TEAM PERFORMANCE

Collaborative Practices of High-Performing Teams

Agility at the Point of Execution

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Introduction

Increasingly, organizations rely on networks of agile teams to get work done.[1] Volatile global markets, digital disruption, and competition for talent have forced companies to accelerate innovation, adapt rapidly to sudden shifts in market conditions, and stay closer than ever to local customers. In response, companies are forming looser, more fluid networks of empowered teams that communicate and coordinate activities in dynamic ways.[2] Research conducted by the Institute for Corporate Productivity finds that 40% of high-performance organizations—those that excel in revenue growth, profitability, and market share over a 5-year time horizon—are shifting from traditional functions to more cross-functional project/team-based work to a "high or very high degree."[3]

Although these companies have made great strides, challenges remain. A Deloitte study found that, although 65% of survey respondents viewed the shift from "functional hierarchy to team-centric and network-based organizational models" as important or very important, only 7% felt very ready to execute this shift.[4] Perhaps this is why teams fail on a regular basis.[5] Even when they do deliver results, their performance may be suboptimal, be conventional rather than innovative, or come at the cost of high levels of overwork, stress, and disengagement. Despite hundreds, if not thousands, of books, articles, and white papers on teams and teamwork and the widespread adoption of team-based tools, the best way to lead teams to high performance in most organizations remains elusive.[6]

Part of the problem is that changes in the workplace have shifted the idea of what constitutes a team (see sidebar "What is a 'team'?").[7] Further, employees are on many more teams—twice as many as they were five years ago.[8] In knowledge-intensive industries, more than 95% of employees work on multiple teams.[9] One study found that

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What is a "team"?

The definition of a team is in the midst of great change. This became apparent to us when we asked the leaders in our study, **"How many teams do you lead?"** We thought it was a simple question, but the most frequent response we received was, "It depends upon how you define a team."

▶ *"Somewhere around 6 to 18...somewhere around there."*
  Pharmaceutical industry leader

▶ *"I'd say anywhere between 5 and 10, depending on how you break these teams into their smaller pieces."*
  Accounting industry leader

▶ *"I would say 3, but, I mean, they all overlap."*
  Fintech leader

▶ *"So, in people numbers, it's 650. I couldn't even tell you how many teams. You know, at a large scale, it's three teams. Three core kind of areas but, going in, each team easily has 20 or so teams."*
  Silicon Valley leader

Today's teams are not the clearly defined, relatively small teams of yesterday. Teams are bigger, more prevalent, and more permeable than in the past. They are different entities and need to be led differently.

senior-level managers might take on seven or more projects in a single day and as many as 25 in a given week.[10] Increasingly, individuals must get up to speed rapidly on new topics with people whom they often do not know well.[11]

In addition, teams are larger and more geographically dispersed than in the past.[12] The *average* team size in U.S. companies is 15.[13] It is not unusual for individuals to find themselves on, or even leading, teams of 20 or more, many of whose members may be in different time zones and accessible mainly through electronic communication. Adding to these challenges is that work can involve many unpredictable events that require rapid responses and constant communication and coordination.[14] As the velocity of work puts people into more and bigger teams much more rapidly than ever before, we need new ways of driving results.

Traditional teaming principles falter when the definition of a team has changed so dramatically. It used to be that a team was not considered "real" unless group members have a shared task, clear team boundaries, and stable membership.[15] Team gurus of yesterday argued that "large teams are bad teams" and based their advice on teams of no more than 10.[16] Typical advice, such as that offered by the authors of *The Wisdom of Teams,* advised managers that high-performance teams require time to develop, a strong commitment to performance, and frequent communication to succeed. Such advice, however, calls for a degree of time and single-team commitment that most employees today do not experience.[17] In agile methodologies and some paradigm organizations, this so-called "two-pizza" team[18] is still alive and well, but, for many others, what worked for teams in the past simply does not work in today's reality.

Increasingly, researchers and practitioners are re-conceptualizing teams as networks embedded within larger organizational networks.[19] This perspective highlights the permeability of team boundaries and emphasizes the need for teams to rapidly establish relationships inside and outside the group, opening up new opportunities to promote performance. For example, the network perspective shifts the focus from being solely on the nature of the relationship to giving equal value to the relationships that team members form among themselves. This perspective also makes it clear that the *structure* of internal and external relationships contributes as much to team success as does the nature of the relationships among team members. For example, we would expect very different outcomes for a team with significant collaborative silos between subgroups within the team compared to a team in which internal communication is distributed equally.[20] Similarly, teams that operate in isolation of the context into which their work will be implanted are likely to have poorer outcomes than will teams that are well connected to stakeholders in the larger ecosystem.[21] If we look at teams not as singular entities but as networks that need to form at the point of execution, we can see that it is a combination of these collaborative dimensions—internal structure, relational content, and external connections—that can yield performance.

We have very little insight, however, into *how* contemporary leaders create more successful outcomes by managing connectivity inside and outside of groups. Despite the fact that today's leaders do not having the luxury of time that past generations have had to form and cohere teams, some manage to outperform and scale results. What are they doing to make this happen?

To better understand the practices that yield performance in today's teams, we conducted 90-minute interviews with more than 100 senior managers at 20 different organizations. Each individual was identified as having successfully led multiple teams over at least 10 years. The organizations included a wide range of industries (e.g., financial services, high tech, consulting, manufacturing, food services, hospitality) and ranged in size from several thousand to hundreds of thousands of employees. Through an iterative process, we collected ideas

about how leaders manage the relationships within their teams as well as their team's relationships with external stakeholders. As a model emerged from our interviews, we tested it on interviewees and with small groups of business leaders at roughly two dozen other organizations to determine what did and did not resonate (see sidebar "About the Research").

Three broad sets of strategies emerged from our analysis of the collaborative practices that high-performing leaders use to build successful teams: internal network structure, relational content, and external ecosystem. The approaches that apply to each of these strategies are described in further detail in the appendix. In the remainder of this article, we discuss the three strategies and illustrate them with examples drawn from our interviews.

About the Research

We collected primary data concerning the strategies and practices that high-performing team leaders implement to build agile teams via 101 (45 men/56 women) semi-structured 90-minute interviews. We began by asking members of the Connec ted Commons—a consortium of more than 100 major companies and organizations—to collaborate with us in the research. One individual—usually with a title such as CHRO, SVP People Analytics, SVP Talent Management, or similar—from 20 different organizations agreed to participate. These individuals each identified approximately five people in their organizations who met our criteria in that they had led multiple teams to high performance over the past 10 years. Organizations represented a range of industries (e.g., financial services, food manufacturing, high tech, consulting, hospitality) and sizes (from several thousand employees to several hundred thousand). All but one were headquartered in the United States, although most had global offices. The interviews were conducted by the authors in three phases: (1) the first 25 between April and May 2019, (2) the second 40 between July and December 2019, and (3) the final 36 between March and May 2020.

Phase 1 was exploratory, allowing us to pilot test a semi-structured interview protocol that drew upon themes we had seen in our previous quantitative work, especially as they related to internal team practices.[39] The protocol was structured as follows: background demographics (job title, role, tenure, number of direct reports, number of teams); internal practices (How does the person manage relationships within the team and for what purpose?); external practices (How does the person manage stakeholder relationships and for what purpose?); and collaborative contexts (What threats to team collaboration did the person often see and how does he or she address them?). In Phase 2, we probed more deeply into the strategies and practices that had emerged from the Phase 1 data analysis. The model that subsequently emerged from data analysis was tested and further refined in the Phase 3 interviews.

Qualitative analysis of Phase 1 data using MAXQDA software produced first-cycle codes from interview transcripts that provided support for a preliminary model. After the Phase 2 data collection, analysis involved more detailed coding, with first-cycle codes refined through second-cycle coding to develop a greater sense of categorical and thematic organization of data that related to team network management practices. Categorization was based on the research focus and the guiding theoretical lens, emphasizing practitioners in praxis. Subsequent themes were developed inductively, and, to ensure inter-coder dependability, the narratives and meanings of the themes were negotiated and then grouped into 26 specific practices. Both authors were involved in this process and were in agreement with the coding outcomes. In addition, one of the authors presented the model to more than a dozen small groups of senior leaders across a wide range of organizations and industries and received additional external validation of categories and practices.

