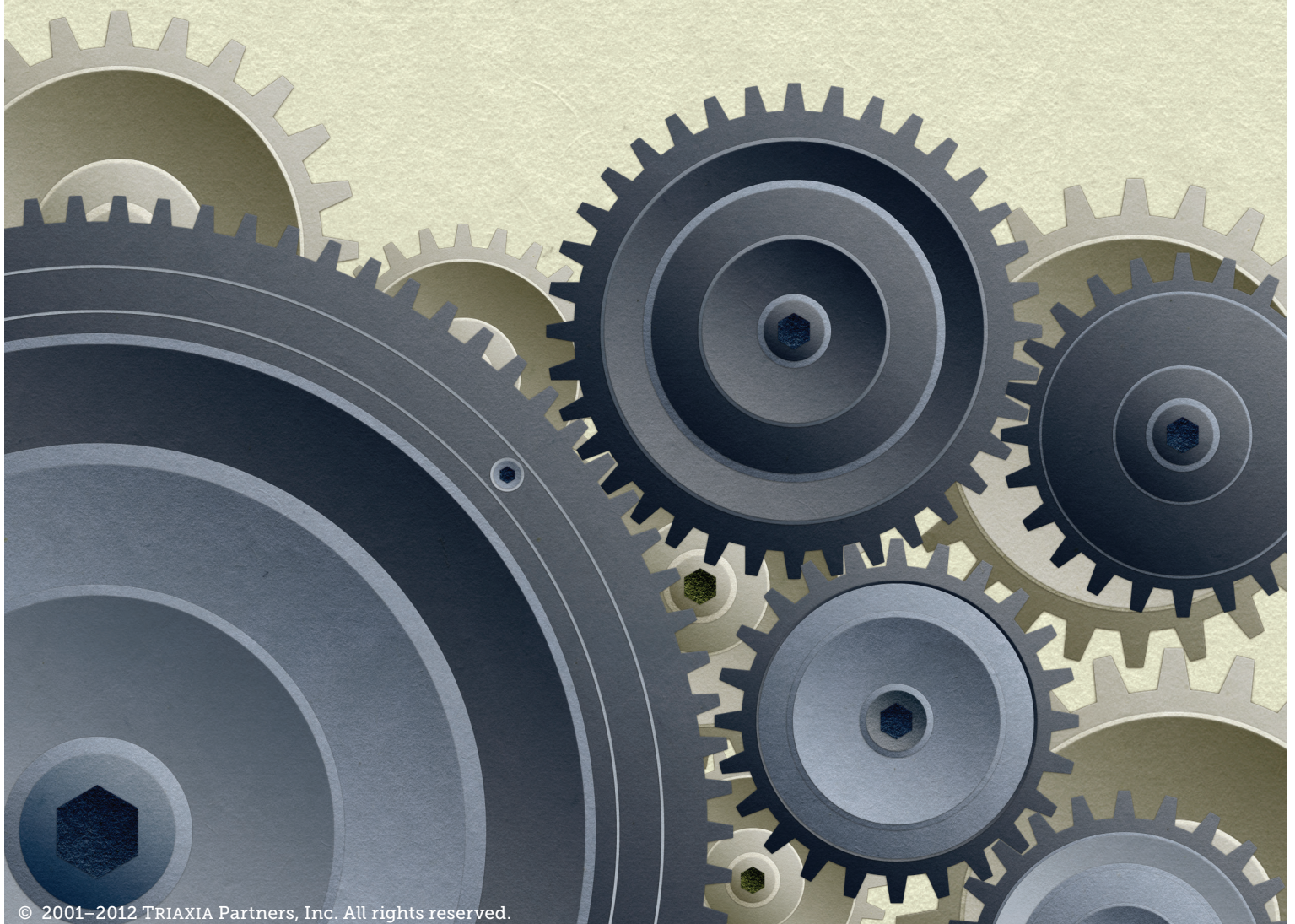# TEAM RESOURCES®

Team Meetings Profile™

Achieve uncommon results on common ground™

TRIAXIA®
PARTNERS

Meetings – The Playground of High Performance Teams

Talk to ten different people in any organization and you are likely to get ten different perspectives on the merit of organizational meetings, ranging from excitement to dread. People are always meeting; it's the way we get things done. We meet informally around the water cooler, we chat over breakfast or lunch, and we exchange emails. These are, in the broadest sense of the word, meetings.

