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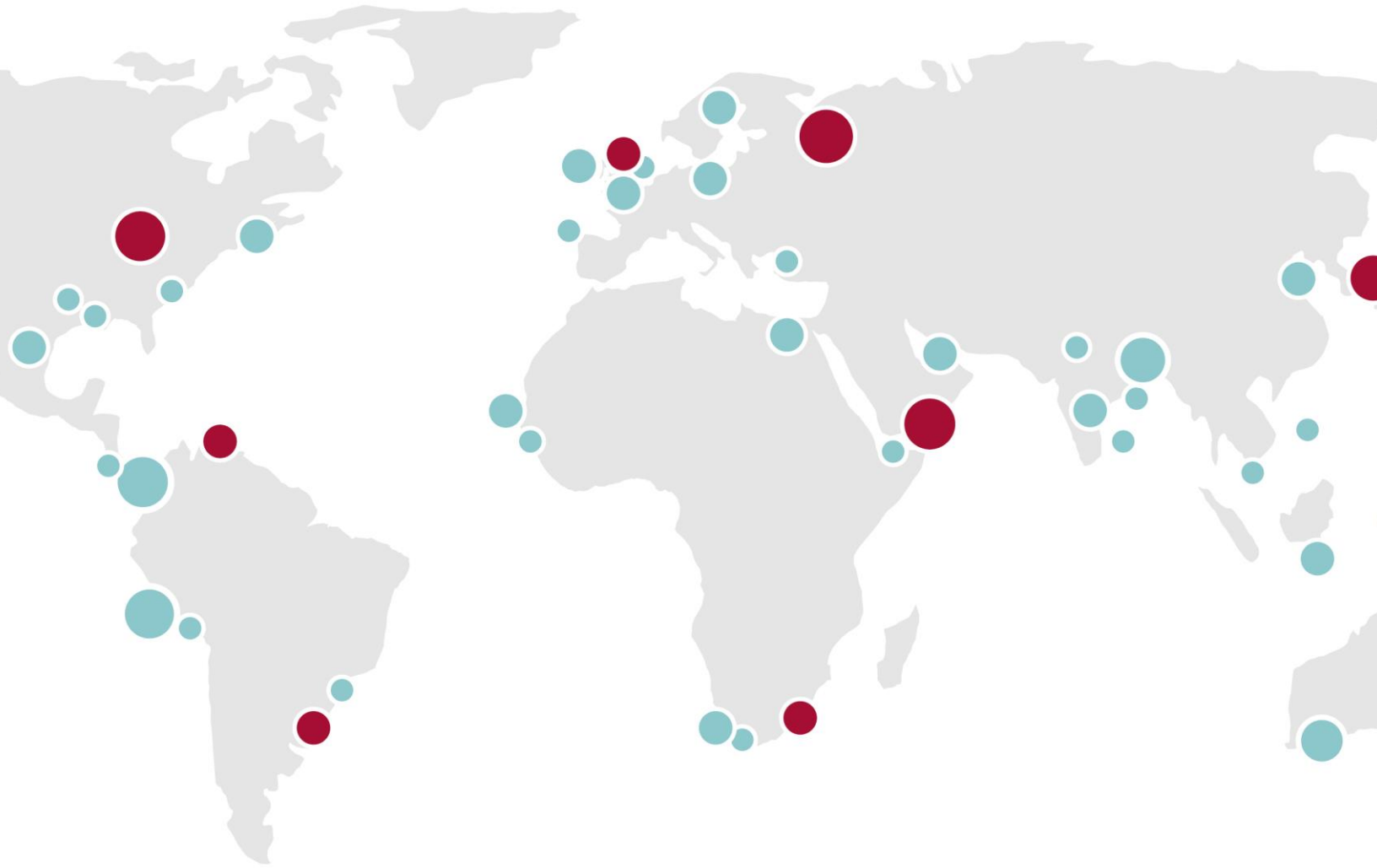

Leadership Principles

Professors Joshua Margolis & Anthony Mayo | Module 2 Summary

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Module 2: Leading Your Team

Setting Up Your Team for Success

Teams that work well are characterized by:

- Commitment to an engaging, common purpose;
- Active and fair participation from all members;
- Healthy and productive debate;
- Openness to take risks and share ideas and perspectives without fear of judgment; and
- A set of shared norms that govern the way they operate, especially in regards to decision-making and information sharing.

Teams work best when they are well suited to the situation. Specifically, teams work better than individuals do under the following conditions:

- When the task is so complex that no one person has the expertise or time to figure it all out and get it all done;
- When diverse views, knowledge, and functional experience are necessary in completing the task, and when those inputs build on one another in reciprocal ways to deliver insight and application;
- When buy-in from multiple constituencies is necessary.

Teams also serve common functions:

- Exchanging ideas, perspectives, and best practices;
- Ideating and innovating potential new approaches, applications, or options;
- Identifying core issues and problem solving;
- Making recommendations from various options;
- Implementing solutions or team recommendations;
- Executing a multi-faceted plan.