Three Strategies

We interviewed more than a hundred high-performing leaders to find out how they built successful teams at the point of execution. Our analysis revealed three distinctive sets of collaborative practices, each aimed at boosting different aspects of team effectiveness: internal network structure, relational content, and external ecosystem.

❶ Optimize Your Team's Internal Network Structure

A team's *internal network structure* refers to the pattern of relationships within a group. Research shows that a moderately high level of connection among team members predicts high performance but that too much degrades performance due to slow decision making, reduced bandwidth, and collaborative overload.[22] We also know the dangers of allowing people to drift too far to the edges of teams, where their expertise is not tapped by team members and they become disengaged.[23] As well, teams that split into factions or conflicting subgroups derail team efforts to reach high-quality decisions, consider diverse perspectives, and build commitment to the team's work.[24] Leaders who actively manage the team's internal structure ensure the emergence of critical collaboration points.[25]

Unfortunately, although we know what effective network structures look like, we know far less about how to create them. We asked the leaders in our study how they formed productive team networks. As expected, they focused on managing the internal network structure of their teams. But they did so in unexpected ways. Sam told us her story.*

After serving as regional sales leader for one of the company's lesser-known brands, Sam was thrilled when she was offered the position of regional sales leader for the company's most highly anticipated new product, an intra-lesionally injected agent that dramatically reduces post-surgical healing time. It was a big promotion to a high-visibility project, and she intended to make the most of this opportunity.

Sam had her work cut out for her. The 83-person team was facing significant challenges. Sales were well below projections, despite high demand. Although some salespeople were having no trouble with exceeding quotas, some of the most seasoned salespeople routinely had dismal sales. Darren, the outgoing team lead, had held a number of off-site meetings to increase commitment to performance expectations but to no effect. "Everyone seems to understand what they need to do. They're just not getting it done," he said, exasperated. Darren also was

frustrated by the lack of communication between different areas of the team, stating that he was regularly called into problem-solving meetings for problems that already had been addressed by other groups. "I created six new task forces to foster communication, but now people are complaining about the number of meetings they are in. The worst part is that we're still not communicating effectively," he said as he threw his hands up in exasperation. Morale was low so that Sam was not surprised to hear that the team had the company's highest rate of turnover. "Good luck," said Darren. "You're going to need it."

Sam knew that she had to change the team's negative trajectory. Her mentor suggested that she re-launch the team, using some of the tried-and-true principles of teaming: get people together, run trust-building exercises, emphasize performance expectations, and set up one-on-one meetings with all skip-level employees. But instead, Sam chose to spend the first few weeks in her new position in observing the team. She noticed that the high turnover had created a larger than usual number of new hires. As a result, some of the more seasoned salespeople were spending time on mentoring the new hires and providing technical assistance to members of other units, while some of the high performers had almost completely disconnected themselves from not only the new hires but also some of the day-to-day events of the team. Sam also noticed that operations and the sales teams were siloed; members rarely spoke to each other. Finally, in talking with individuals, she heard the same complaints that Darren had heard about their attending too many meetings and not having time to get work done.

Sam took four swift actions. One, she organized a formal buddy system to pair new hires with appropriate individuals. By redistributing this work across the team, she was able to reduce some of the collaborative overload on the more seasoned salespeople, freeing them up to refocus on their sales. Two, she asked the disconnected high performers to provide technical

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assistance to different sales groups. The high performers were pleased that their expertise was being valued and soon found that these new relationships gave them access to information that helped them to maintain their high performance levels. Three, she bridged functional silos by bringing together operations and sales teams across all different markets and showed them customer data that indicated that they were losing business because no one area had clear responsibility. By focusing on customer experience and growth, the team members in silos saw the advantage of working in partnership.
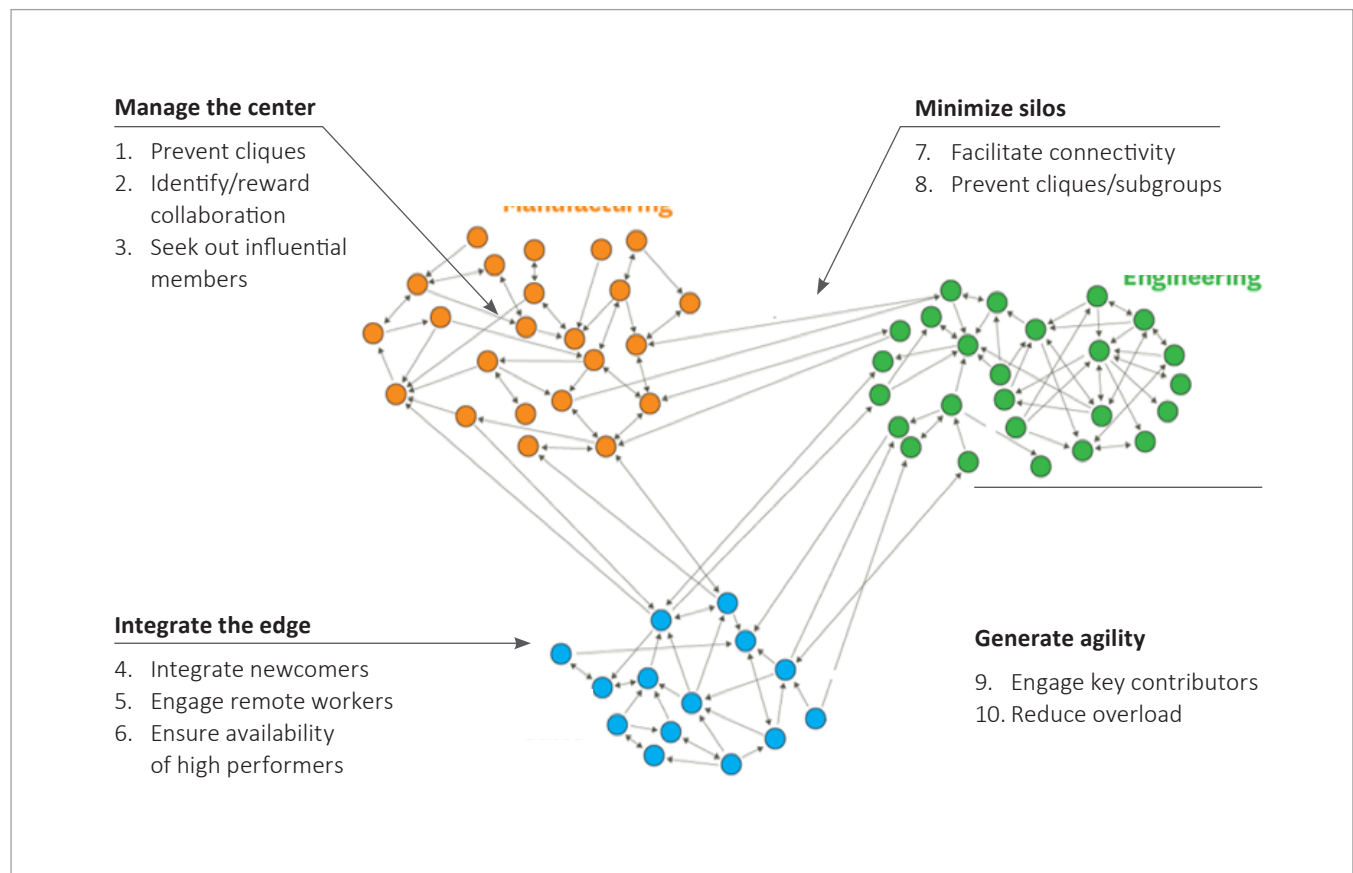
Finally, Sam plotted a grid of work streams and all of the meetings that had been scheduled to coordinate that work. She mapped out all of the team's recurring meetings on a single spreadsheet, along with each meeting's purpose, participants, and cadence. In looking over the meetings, she eliminated those that were either no longer relevant or had significant content overlap with another meeting, shortened the "default" meeting frequency from one hour to 30 minutes (unless there was a specific reason to meet longer), and limited participants to people who were either decision makers or who provided advice to decision makers. Meeting

agendas and minutes were put into a shared space that anyone on the team could access.