As much as we sometimes would like to avoid meetings, the fact is that meetings are a part of our jobs. They are where the energy and resources of an organization become synergistic — where the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. A good meeting brings minds and hearts together and results in ideas or decisions which no one person could have made alone. A bad meeting diminishes the organization, discourages people, and threatens effectiveness.

Meetings are the playground of high performance teams. They test the mettle of purpose and consistency. In meetings, the true character and competence of a team is revealed.

Since you have been involved with meetings all your lives, you may be tempted to think that an assessment and discussion about your team meetings is just one more meeting that wastes time. You may be surprised, however, to discover that effective meetings actually require a lot of work, both from you and from your fellow teammates. It's important to be sure you are a part of the solution for your team versus part of the problem. The purpose of this Team Resources® diagnostic is to provide you with focused insight into specific ways in which you can make your meetings more productive.

MEETING EFFECTIVENESS FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS

As we have studied and researched teams and teamwork over the years, we have found consistently similar qualities and characteristics in teams that achieve exceptional results. This list of characteristics has proven to be of immeasurable value as we have worked with clients to establish new teams or to intervene when a team's effort was less than effective. It's a short list; in fact, it contains only six characteristics. But each characteristic plays a specific and vital role in making the team effective and, therefore, it is worth a closer look. If one of these six characteristics is missing or inadequate, the team is, at best, limping. If two or three are lacking, this group is probably not a team at all.

Effective meetings are grounded in both Effective Processes and Effective Communication – the fourth and sixth characteristics of high performance teams. Communication is critical to managing meetings effectively, and many tested techniques for managing meetings are process-driven. Teams that put such processes in place and follow them skillfully have a much greater chance of leveraging both formal and informal meetings as opportunities to drive results.
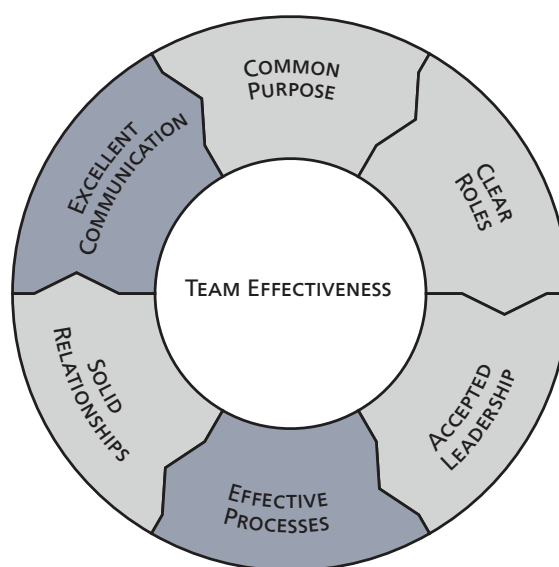
How Effective are Your Team's Meetings?

This Team Meetings Profile™ allows your team to assess its meeting effectiveness skills by measuring itself against three critical Team Resources Meetings factors:

1. PURPOSE

Like any successful endeavor, meetings must start with a clear, common, relevant purpose. It is the purpose that draws the participants into the meeting and answers the question, "Why are we here?"

2. PROCESS

The big idea when it comes to processes is that they should be purposefully designed versus the result of random trial and error. High performance teams have two major types of activity:

- How they work together (execution)
- How they think together (decision making, problem solving, planning)

Meetings are a critical time for teams to think together and, knowing that good decisions are generally not made in bad meetings, teams should take the time to establish meeting ground rules and then hold one another accountable for adhering to them. Other process issues with meetings include communication (suspending assumptions, active listening, valuing differences) and the effective use of tools like criteria-based decision making and brainstorming.