Model of Team Effectiveness

When managing a team, you can apply three criteria of effectiveness, or indicators, called the **Dashboard of Effectiveness**.

- **Performance or Results:** The team successfully delivers in a manner that satisfies relevant audiences (such as bosses, customers, and/or investors).
- **Team Strength and Flexibility**: The team gets better at what it already does together (strength) and builds capacity to take on new work and respond to unexpected challenges (flexibility, sometimes referred to as adaptability).

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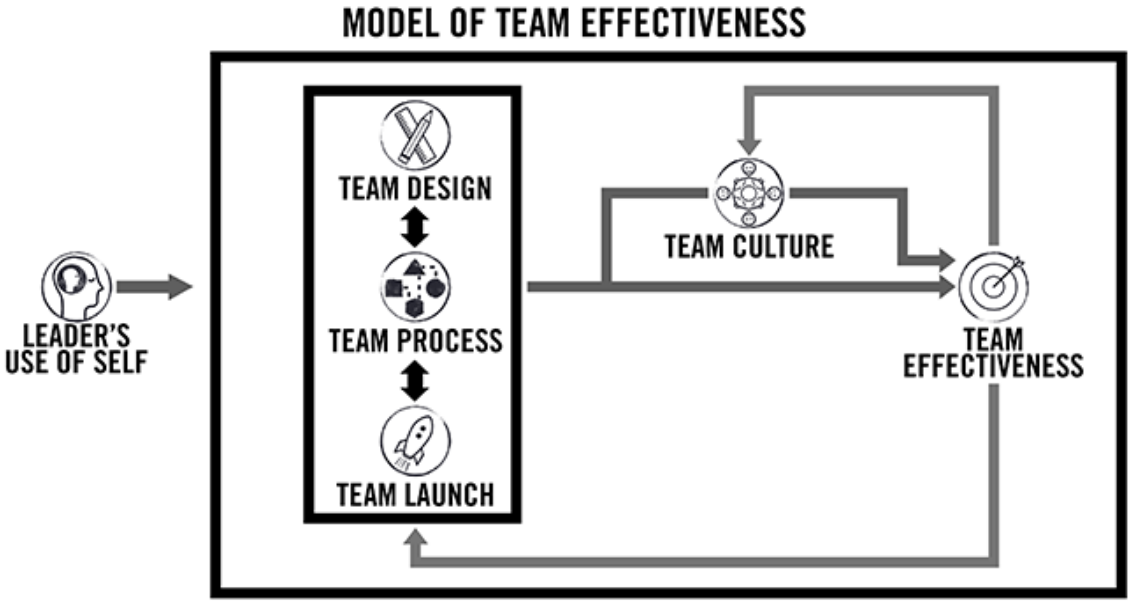
- **Individual Learning:** Individual team members learn and grow, so they are equipped to work in new ways and take on new tasks and responsibilities.

You can create high performing teams by using five levers to design and run teams that meet all three criteria on the Dashboard of Effectiveness.



These five levers make up the **Model of Team Effectiveness** and include:

- **Culture:** The definite do's and don'ts about how the team works together that everyone on the team knows implicitly, and how the team solves problems and addresses challenges.
- **Process:** The practices you establish for how people interact to get their work done—for example, how you run meetings, how you share information, and how you lead people through plans and feedback. As you think about your own team or department's process, you can map two dimensions of process:

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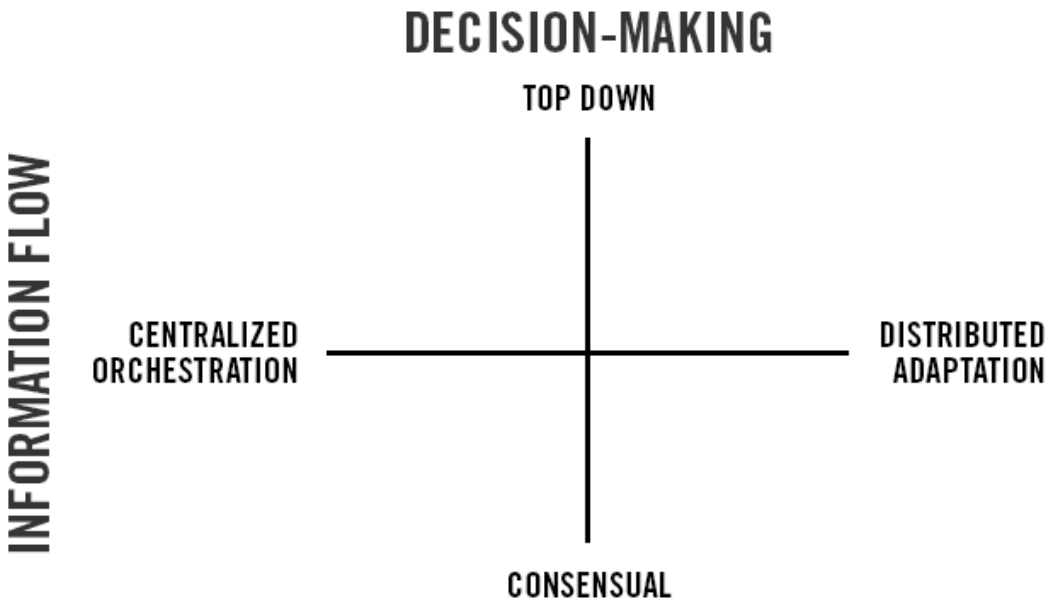
- **Decision Making**: Decision making refers to the way decisions are made by the leader and the team. With a **consensus**-based approach, all members of the team are comfortable with the decision and feel that they can adequately support it. In a **top-down** approach, the decision rests with the leader.
- **Information Flow**: Information flow refers to the manner in which information is disseminated across the team. In a **centrally orchestrated** format, the leader curates the information available before presenting it to the team. In the **distributed** process**,** individual members of the team continually adjust their sense of who else needs the information or who else they need information from, and that information flows freely among team members.