It took an enormous effort to push these actions through the team, but the results were worth it. Within the year, sales had increased by 75%, and turnover had dropped by 50%. People looked less stressed. Meetings became not only more productive but also a source of engagement and renewed purpose. Sam was pleased. "They're great people," she said, speaking of her team. "They just needed to work together differently."

High-performing team leaders optimize network structures. In contrast to advice based on old models of team development, the leaders in our study did not focus excessively on team-building activities, nor did they limit their efforts to building strong one-on-one relationships with team members. Instead, like Sam, they assessed and shaped the relationships *among* team members, purposefully redesigning the network structure to optimize it for team performance. More specifically, Sam and the other leaders in our study (a) manage the center, (b) integrate the edge, (c) minimize silos, and (d) generate agility. To accomplish this, they engage in 10 practices to shape the network, as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Internal Structure

Manage the center
1. Prevent cliques
2. Identify/reward collaboration
3. Seek out influential members

Minimize silos
7. Facilitate connectivity
8. Prevent cliques/subgroups

Integrate the edge
4. Integrate newcomers
5. Engage remote workers
6. Ensure availability of high performers

Generate agility
9. Engage key contributors
10. Reduce overload

Manage the Center

To *manage the center*, the leaders in our study took steps to prevent the people who are most centrally connected in the network from becoming overloaded with collaborative demands. Collaborative work (i.e., time spent on phone calls, in virtual or face-to-face meetings and on email or other collaborative technologies) is rarely evenly distributed. Very often, a small set of people—leaders, experts, long-tenured colleagues, or colleagues with whom others enjoy interacting—absorb a much higher volume of collaborative work than do others. Typically, 3% to 5% of the people account for 20% to 35% of the value-added relationships—collaborations that generate sales, efficiency gains, key innovations, or other forms of value. This means that relatively few employees have a substantial and quantifiable impact on performance, yet, often, they are not managed any differently than those who do not make comparable contributions. All overwhelmed employees suffer due to the volume and diversity of demands; their work quality often falls off, they are at much greater risk for burnout, and they are far more likely to leave the organization.[26] Sam knew that some of the seasoned salespeople on the team were becoming overloaded and helped to redistribute some of their burden across the team.

The leaders in our study engage in three practices and a number of actions to manage the center of their teams. They:

- *Ensure that individuals, in general, or those in certain roles within the group do not become so overloaded with collaborative demands that they are unable to support their colleagues in a timely fashion.* Suggestion: Simple network analysis techniques can quickly reveal people at risk for collaborative overload. Take 10 minutes to draw the network map of your team and who turns to whom for information to get work done. Have two or three teammates review the diagram and make additions as needed. Use this information to distribute collaborative demand more equitably.

- *Identify and reward/acknowledge employees who engage in collaborative behaviors that make their colleagues more effective.* Suggestion: Publicly acknowledge and celebrate collaborative behaviors to promote engagement and signal the importance of collaboration, e.g., set a regular reminder to spend 30 minutes once a week to thank a small number of people for their efforts in the way that means the most to each person—handwritten note; email, with cc'ing of partners; private conversation; or recognition of that individual's contribution during a team meeting.

- *Seek out influential team members to promote alignment and team engagement.* Suggestion: Invest time to locate and proactively engage negative opinion leaders. Crafting mutual wins early can pay off substantially over time.

Integrate the Edges

Integrating the edges of a team's network structure means pulling in people who are not fully included in the team's interactions. If they are allowed to drift to the edges, their expertise goes untapped, and they are at risk of disengagement and attrition.

Sam reached out to two types of team members who had drifted out to the edge of the team—newcomers and high performers—in different ways. She paired the newcomers with established team members to accelerate the newcomers' productivity and the likelihood of their capitalizing on the high performers' innovative insights. In contrast, Sam asked the high performers at the edge to provide technical assistance to different sales groups. We typically find that 20% to 30% of the employees considered as top talent—those on top talent lists or in the top 20% performance category—migrate to the fringe of the network. Frequently, these are people who have learned how to meet their revenue or other performance management objectives without making much of a contribution to their colleagues' efforts. For the high-performers in Sam's team, serving in an advisory role enhanced their ability to share their expertise with others, satisfying their desire to have their expertise recognized and valued. The new role also compelled them to work more collaboratively with their colleagues. Thus, to integrate the edges of their teams, the leaders in our study:

- *Rapidly integrate newcomers.* Suggestion: Assign a "buddy" who is respected and well-connected in the network.

- *Proactively engage remote and virtual group members to ensure integration.* Suggestion: Create short forums for serendipitous interactions, e.g., institute "watercooler Wednesdays" in which all team members can join an IM group, such as WhatsApp, for informal conversations about binge-worthy shows or holiday shopping.

- *Ensure that subject-matter experts and high performers are available to help their colleagues in a timely manner.* Suggestion: Increase collaborative accessibility to high performers by having them serve as technical consultants.

Minimize Silos

A big part of a leader's work is *minimizing silos*. Collaborative breakdowns diminish performance and innovation and have various causes. In one case, it might be poor communication technology. In another, it might be that none of the groups that should be working together knows what expertise exists in the other groups or understands how that expertise can support their work. Misaligned incentive schemes also can foster parochial behaviors, as can leaders who do not like each other. Companies often try to minimize silos by launching cultural change programs, formal reorganizations, or new collaborative technologies, but these broad solutions often do not address the issues that impede collaboration at crucial

network junctures. Sam, like other leaders in our study, targeted her efforts at the critical point in the network, where collaboration was likely to deliver significant performance and innovation benefits. For her team, that meant bringing operations and sales together to work in partnership. To minimize silos, the leaders in our study:

- *Facilitate connectivity at specific silos across functional lines, physical distance, hierarchical levels, demographics, or expertise domains where collaboration is critical to performance.* Suggestion: Locate efficiency losses for targeted action, e.g., set up weekly check-in meetings with people whose role requires them to work across boundaries to help them to understand when and how to include others earlier in the process.

- *Ensure that cliques or subgroups do not form within the team in ways that diminish alignment, performance, or engagement.* Suggestion: Prevent the formation of an "inner circle" subgroup by purposefully inviting quieter voices into the conversation and by forcing reluctant but capable members to take on added responsibilities.

Generate Agility

Generating agility encourages team members to efficiently and adaptively work together in ways that respond to environmental demands. A recent Korn Ferry survey that queried more than 750 CEOs worldwide about how their companies could succeed during the pandemic, found that one in four stated that "breaking down hierarchies and building agility" was paramount.[27] Agility requires team members to collaborate rapidly and to easily share their sometimes differing perspectives on how best to respond to an environmental demand. Sam generated agility by removing inefficient practices that consumed a critical resource: employee time. By plotting out the standing meetings, she was able to create a simple visual that made it immediately obvious why people were "gridlocked" and how the team could operate far more efficiently by thoughtfully reconsidering who went to what meetings, the tempo of these meetings, and in many cases, shrinking or abandoning participation that was not critical. To boost their teams' agility, the leaders in our study:

- *Assess and streamline collaborative activities within the team to promote efficiency and engagement.* Suggestion: Employ formal or informal approaches to analyzing collaborative time demands, such as plotting a grid of work streams and standing meetings that are employed to coordinate work. Then, reconsider the purpose, agenda, and required participation in each meeting.