3. PEOPLE

The people dimension of meetings encompasses multiple moving parts, including:

- The relational aspects between the participants (trust levels, acceptance, respect, etc.)
- Roles (e.g., facilitator, participant, presenter)
- Facilitation
- Group dynamics (conflict, sidebar meetings, interruptions)

All of these aspects are inherent in the life of any team, but they are particularly important in a meeting when a team has an important purpose to accomplish.
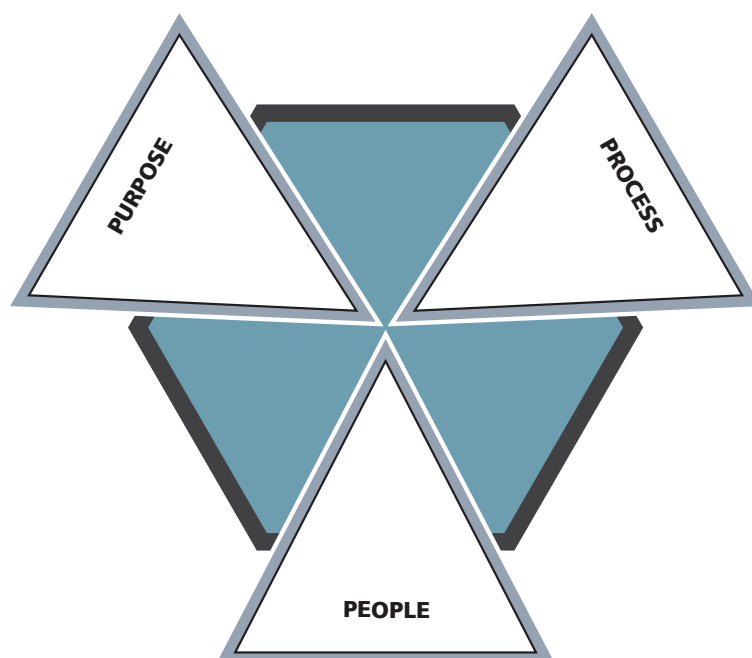
Interpreting Your Team's Results

Each Team Resources Factor within the Team Meetings Profile was rated by your team members on a five (5) point scale ranging from Not at All Descriptive (1) to Very Descriptive (5). Your answers have been compiled to provide both individual scores and an average team score for each factor.

Your team needs to function effectively in all three areas to powerfully and creatively leverage meetings for maximum collaboration. A low score in any one of these areas can result in significant meeting challenges, and is worthy of closer examination and a clear action plan for improvement. The summary below will help you to assess your overall and factor-specific scores.

Rating Scale				
1–1.99	2–2.99	3–3.49	3.50–3.99	4.00 - 5.00
Poor	Somewhat Poor	Adequate	Good	Excellent
Our meetings are a great way to cram 30 minutes of content into 2 hours... if we bother showing up.	We avoid meetings whenever possible, but others seem to find us anyway.	We're doing ok, but sometimes our meetings are unproductive.	Some sticking points, but overall our meetings are effective.	Our meetings run like a finely tuned machine.
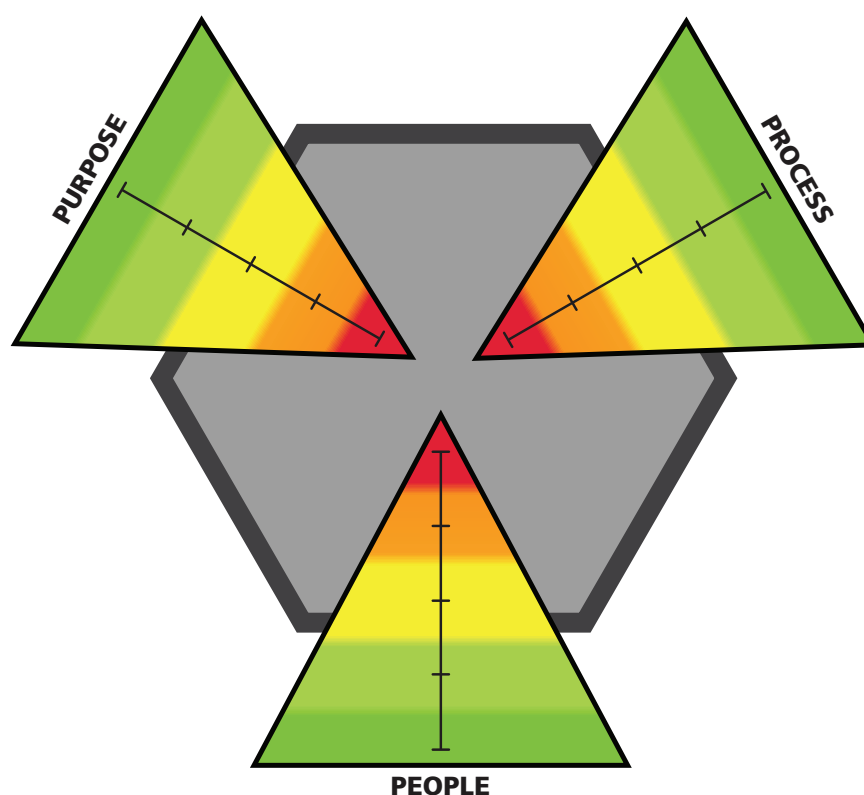
Results Overview at a Glance

