done exceptionally well. Who came up with *that*? Why not sidestep the goofy "only one can win" philosophy, and just recognize *all* exceptional effort? Leverage your role as a team leader to suggest a different approach, with rewards and recognition for every team and team member that excels. Even if the rewards are smaller (because you're giving out more than just one big fat one), they will still be appreciated by the teams, *provided the rewards are the kind that motivate those particular team members.* Just be sure to do your homework and find out how best to reward each team. There's nothing worse than awarding "an evening of bowling" to a bunch of people who would rather just get a paid day off to spend however they want. Another suggestion: create different award *categories* like "most improved" or "best newcomer performance" or "best individual achievement" or "most creative effort / approach / strategy." If you're short on creativity, take a look at Bob Nelson's book, *1501 Ways to Reward Employees.*[4]

Praise It

Use *The Glory Garden* principle to praise other teams and team leaders. When you are generous with your recognition of other's efforts, you spread appreciation and loyalty all across the organization. I guarantee it will come back to you!

Pinch It

The penny, that is. Think creatively about limited resources (space, staff, equipment, etc.). Find ways to get beyond the traditional departmental boundaries and think collaboratively about sharing the wealth. Instead of trying to buy expensive new equipment, figure out how to share and schedule usage. If you can't hire to fill a new full-time position, think about creating a position that is "shared" by two or more departments. The employee will have to split their time between the departments, but the cost of their salary and benefits is also shared. And remember—even *space* can be shared, by using a creative approach to scheduling or consolidating usage.

Getting Beyond Cooperation

Surprisingly, the Cooperative team has the greatest potential for becoming a mind-numbing and soul-sucking experience for team members. It's a very short step from "cooperative" compliance to passive-aggressive conflict. And it's so subtle, the average team leader won't catch it until it's full-blown. How do you get beyond it? To begin with, everything we've recommended so far should be part of the strategy to move beyond Cooperative team culture. Yes, even though we're tempted to think of the Cooperative team as much farther along in the team culture spectrum, it still suffers from many of the same deficits we see in the other dysfunctional forms of teamwork. So reread the previous sections, especially about getting to know your team members *as unique individuals.* That is a beginning step for *all* good teams.

Teaching "Team" To YOUR Team

Now you've got to teach your team how to *function* as a team. The best time and place to do this is in regular team meetings. Schedule a time each week when you can gather together as a team. The team leader should set the agenda. Make a list of the most important things you need to deal with, and prioritize the list, with the most important thing at the top, and lesser things in order under it. At your weekly meeting, set aside a specific time (an hour or so) and start working through the list (from the top to the bottom). When you run out of time, bring the meeting to a close. Review any assignments that have been given as a result of the meeting. Make sure everyone gets a written summary of the meeting, including the resulting decisions, deadlines, and assignments. If you need a major block of time in order to do any special creative thinking; strategic planning; or major problem-solving, then consider scheduling a separate team meeting just for that purpose. Consider, also, using an off-site location to get your people away from the familiar work-setting so they can think and interact more creatively.

Check out our suggestions for a team meeting schedule, to guide you in planning effective meetings for *your* team.

What Do You Do In A Team Meeting?

- √ Make it a forum for sharing information, ideas, opinions, insights, and suggestions.
- √ Always keep the "big picture" in front of the team (e.g. the organization's mission and values).
- √ Create team goals, and keep the team focused squarely on them.
- √ Apply all the team diversities to the completion of those team goals.
- √ Devise ways for the team members to get to know one another better.
- √ Engage the whole team in strategy-building, decision-making, and problem-solving.
- √ Referee the meetings using DeBono's *Six Hats* approach to team interaction.[5]
- √ Leverage the unique gifts, talents, and abilities of individual team members for greater team success. For example, if one member is really good at creating follow-up systems, let them use that strength to help other team members design *their* systems; and especially turn them loose to help the whole team with team assignments that require follow-up systems. Create similar "in-team consultants" who are expected to make *their* strengths available to the rest of the team in the same way.

Marcus Buckingham's 5 Questions

1. What was your best day at work in the last 3 months?
2. What was your worst day at work in the last 3 months?
3. What was the best manager relationship you've ever had? What made it so good?
4. What was the best recognition you've ever received?
5. When in your career did you learn the most? Why? What was going on?

The Boss Doctor's[6] Customized Management Questions

1. What do you know/see that I need to know/see?
2. What really bugs you about this place?
3. If you were me, what would you do to improve things around here?
4. Finish this sentence: *I wish…*
5. What do you need, in order to do your job better or easier?
6. How can the other team members help you to do your job better or easier?
7. What part of your job is easiest to do? What part is hardest?
8. Where do you think you have a special ability, gift, or talent?
9. What's the best way for me to stay in touch with you?
   - √ Face-to-face conversation
   - √ Quick phone call
   - √ E-mail
   - √ Memo
10. How often works best for you?
11. What are you not telling me?

Suggested Meeting Schedule

1. Daily Check-In Meeting—15 minutes
2. Weekly Tactical Meeting—60 to 90 minutes
3. Monthly Strategic Meeting—2 to 4 hours
4. Quarterly Off-Site Review Meeting—1 day
5. Annual Off-Site Strategic Planning and Team-Building—2 to 2½ days

References

1. *If Aristotle Ran General Motors,* by Tom Morris. New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1997, p. 60.
2. Ibid, page 61.
3. Yiddish for "nothing" (with an emphasis on abject, worthless, "nothing" that adds insult to injury).
4. *1501 Ways to Reward Employees,* by Bob Nelson. New York, Workman Publishing, 1994.
5. *Six Thinking Hats,* by Edward De Bono. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1999 paperback.
6. Dr. Jim Dyke IS "The Boss Doctor" and you can access his blog at: www.TheBossDoctor.net