- *Cultivate diversity in network interactions to promote team agility and innovation.* Suggestion: Leverage moments of connection—however brief—with people who represent different subcultures (e.g., chat for a minute or two with someone at the company café, ask someone about his or her weekend when a meeting ends early).

❷ Build Quality Relationships Within Your Team

We have long known that the quality of network ties—or the *relational content*—also matters for performance. Stronger positive connections facilitate the location and transfer of knowledge, especially tacit knowledge, which is difficult to articulate and, therefore, often more valuable.[28] At the heart of strong relationships is the multifaceted concept of trust, which also forms the bedrock of psychological safety.[29] Trust is the willingness to believe in someone, even when doing so risks disappointment, failure, or personal harm. Especially in organizational contexts, such as temporary work groups and virtual teams, quickly developing trust is critical for collaboration success.[30] We know little, however, about the strategies that team leaders use to build swift trust and nothing about how they do so for different facets of trust. Further, although we know that perceiving a relationship as *energizing* is related to team performance, innovation, employee motivation, and job satisfaction, we know little about the strategies that team leaders employ to build energizing relationships among team members.[31]

We do know, however, that the impact of negative connections on the team climate is far greater than that of positive connections. In fact, just one negative relationship at work—if it's between two people who need to interact regularly—can have a far greater effect on a person's motivation, job satisfaction, and likelihood of turnover than having ten positive relationships.[32] When negative situations are allowed to fester, their impact magnifies and expands, sucking others into the negative dynamics. The leaders in our study revealed that they consistently implemented *relational* practices to create high-quality relationships among team members. Some of the strategies that they shared with us were similar to ones that we have seen in traditional teaming, e.g., addressing interpersonal conflict, but others were completely unexpected and included pushing responsibility for the quality of relationships to the members themselves. Consider Jamie's story.

Jamie had been VP of talent development at a major financial services company for less than two years when he spoke with us. The 35-person team that he led was scattered across three

continents and five time zones. "We were supposed to operate as one team but, really, we were six different teams that got together occasionally. I wanted to change that." He reflected. "The relationships across the team weren't great, either. Some people clearly didn't like or trust each other. But, more than that, was this feeling that people weren't excited by the work. I mean, here we are in charge of developing talent—teaching leadership and management skills and all this other really cool stuff—and everyone acted as if their job was to watch paint dry. I wanted to reinvigorate the enthusiasm that drew them to this field in the first place."

The first thing that Jamie did when he took over as team lead was to ask each person to create a "baseball card"-style profile that included the person's responsibilities and expertise (e.g., management and oversight, things you may not know about me, other areas of expertise). He also asked individuals to include non-work information, such as their childhood nickname, vacation bucket list, and hobbies. The purpose of this second set of facts was to provide material that could help break the ice when members reached out to people they didn't know. The baseball cards were captured on PowerPoint slides and posted on a shared drive that team members access frequently. Jamie also rotated leadership of standing calls among the six "teams" to create greater awareness, not only of the expertise and experience throughout the entire team, but also of the challenges and priorities faced by different parts of the team. This was particularly helpful for integrating the expertise of remote members.

Jamie soon realized that, even though people knew a little more about each other, they still were not connecting with each other outside of structured team meetings. So, he started to redirect questions during meetings to the people who could best answer them. "I'd say, 'Maria has more experience with that than I do. Maria, could you answer Sanjay's question?' I did that not only because Maria—and other experts—genuinely knew more about that topic than I did but because I wanted to legitimize and reinforce her expertise." Jamie also coached Maria on how to talk about what she knew in a non-threatening way. "I suggested that she say, 'Here's what I did in a similar situation. It might work for you' instead of, 'You have to do this.'" Before long, people were reaching out to Maria on their own.

Jamie noticed that two long-tenured team members often gave overly negative responses to new ideas by saying things like, "We tried that years ago. It didn't work then and it won't work now." Although a critical eye is helpful when ideas are ready to be tested, it can be demotivating in early-stage development. Jamie challenged the members to think outside the box. "During meetings when Jo or Stephanie would say how it'll never work, I'd turn to them and say, 'Cool, got it. Put that aside for a moment. Now let's talk about how we could theoretically make it happen. What would have to happen in order for the problem to be solved?' Then, they'd often come out with some really great ideas." Jamie stressed the importance of having these conversations in front of the team so that everyone who experienced the negative energy also saw the positive outcomes. "I knew that I'd made some progress when 'How could we do it in theory?' became a catchphrase. Someone says it, and then we all laugh and get on with it."

Jamie conducted regular one-on-ones with direct reports and periodic meetings with skip levels to discuss career aspirations and establish drivers of purpose. He allocated up to a third of these meetings to understanding aspirations and priorities. He posed questions such as, "What are you trying to accomplish in the coming years?" "What is important to you in your work?" "What would you be doing more of, if you had the time?" "How can I help you adapt what you are doing now to make work more meaningful?"

At the end of every week, Jamie circulated the "Friday email," in which team members shared a moment in the week—work- or non-work related—that connected to their personal sense of purpose. Team members commented on each other's stories, providing a visible demonstration of support and understanding. After a few weeks, Jamie noticed that people were discussing their work with a deeper engagement as their sense of purpose became more strongly connected to their work.

Finally, Jamie was aware that the high velocity of the team's work created stressors for individuals. He started setting aside as little as 5 minutes in meetings to check in on how people were doing. "I want them to know that I care and that I'm there to help in any way I can," he said. Over time, team members began to share non-work issues that were affecting their work. In many cases, Jamie was able to restructure work roles or processes so that individuals could continue to contribute productively, even when facing stressors external to the team.

In the end, Jamie's team built strong relationships that helped them collaborate more effectively. Jamie stated, "It's not rocket science, but it does require intentionality. Teams don't just magically figure out how to work together. You have to make it happen."

Leaders today need to pay attention not just to where relationships are occurring in the team's internal and external structure but also to the *quality* of those relationships. Rapidly creating high-quality relationships speeds effective collaboration. The leaders in our study focus on proactively cultivating high-impact, positive qualities in team relationships: *expertise awareness, trust, energy*, and *purpose*. At the same time, they recognize the importance of discouraging negative influences, such as *difficult team members*, a *risk-averse culture*, and *stressors*. To reap the benefits of positive factors and reduce the effect of negative factors, they alter the relational elements of collaboration, as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Relational Content

Cultivate...
- Expertise Awareness
- Trust
- Energy
- Purpose

Discourage...
- Difficult Team Members
- Risk-Aversive Culture
- Stressors
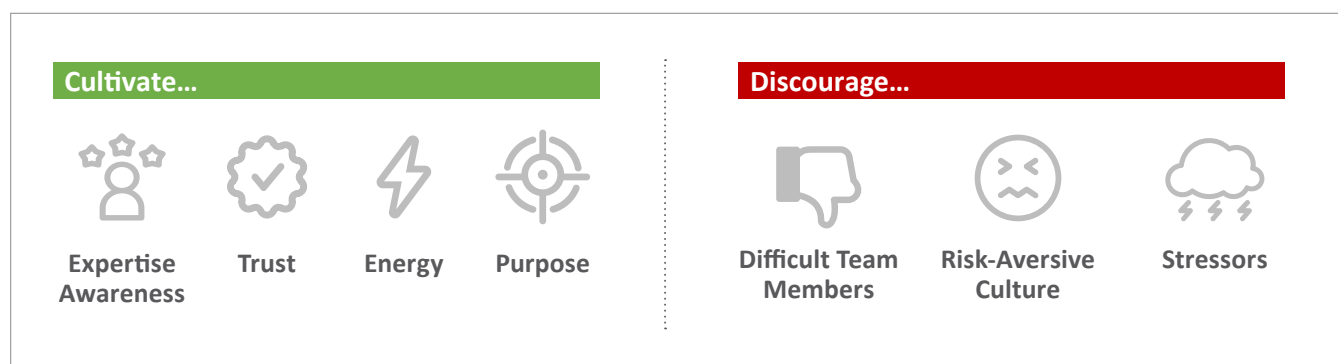
Develop Awareness of Expertise

Effective collaboration within a group requires *expertise awareness*. Teams that are carefully designed to include the right expertise fail if team members are unaware of the expertise that exists within the group and to whom to turn for what. Teams with higher levels of expertise awareness produce more holistic results because, by understanding capabilities of the team, members have a broader perspective and can, therefore, develop higher-quality solutions. They are also far more likely to innovate as team members to discover how they can apply or leverage their colleagues' abilities in their own problem domains. Finally, they improve efficiency of work because team members do not waste time reinventing the wheel every time a problem arises and, instead, turn swiftly to the appropriate information source. The baseball cards that Jamie asked members to create, as well as rotating leadership of meetings, helped members of his team to:

- *Develop awareness among members of one another's expertise, contacts, and resources.* Suggestion: Create "baseball card-" style profiles that include the person's responsibility and expertise (e.g., management and oversight, things you may not know about me, other areas of expertise). Capture the baseball cards on PowerPoint slides and post on a shared drive. Include some personal information on the card to make it easier for individuals to break the ice when reaching out to someone they don't know.