The following table lists each team member's individual response average and the overall team's response average for each factor. Team member identification numbers have been randomly assigned to maintain anonymity. They do not reflect the chronological order of testing, nor are they affected in any way by the team members' survey responses.

Discussion Questions

1. Overall, which of the three factors was rated the strongest?

2. Weakest?

3. Are there significant score differences among team members?

4. What accounts for these differences?

5. As a result of your scoring and discussion, which of the Team Resources factors, if strengthened, could most improve the effectiveness of your team's meetings?

People Results

Below are your team's People descriptors, including any participant comments, listed by average score.

Discussion Questions

1. In your opinion, what are the key challenges for your team regarding how its members lead and participate in meetings?

2. What are the consequences of these issues for your team and what will happen if it does not address them?

3. What are some specific actions you can take as a team to address these challenges?

    a. _____

    b. _____

    c. _____

Process Results

Below are your team's Process descriptors, including any participant comments, listed by average score.

Discussion Questions

1. In your opinion, what are the key challenges for your team regarding its processes for effective meetings?

2. What are the consequences of these issues for your team and what will happen if it does not address them?

3. What are some specific actions you can take as a team to address these challenges?

    a. _____

    b. _____

    c. _____

Purpose Results

Below are your team's Purpose descriptors, including any participant comments, listed by average score.

Discussion Questions

1. In your opinion what are the key challenges for your team in regards to establishing and communicating a clear purpose for each of its meetings?

2. What are the consequences of these issues for your team and what will happen if it does not address them?

3. What are some specific actions you can take as a team to address these challenges?

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

Complete Results by Score

Below you will find your team's average response to each question, prioritized by score from highest to lowest. As a team, review the results and discuss where you may have been surprised – or not surprised – by what you discovered.

Complete Results by Score Discussion

1. Do you, as a team, believe these results accurately reflect where your team is in regards to running effective meetings?

2. Were the scores for the individual team members relatively close? How did your team members' assessments compare?

3. Based upon this summary, can you identify your team's three biggest barriers to effective meeting management?

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

Completing the Action Plan Worksheet

The Action Plan Worksheet is a template on which your team can design a development strategy for each selected item. Like any of the worksheets in this document, it is merely a framework you can use as a guide. Feel free to change or adapt it to make it best suit your team's needs.

Before you complete the worksheet, make copies to use for additional action plans as you continue to develop your team to new levels of effectiveness.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Review each of the possible action items your team listed for each factor.

2. Choose the top three issues that most need developing.

   • ....

   • ....

   • ....

3. Prioritize these issues according to their importance:

   a. ....

   b. ....

   c. ....

4. Develop an action plan for each of these three using the worksheets on the following pages.

5. Commit to implementing your ideas over the next 90 days.

Action Plan Worksheet

Here is your opportunity to turn principle into practice—to take a meaningful first step in becoming a more effective team.

1. | **Question #** | **Factor** | **Question** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Q23 | Purpose | Participants feel they're fully informed about the meeting's purpose |
| | | |

2. What are the current consequences of this meeting challenge (e.g., feelings, results or impact, etc.)?

3. Identify the root causes of the current situation (e.g., attitudes, lack of knowledge or skill, lack of resources, outside pressures, etc.).

4. Describe the desired situation.

5. What **specific steps** will you take as a team to address the root cause and transform the current situation into the desired situation? Who is responsible for what? By what date?