- **Design:** The systems, structures, and practices you establish that enable performing units to function well. The lever of design includes:
  - Establishing a compelling team **purpose** that explains what the team is trying to achieve and why;
  - Considering the team **composition** and building the team in a way that focuses on hiring for individual members and the team as a whole;
  - Defining **systems** and structures that foster collaboration and allow the team to deliver on its purpose.
- **Launch:** The beginning or starting point of a team, which a leader facilitates deliberately as an opportunity to discuss how the team will operate, including the team's purpose, objectives, and norms. Five aspects that make up a successful launch include:
  - Shared understanding of purpose;
  - Awareness and appreciation for the team's resources, knowledge, and expertise;
  - Norms governing collaboration;
  - Strategy for performance;
  - Perspective on leadership.
- **Leadership Style:** Your patterns of behavior that are consistent across situations and your interactions with others, discussed in detail in Module 3.

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The strongest predictors of team performance are **social sensitivity**—that is, the ability to read the emotions of others—and **turn taking,** or the extent to which each team member speaks.

Key Challenges to Teams

One of the most common challenges teams face is **conflict**.

- Teams need healthy conflict and disagreement. The work of leadership is to enable the team to draw on different perspectives, learn from conflict, and devise solutions that reflect contributions of the team's individual members.
- As a leader, you can monitor the amount and type of conflict.
    - **Too little conflict** can be a sign people do not feel safe sharing their authentic views or that the team does not have sufficient diversity of perspectives. **Too much conflict** can distract a team, and suggests the team has lost track of its collective mission or that people see more at stake than the issue at hand.
    - **Type of conflict** refers to *how* people disagree and *what* they disagree about. You want teams to focus their disagreement on the work to be done—the tasks, problems, challenges, opportunities, questions, and decisions facing the team—rather than focus on the people or personalities on the team.

You should strive to manage your team in a way that reaps the benefits of intellectual disagreements while also ensuring team members are learning from the disagreement and growing closer and more trusting of each other.

Diversity is an essential component of team composition. The effectiveness of a team should outstrip the sum of its parts, and hinges on making the most of the differences within a team. You can increase the potential impact of diversity by thinking of the **4 E's of Diversity**:

- **Enhancement**: Teams get more from their differences if they share a common belief that the differences within the team enhance the team and its capacity to deliver.
- **Empathy**: You can help your team develop the habits of first understanding others' perspectives, truly understanding those perspectives, and putting themselves in others' shoes.
- **Exploration**: The practice of inquiring into different perspectives and backgrounds, even taking the initiative to tap into the differences on the team when they are not voiced or before they arise.
- **Esteem**: Ensure that everyone on the team feels appreciated for what she or he distinctively brings to the team, rather than feeling discounted, sheepish, or apologetic for being different. Truly making sure that every member of the team knows their differences are valued and crucial for team success is the work of the leader and is essential in making the most of a team's diversity.

Dispersed or distributed teams require heightened roles and responsibilities of the team leader.

- As a general guideline, you will tend to feel you are communicating enough whereas your team is likely to feel they are getting insufficient communication. As such, you need to feel like you are over-communicating.

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- You must ensure ongoing communication, reinforce team norms, encourage collaboration, and actively solicit the input and perspectives of everyone on the team, especially those that are not co-located.

You must foster **psychological safety,** which is a team climate in which everyone on the team feels the team is safe for risk taking. In this type of team climate, there is a high level of trust and respect within the team, and individuals feel comfortable speaking up and challenging opinions. To foster psychological safety, you can:

- Frame the work of the team as a learning process, so that people realize their ideas and others' ideas are valid and worth sharing, even if they are incomplete.
- Foster in everyone a sense of humility, so that each person feels that their knowledge, expertise, and experience are essential but not comprehensive.
- Model careful listening and be vulnerable about your own gaps in knowledge and your own mistakes.

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