Cultivate Trust

Like all of the leaders in our study, Jamie understood that *trust* is the cornerstone of collaboration. Without trust, even when individuals know where expertise lies, they will not access it. Trust is a multifaceted concept. Competence-based trust, for example, requires teammates to rely upon each other's capabilities. High-performing leaders build and promote the competence of individual team members, such as Jamie did with Maria, making it more likely that members will draw upon their expertise. This, in turn, enables the team to produce higher-quality solutions. Teams

also bring solutions to market quicker when they trust each other's competence because they can rapidly combine competencies. Leaders who coach individuals to build competence-based trust or who facilitate team interactions that generate that trust benefit from teams that more fluidly utilize the expertise available in the network. The leaders in our study develop different aspects of trust when they:

- *Cultivate trust among members in each other's capabilities and competence.* Suggestion: During meetings, share specific examples that demonstrate individual member competence. Coach individuals to ask questions in a way that reveals their competence in non-threatening ways by, for example, demonstrating situation-specific experience or sharing what has worked for them, rather than saying that their solutions should fit every situation.

- *Cultivate trust among members in each other's intent to act with the interests of others in mind and not just their own.* Suggestion: Build trust development into meetings. Build in time and routines for informal, off-task conversations, and small, personal interactions. Even spending just 15 minutes of a two-hour meeting can yield big dividends.

- *Cultivate trust among members in each other's likelihood of following through with their commitments.* Suggestion: Create accountability for delivering on commitments. Establish priorities and create accountability mechanisms early in the team's work.

Spark Energy

Energy is related to team performance, innovation, employee motivation, and job satisfaction.[33] A high-energy team is one in which ideas flow freely and members build effortlessly on one another's work. People enjoy working with high-energy people because they help to create and foster exciting future possibilities. In contrast to energizers, de-energizers drain the energy and enthusiasm away from the people who interact with them. Where energizers see realistic possibilities, de-energizers, such as Jo and Stephanie, see only roadblocks. Because people

gravitate away from de-energizers, their expertise often goes untapped, no matter how relevant it is. Not surprisingly, de-energizers have more than twice the negative impact on performance that energizers have positive.[34] Leaders like Jamie release expertise that has been "locked" inside a de-energizer and make it available to the team. Further, they spark energizing interactions that improve team performance by increasing innovation as team members feel freer to share new ideas and brainstorm possibilities. The leaders in our study:

- *Foster a team environment in which members feel energized by their interactions with each other.* Suggestion: Require team members to use their expertise to open conversations, not shut them down. Create room for others to be a meaningful part of conversations and make sure they see how their efforts will contribute.

Foster a Sense of Purpose

Having a *sense of purpose* in the team's work builds enthusiasm, engagement, and performance, all of which affect the bottom line. Companies in which people put more effort than required into their work outperform other companies by 9%.[35] With greater clarity about what matters to them, individuals in teams can co-create ways of working that better align with each member's aspirations. Individuals want to structure and engage in work to live desired values through their careers. Jamie used one-on-ones and periodic career discussion to help people set goals that were tied to their aspirations. Instead of just reviewing tasks or how individuals are accomplishing work, leaders such as Jamie explain how a given task is part of the big picture. Members begin to see that *their* contributions matter. When people are able to live their values through their work, they internalize project goals and the organizational mission.

Like the other leaders in our study, Jamie told us that it was also important for team members to support *each other's* sense of purpose. When teams make time to celebrate and acknowledge wins, milestones, and effort, they have a substantial impact on members' sense of purpose and meaning in their work. Jamie's simple "Friday email" provided a visible way for team members to demonstrate their support for what matters most to their colleagues. The leaders in our study:

- *Foster a team environment in which members feel a sense of purpose from their work.* Suggestion: Use one-on-ones and periodic career discussion to establish drivers of purpose. Allocate up to a third of these meetings to understanding aspirations and priorities. Identify what purpose means to each team member and how it relates to the group's work.

- *Foster a team environment in which members help each other to feel a sense of purpose from their work.* Suggestion: Encourage individuals to tell stories that help others understand what matters most to them and where they find their personal sense of purpose.

Discourage Negative Influences

Sometimes fostering collaboration means taking roadblocks out of the way. Workplace *stress* is one barrier to effective collaboration, and it is on the rise. Individuals today feel more under the gun than ever, pressured by the sheer volume of work and endless collaborative demands, resulting in their working longer hours, being sleep deprived, and dogged by always-on technology. The negative effects of stress on individual health and well-being can result in increased absenteeism and attrition. The leaders in our study, such as Jamie, help teams by building team resilience so that members can better cope with unavoidable stressors.

Teams with lower levels of stress produce higher-quality and more innovative solutions because they have time and energy to engage in thoughtful reflection and to gather additional information and perspectives. They are also more productive because they are not depleting their physical, cognitive, and emotional resources by battling attacks on their well-being and so can focus on accomplishing the task at hand. Finally, as Jamie discovered, individuals with lower levels of stress are more engaged in their work because it is a source of purpose and positivity that nourishes physical and psychological health. The leaders in our study remove roadblocks to collaboration by taking the following actions:

- *Address issues caused by difficult and/or toxic team members.* Suggestion: Create an expectation for team members to disagree positively to maintain forward momentum on ideas. Emphasize the need to move from championship behavior (e.g., "I'm going to champion my cause") to citizenship behavior (e.g., "I'm thinking about the bigger picture").

- *Nurture a team context that does not reward risk aversion or fear of action.* Suggestion: Tolerate a relatively high level of failure in a way that supports learning. Acknowledge mistakes but also encourage learning so that the mistake is not repeated. Focus on how to change the pattern so that it does not repeat, rather than on how to punish the people for what has already occurred.

- *Reduce the negative effects of internal and external stressors on the team.* Suggestion: Make investments in relationships that make people more resilient to stress when it happens. Showing that you genuinely care helps people to feel like they are not alone. Provide spaces in the conversation for non-work issues to be shared. This can mean setting aside as little as five minutes in a meeting to ask people how they are doing.

❸ Proactively Shape Your Team's External Ecosystem

A final collaborative dimension critical to team success lies with the structure and quality of the team's *external connections to the ecosystem* (i.e., relationships with individuals and groups outside of the team). Teams that are better connected to others in the organization have greater access to resources, including critical information and organizational knowledge.[36] It is also easier for them to efficiently locate and absorb more unique and complex information, positioning them for greater success when seeking to innovate.[37] Not surprisingly, strong external networks are associated with higher team performance, especially when the team is facing an uncertain and rapidly evolving situation.[38]

Leaders who actively manage the team's external structure pull their teams toward high performance, although the existing research tells us little about the specific tactics that leaders use to accomplish this today. What we learned in this work is that successful leaders build relationships with external stakeholders through strategies that go far beyond stakeholder mapping activities. Trevor's story captures some of the practices that several leaders shared with us.