Action Step	**Responsibility**	**Date**

6. Specifically, how will you measure progress as you work in this area? Can you state it in terms of output (e.g., increased production, decreased costs, etc.)?

Action Plan Worksheet

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Monitor and Measure

1. Set a date to review your progress with the team.

2. Review your Action Plan.

3. What is working? Not working?

4. Are you achieving your desired results? If so, how can you continue to leverage our effectiveness?

5. If not, what must you start doing?

6. What must you stop doing?

7. What changes will you implement going forward?

Principles in Practice

Achieving Exceptional Results through Effective Meetings

High Performance Meetings

Talk to ten different people in any organization and you are likely to get ten different perspectives on the merit of organizational meetings, all the way from excitement to dread.

People are always meeting; it's the way we get things done. We meet informally around the traditional water cooler, we chat over breakfast or lunch, we exchange emails. These are, in the broadest sense of the word, meetings.

Then there are the more formal meetings which take place within any organization: the regular meetings of staffs, departments, boards, and committees. We meet to set direction, make evaluations, solve problems, share information, and sometimes simply enjoy fellowship with other co-workers.

As much as we sometimes would like to avoid meetings, the fact is that meetings are a part of our jobs. They are where the energy and resources of an organization become synergistic — where the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. A good meeting brings minds together and results in ideas or decisions which no one person could have made alone. A bad meeting diminishes the organization, discourages people, and threatens corporate effectiveness.

Meetings are the playground of high performance teams. They test the mettle of organizational purpose and consistency and reveal the true character of a team. Much can be accomplished in a successful meeting. Decisions are made, information is shared, and action steps are taken. No other component of organizational life has the capacity for tasking that meetings do. However, the value of meetings goes beyond the power to "get things done." The collective IQ that surfaces in high performance meetings brings together individual ideas and creates intense synergy. Camaraderie and energy are also byproducts of meeting face-to-face to accomplish a common purpose.

Meetings can also be a powerful building block for creating committed communities: teams who are dedicated to a clear purpose *and* to each other. The combination of these commitments adds up to synergistic teamwork when supported by effective meeting processes. Integrating the Purpose, People, and Process aspects of your meetings will significantly increase the impact of your time together.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A HIGH PERFORMANCE MEETING

A high performance meeting places equal emphasis on three key attributes:

- Clear, Common Purpose
- Managing the People Factor
- Clear, Standardized Process

CLEAR, COMMON PURPOSE

Without a clear, common purpose, you have set the stage for meeting anarchy. The number one problem in meetings, getting off topic, closely relates to the number two problem, no goals or agenda. This can be addressed by ensuring there is a clear purpose for the meeting and that everyone is clear about it.

The qualities of an effective meeting agenda make up a short but very powerful list:

1. **Clear.** Effective agendas spell out what is being asked of the participants so they know how to participate (e.g., brainstorming, decisions, etc.)

2. **Provides a time frame for each topic.** This gives participants the power to table a topic if the discussion requires more time that is available for that meeting

3. **Establishes clear outcomes (end results) for each agenda item.** Clear outcomes help the participants stay on topic, because it is more apparent if the discussion is achieving the desire result. Some meeting experts recommend calling agenda items "outcome frames," using the idea of a frame to suggest boundaries[1]. If a comment is outside of that frame, it's not helping achieve the outcome and the idea needs to be "parked" or dropped.

When something is irrelevant to the agenda, there are three possibilities:

1. Not important/not urgent – drop it

2. Important but not urgent – put it on the "parking lot" to be discussed later (takes the pressure off of trying to fit everything in now)

3. Important and urgent – go ahead and adjust the agenda to handle the issue now

Making everyone aware of the meeting's purpose and giving them the tools and permission to help the team adhere to it will result in a much more effective – and quite possibly much shorter – meeting.

MANAGING THE PEOPLE FACTOR

The people aspect of meetings involves a lot of moving parts. How well participants get along and trust each other, the various roles involved in the meeting itself (e.g., participant, presenter, facilitator, etc.), and group dynamics, including managing conflict, limiting interruptions, etc. The people factor in meetings can mean the difference between a powerful, effective brainstorming session and a miserable shouting match where little to nothing gets accomplished.