Trevor is the quality assurance director for internal audits for global consumer banking and compliance for a major fintech company. His has been with the firm for nearly 15 years in various positions and currently oversees a team of 56 globally distributed people. His teams have reached consistently high levels of performance for the past 10 years. When we asked him the secret of his success, he thought it might have something to do with the relationships that he had with people outside of his team. "I spend a lot of time setting the team up for success," he said.

Trevor described engaging key financial sponsors earlier in the funding process to better align the work that comes into his unit with the aspirations of his employees. He does this not with a detailed slide deck but, rather, with a single slide and rich exploratory conversations focused on possibilities months ahead of the formal planning process. As he told us, "It took me 10 years to figure out that that approach allowed us both to create streams of work that better aligned with our respective needs versus being in a more defensive posture of showing what I could do for certain levels of support and defending that in detailed slide decks."

Trevor also keeps a running list of key leaders—inside and outside his chain of command—who have a vested interest in his team's work. He schedules biannual check-in meetings with three senior sponsors to understand and clarify how their team can best support key objectives of each stakeholder. Building these relationships ahead of need makes it easier for him to turn to them later for support—in terms of time, resources, talent, and budget. "The only way you win when you are
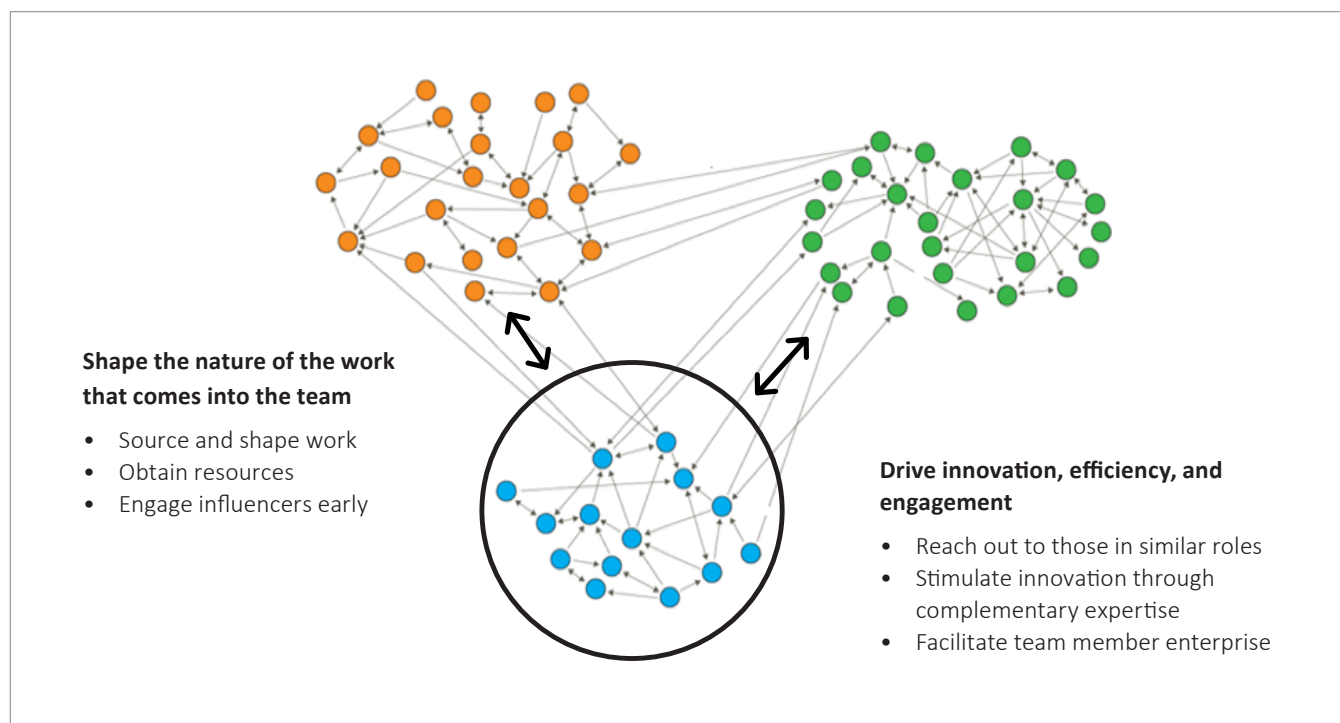
reactive is if you have powerful people making noise, and I don't like to ever be there. I want to get in front of the noise."

Trevor keeps in regular touch with network influencers in addition to the key formal leaders. By observing who people listen or respond to in face-to-face and virtual forums, he identified the people who were listened to and who influenced a large number of people. Some of these influencers were in surprising places, such as Sangmee in Legal, who had been with the company for 40 years and had served as a mentor to many of the executives now in the C-suite. Trevor set up meetings with these people and regularly asked them how they might handle the problems that the team was facing. He also asked them about their points of pain and interest. "I know it sounds like a little thing, but those meetings have saved my team and me time down the road when it comes to approval and implementation processes."

Trevor's teams also were known for innovating new services. Although Trevor credits the talent on the team, he also notes that he has been able to bring opportunities to the team. He keeps a moleskin notebook with him throughout the week and maintains a list of things that he is hearing and thinks he should know more about. He consistently preserves Fridays at 5 p.m. to review this list and send outreach on one or two items to learn from others. "The key is to keep this list and then identify the thing that could have the greatest impact. Otherwise, it gets lost in all the frenzy." Trevor reaches out to the leader or representative to determine whether integration of their capabilities could drive service or product innovation that his stakeholders value. "I'll suggest a cup of coffee or a video call to learn about what they're doing and to see if we could co-create a value-added solution. It doesn't always turn into anything, but, when it does, it's a home run."

If one thing surprised us in all of this work, it was the degree of time that successful people put into shaping the ecosystem in which their teams resided. We would routinely ask our interviewees the amount of time that they spent managing external relationships, and they frequently mentioned 50%—sometimes 60%!—of their time, which is far beyond what most team models and frameworks indicate. Of course, if the leaders do not manage the internal network pattern of the team in a way that keeps overload from happening, they never have time for this critical external work. And without that time, their teams have fewer resources, less engaging work, too much work, and a more difficult time with implementation. Trevor, like the other leaders in our study, cultivated his ecosystem in two intentional ways: by (a) shaping the nature of the work that comes into the team to align with resources, capabilities, aspirations, and capacity and (b) driving innovation, efficiency, and engagement through external ties. The external ecosystem is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. External Ecosystem

Shape the nature of the work that comes into the team

- Source and shape work
- Obtain resources
- Engage influencers early

Drive innovation, efficiency, and engagement

- Reach out to those in similar roles
- Stimulate innovation through complementary expertise
- Facilitate team member enterprise

Shape The Nature of The Work That Comes Into the Team

When the demands of the work that comes into the team exceed available resources, such as time, expertise, and budget, work quality suffers and members are at risk of burnout, disengagement, and turnover. Of course, leaders obtain resources for their team's work within the formal performance management and budgeting processes. High-performing leaders, such as Trevor, however, are more proactive about *shaping the nature of the work that comes into the team.* They supplement what they receive through the normal channels by proactively seeking a broader range of resources not only through formal processes but also by working informal channels to secure funding for current and future demands. Leaders who actively manage their resource environment trigger a positive spiral in which they are better able to deliver results that fuel the reputation of the team's work, which, in turn, helps to secure future resources and has a positive impact on team morale and capabilities.

Teams falter—even when producing good work—when they do not engage formal decision makers or informal opinion leaders in ways that streamline acceptance and uptake of their team's output. Trevor engaged a small set of formal decision makers and informal influencers ahead of approval points and in ways that resulted in the decision makers and influencers' talking about the team's work as if it were their own. Proactively engaging formal and informal leaders

had the secondary effect of enhancing both the team's and the leader's reputation, leading to more and higher-quality future opportunities being brought into the team. The leaders in our study:

- *Engage external stakeholders to source and shape work coming into the team.* Suggestion: Identify the key constituencies driving work for your team—think broadly in terms of customers, stakeholders, and leaders. Where possible, set up a meeting with each to discuss objectives and alternative ways your team could deliver results in a more efficient way or an outcome of greater value to the stakeholder.

- *Engage external stakeholders to obtain resources that support the team's work and engagement.* Suggestion: Tell the right story at the right time in the right way. For example, create context for the ask by establishing need *before* making the specific request. This gives stakeholders an opportunity to consider alternative ways to meet needs rather than forcing yes/no thinking in the moment.

- *Engage formal decision makers and informal opinion leaders early to streamline approval and implementation processes.* Suggestion: Locate and engage informal network influencers to build support for your ideas. Set up meetings with these people, ask how they might handle the problem that you are facing, and listen to their points of pain and interest. Look to co-create a simple story/vision of success with vivid examples that the opinion leader cares about.

Drive Innovation, Efficiency, and Engagement

Trevor, like the other leaders in our study, *drives innovation, efficiency, and engagement* through exploratory interactions with teams with complementary or synergistic expertise to bring new ideas, services, or products to market. Most innovations arise from envisioning new solutions through the integration of existing products, services, or capabilities. Teams easily become insular in the face of significant workloads and short time frames. Failing to identify and adapt best practices outside of the team, however, keeps the team's efficiency at a suboptimal level and degrades long-term effectiveness.

The leaders in our study reach out to those in similar roles or who are doing similar work in different geographies, functions, or organizations. Like Trevor, they build targeted relationships with the goal of identifying and bringing best practices into their team. Proactively engaging in ideas at the forefront of their discipline often has the side effect of spurring team engagement. Too, exploring synergies creates network leverage as collaborating teams become aware of capabilities and sources of future work and referrals. The leaders in our study do the following to drive innovation, efficiency, and engagement:

- *Reach out to those in similar roles to adapt practices that promote quality and efficiency of the team's work.* Suggestion: Reach out to those who face problems of a similar scope or level of abstraction. Search for and reach out to individuals and teams who tackle similar issues but in different environments. For example, send an email to a peer when you hear about an interesting practice in another part of the organization or in an external organization.

- *Stimulate innovation through exploratory interactions with teams who have complementary expertise.* Suggestion: Identify functions, teams, or centers of excellence that have adjacent expertise, for which integration of capabilities could drive service or product innovation that your stakeholders value. Reach out directly to a leader or representative of that group to explore a possibility over coffee.

- *Facilitate team member enterprise connectivity for performance, engagement, and well-being.* Suggestion: Adapt more systematic practices that stimulate enterprise connectivity. For example, create a team alumni network and, as appropriate, pair alumni and members to boost engagement and strengthen team connections to other units.

Conclusion

Although the organization of today strives to become more agile by organizing around a network of teams, challenges remain for practitioners who seek to successfully lead teams in the new environment. This has never been more true than in these times—characterized by a pandemic, financial uncertainty, and social unrest—in which people are more dispersed and needing of leadership and guidance more than ever. Many leaders still rely on old models of teamwork, not realizing that the definition and role of teams have changed in fundamental ways. Our research revealed strategies used by high-performing team leaders that provide powerful insights for academics and managers alike to significantly improve the success of their teams.

ACTIVITY:

Step 1: Think about a team of which you are currently a member. Choose one that matters to you, one that you really care about. You don't have to be the formal leader. Reflect on the current functioning of the team.

Step 2: Go through the tool below to determine which practices describe your team and which do not. Identify one practice from each section—internal, relational, and external—that isn't currently occurring in your team but, if it were, would have a significant and positive impact on your team's performance.

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Internal Network Structure

A team's *internal network structure* refers to the network of relationships within a team. High-performing team leaders optimize relationship structures and cultivate effective networks that replicate patterns of high performance. In contrast to following advice based on old models of team development, the leaders in our study assessed and shaped the relationships *among* team members, purposefully redesigning the network structure to optimize it for team performance.

PRACTICE	WHY THIS MATTERS	WHAT YOU CAN DO
☐ We ensure that people or roles within the group do not become so overloaded with collaborative demands that they are unable to support their colleagues in a timely fashion.	Being overloaded can cause lost opportunities as well as excessive employee time and effort spent in trying to obtain information or decision approvals; it also can result in burnout and attrition.	Simple network analysis techniques can quickly reveal people at risk for collaborative overload. Take 10 minutes to draw the network map of your team and who turns to whom for information to get work done. Have two or three teammates review the diagram and make additions as needed. Use this information to distribute collaborative demand more equitably.
☐ We identify and reward or acknowledge employees who engage in collaborative behaviors that make their colleagues more effective.	"Hidden stars" who have a substantial impact on team effectiveness and efficiency may be unrecognized and unappreciated, increasing disengagement and attrition.	Publicly acknowledge and celebrate collaborative behaviors to promote engagement and signal the importance of collaboration, e.g., set a regular reminder to spend 30 minutes once a week to thank a small number of people for their efforts in the way that means the most to each person—handwritten note; email, with cc'ing of partners; private conversation; or recognition of a contribution during a team meeting.

☐ We seek out influential team members to promote alignment and team engagement.	Influencers' insider knowledge and credibility can facilitate alignment and engagement efforts.	Invest time to locate and proactively engage negative opinion leaders. The crafting of mutual wins early can pay off substantially over time.
☐ We rapidly integrate newcomers.	The turnover rate among newcomers is high and productivity is low until they integrate.	Assign newcomers a "buddy" who is respected and well connected in the network.
☐ We proactively engage remote and virtual group members to ensure integration.	These group members may otherwise become disengaged or feel disenfranchised.	Create short forums for serendipitous interactions, e.g., institute "watercooler Wednesdays," in which all team members can join an IM group, such as WhatsApp, for informal conversations about binge-worthy shows or holiday shopping.
☐ We ensure that subject-matter experts and high performers are available to help their colleagues i n a timely manner.	Top talent often migrates to the fringe of the network if overly focused on individual contribution, lowering the value that they could offer the team.	Increase collaborative accessibility to high performers by having them serve as technical consultants to other teams. This enhances their ability to share expertise with others, provides recognition of value, and compels them to work more collaboratively with their colleagues.
☐ We facilitate connectivity at specific silos across functional lines, physical distance, hierarchical levels, demographics, or expertise domains, where collaboration is critical to performance.	Collaborative breakdowns diminish performance and innovation.	Locate efficiency losses for targeted action, e.g., set up weekly check-in meetings with people whose roles require them to work across boundaries to help them understand when and how to include others earlier in the process (e.g., "Whom have you talked with about the project?" "Whom have you run ideas by?").
☐ We ensure that cliques or subgroups do not form within the team in ways that diminish alignment, performance, or engagement.	Excessive coordination costs and friction/misalignment between subgroups slow productivity. They also can drive disengagement and attrition or stifle desired innovation if a core group becomes too dominant.	Prevent the formation of an "inner circle" subgroup by purposefully inviting quieter voices into the conversation and by giving reluctant but capable members added responsibilities.
☐ We assess and streamline collaborative activities within the team to promote efficiency and engagement.	People spend an average of 85% of their work week in collaborative activities, potentially leading to burnout and attrition.	Employ formal or informal approaches to analyzing collaborative time demands, such as plotting a grid of work streams and standing meetings that are employed to coordinate work. Then, reconsider the purpose, agenda, and required participation in each meeting.
☐ We cultivate diversity in network interactions to promote team agility and innovation.	A lack of diversity promotes insular thinking and reduces innovation.	Leverage moments of connect—however brief—thoughtfully and connect with people who represent different subcultures (e.g., chat for a minute or two with someone at the company café, ask someone about his or her weekend when a meeting ends early).

Relational Content

The quality of the network ties—or the *relational content*—matters for performance. Positive qualities, such as trust and energy, enhance the ability of people to collaborate effectively. Conversely, negative qualities inhibit collaboration, sometimes dramatically. The leaders in our study focused on proactively cultivating high-impact, positive qualities in team relationships and mitigating negative influences by altering the relational elements that made collaboration difficult.

PRACTICE	WHY THIS MATTERS	WHAT YOU CAN DO
☐ We develop awareness among members of one another's expertise, contacts and resources.	Effective collaboration within a group can occur only if employees are aware of their colleagues' expertise and resources. Teams, even when they are carefully designed to include the right expertise, will fail if team members are unaware of the expertise that exists and to whom to turn for what.	Create "baseball card-" style profiles that include the person's responsibility and expertise (e.g., management and oversight, things that the person may not know about you, other areas of expertise). Capture the baseball cards on PowerPoint slides and post on a shared drive. Include some personal information on the card to make it easier for individuals to break the ice when reaching out to someone they don't know.
☐ We cultivate trust among members in each other's capabilities and competence.	Teams with trust in each other's competence produce higher-quality solutions because members are more likely to seek out and draw upon expertise from individuals identified as competent. They also bring solutions to market quicker by making it easier to combine competencies more rapidly.	During meetings, share specific examples that demonstrate individual member competence. Coach individuals to ask questions in a way that reveals their competence in non-threatening ways, for example, by demonstrating situation-specific experience or sharing what has worked for them, rather than saying that their solutions should fit every situation.
☐ We cultivate trust among members in each other's intent to act with the interests of others in mind and not just their own.	Trusting members share new ideas more readily, creating an environment where new ideas and out-of-the-box thinking are supported and developed. Opportunities are more likely to be shared and disseminated quickly, making it easier for talent to match to opportunity. Increase engagement and reduce attrition by building closer connections among team members.	Build trust development into meetings. Build in time and routines for informal, off-task conversations and small, personal interactions. Even spending just 15 minutes of a two-hour meeting can yield big dividends.
☐ We cultivate trust among members in each other's likelihood of following through with their commitments.	Trust helps members to engage in strategic prioritization because they can confidently create a set of achievable, high-priority objectives that support unit goals and are consistent with the team's capabilities. It also helps members to avoid collaborative overload because they can manage their work flow to focus on achieving a specific set of objectives and avoid taking on too much and delivering too little.	Create accountability for delivering on commitments. Establish priorities and create accountability mechanisms early in the team's work.
☐ We foster a team environment in which members feel energized by their interactions with each other.	An energizing environment increases innovation, as team members feel freer to share new ideas and brainstorm possibilities, and releases expertise that has been "locked" inside a de-energizer and makes it available to the team.	Require team members to use their expertise to open conversations, not shut them down. Create room for others to be a meaningful part of conversations and make sure that they see how their efforts will contribute to an evolving plan.

☐ We foster a team environment in which members feel a sense of purpose from their work.	Having a sense of purpose provides greater clarity about what matters to team members, and members can co-create ways of working that better align with each member's aspirations. The more that work aligns with individual aspirations, the more that members feel energized about future opportunities and the more committed they become to the work and to the organization.	Use one-on-ones and periodic career discussion to establish drivers of purpose. Allocate up to a third of these meetings to understanding aspirations and priorities. Identify what purpose means to each team member and how it relates to the group's work.
☐ We foster a team environment in which members help *each other* feel a sense of purpose from their work.	Helping each team member to have a sense of purpose in the team's work builds engagement, enthusiasm, and performance. Co-creating and diffusing ownership helps team members feel like their work matters and has an impact.	Encourage individuals to tell stories that help others to understand what matters most to them and where they find their personal sense of purpose.
☐ We address issues caused by difficult and/or toxic team members.	Animosity between members can result in disengagement and turnover among those member as well as spillover onto others in the team, reducing morale and increasing attrition. Interpersonal friction can slow down decision-making.	Create an expectation for team members to disagree positively to maintain forward momentum on ideas. Emphasize the need to move from championship behavior (e.g., I'm going to champion my cause) to citizenship behavior (e.g., I'm thinking about the bigger picture).
☐ We nurture a team context that does not reward risk aversion or fear of action.	Organizations that punish failure either directly or indirectly (e.g., through expressions of disapproval, slower promotion rates, withheld bonuses), teach people to fear action and, especially the ownership of action.	Tolerate a relatively high level of failure in a way that supports learning. Acknowledge mistakes but also encourage learning so that the mistake is not repeated. Focus on how to change the pattern so that it does not repeat rather than on how to punish the people for what has already occurred.
☐ We reduce the negative effects of internal and external stressors on the team.	Workplace stress is on the rise and has negative effects on individual health and well-being, resulting in increased absenteeism and attrition, as well as lower team performance.	Make investments in relationships that make people more resilient to the experience of stress when it happens. Showing that you genuinely care helps people feel like they're not alone. Provide spaces in the conversation for non-work issues to be shared. This can mean setting aside as little as five minutes in a meeting to ask people how they are doing.

External Ecosystem

Strong external networks are associated with higher team performance, especially when the team is facing an uncertain and rapidly evolving situation. Leaders who actively manage the team's external structure pull their teams toward high performance. They cultivate the ecosystem in two intentional ways: by (a) shaping the nature of the work that comes into the team to align with resources, capabilities, aspirations, and capacity and (b) driving innovation, efficiency, and engagement through external ties.

PRACTICE	WHY THIS MATTERS	WHAT YOU CAN DO
☐ We engage external stakeholders to obtain resources that support the team's work and engagement.	When the demands of the work that come into the team exceed available resources, including time, expertise, and budget, work quality suffers, and members are at risk for burnout, disengagement, and turnover.	Tell the right story at the right time in the right way. For example, create context for the request by establishing need *before* making the specific request. This gives stakeholders an opportunity to consider alternative ways to meet needs rather than forcing yes/no thinking in the moment.
☐ We engage external stakeholders to source and shape work that comes into the team.	When work is misaligned with the interests of members, team leaders struggle with disengagement and attrition. When work that comes into the team is beyond capacity or capability, quality and timeliness of delivery falters.	Identify the key constituencies that drive work for your team. Think broadly in terms of customers, stakeholders, and leaders. Where possible, set up a meeting with each to discuss objectives and alternative ways your team could deliver results in a more efficient way or an outcome of greater value to the stakeholder.
☐ We engage formal decision makers and informal opinion leaders early to streamline approval and implementation processes.	Teams falter, even when producing good work, when they do not engage formal decision makers or informal opinion leaders in ways that streamline acceptance and uptake of their team's output.	Locate and engage informal network influencers to build support for your ideas. Set up meetings with these people, ask how they might handle the problem you are facing, and listen to their points of pain and interest. Look to co-create a simple story/vision of success with vivid examples that the opinion leader cares about.
☐ We reach out to those in similar roles to adapt practices that promote the quality and efficiency of my team's work.	Teams can quickly become insular in the face of significant workloads and short time frames. However, failing to identify and adapt best practices outside of the team hurts efficiency and effectiveness over time.	Reach out to those who face problems of a similar scope or level of abstraction. Search for and reach out to individuals and teams that tackle similar issues but in different environments. For example, send an email to a peer when you hear about an interesting practice in another part of the organization or in an external organization.
☐ We stimulate innovation through exploratory interactions with teams who have complementary expertise.	Most innovations arise from envisioning new solutions through the integration of existing products, services, or capabilities. Leaders who proactively explore synergistic or complementary expertise domains are more likely to bring new ideas, services, or products to market.	Identify functions, teams, or centers of excellence that have adjacent expertise for which integration of capabilities could drive service or product innovation for your stakeholders' value. Reach out directly to a leader or representative of that group to explore a possibility over coffee.
☐ We facilitate team member enterprise connectivity for performance, engagement, and well-being.	Higher engagement is created and attrition is reduced when team members connect with groups that are doing work they care about and find meaningful.	Adapt more systematic practices that stimulate enterprise connectivity. For example, create a team alumni network and, as appropriate, pair alumni and members to boost engagement and strengthen team connections to other units.

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