The role of a facilitator is critical in meetings, and it is his or her job to manage the people factor and drive an effective dialogue among the team. Peter Senge, a well-known business author and leading thinker in organizational effectiveness, reminds us that team learning is built on the foundations of dialogue and discussion – the two primary means of team discourse. "In dialogue, there is the free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues, and deep listening to one another and suspending of one's views."

Most of us have participated in meetings where this kind of discourse hasn't happened, but meetings are magical when it does. Ideas flow, excitement grows, motivation increases, and the team develops a laser-sharp focus on what it needs to accomplish, and maybe even has a little fun in the process. Effective dialogue is a conversation that takes its participants into new territory to new positions, possibilities, ideas, and alternatives that often have little resemblance to those originally held by the individuals participating in the dialogue. Synergy happens and the team can effectively tap into its collective IQ – one of the only reasons meetings should occur in the first place.

A CLEAR, ADHERED TO PROCESS

Even with a clear purpose and the right people in the room, it doesn't take long for a meeting to devolve into chaos if the participants don't have established rules for interaction and how to think together. Virtually every group task has a process that, if effective and followed, will achieve anticipated results. Meetings are no different, and actually may be even be one of the team activities that benefits most from a clear, established process.

[1] PRECISION: High Quality Information Processing for Business, Dr. John Grinder and Michael D. McMaster

Effective teams appreciate establishing a process for running their meetings, and one key rule is to select an effective meeting facilitator. A strong facilitator will understand how to use key meeting tools and processes to be sure the team accomplishes the meeting's purpose. This can range from running a brainstorming session, to effectively leveraging flip charts to capture the conversation, to calling on quieter team members to be sure their opinions are heard, to reigning in more dominant speakers, to making sure there are no side conversations, to assigning someone to capture and disseminate the meeting minutes. If the team has established meeting processes, or ground rules, for how they will run their meetings, an effective facilitator can leverage those to be sure the meeting stays on track.

Establishing clear processes and guidelines can also help to ensure that your meetings result in better decisions. Effectively leveraging processes like Nominal Group Technique[2] and encouraging multiple alternatives to prevent the team from making binary decisions will go a long way toward making team members feel they are heard and allowing new or different ideas to be put on the table. Meeting ground rules are critical rules of the road for high performance teams, and you won't see very many effective teams that don't have them.

ONE TEAM'S EXPERIENCE WITH MEETING GROUND RULES

Several years ago we were asked to work with the strategy team of a large corporation. The team, consisting of 15 members from two separate departments, was collapsing under the strain of broken relationships as two of the functional areas represented were locked in serious conflict. Infighting was intense, and the consequences were painful. Team members were feeling frustrated and, as a result, they withdrew from each other. When apart, they disparaged members of the other group, challenging either their competence or character, and business results suffered as people from other departments were drawn into the fray and felt the impact as the group's conflict lowered productivity. They eventually became angry at the inability of these team members to get their respective acts together.

Over the course of several off-site sessions and a number of small group and individual meetings, the rift began to close. A beachhead of trust was established, making communication more effective, and even this initial relief in the tension created a noticeably better work climate. This improvement, in turn, motivated even more communication and the first tentative steps in collaboration.

This particular management team was responsible for the corporation's primary product and marketing decisions—decisions that were generally made in a monthly strategy meeting. Due to the team's breakdown described above, several months had passed since they had held one of these meetings, despite their importance. The meetings had just been too frustrating and only aggravated the relational problem. When necessary, decisions had been made in smaller, more informal settings. They were really only getting by. As relationships became healthier, the first thing they decided to do was to reestablish the monthly strategy meeting, and requested our help in working through how to keep these meetings positive and productive.

....

[1] Jerry A. Dibble and Beverly Y. Langford Communication Skills and Strategies, Atlanta, GA, Dibble and Langford, Atlanta, GA., 1990, p. 14

[2] Nominal Group Technique (NGT) is a form of brainstorming in which participants write down their ideas and a facilitator goes around the room to have people share them. Over the course of all the suggestions, duplicate ideas are eliminated. This method is often a good way to encourage participation in quieter group members.

If your team meetings have not been as effective as you feel they could be, you might gain some insight for improvement from the process used by this strategy team. One of the first steps was to clarify the team's mission and the mission of each meeting. Next, we evaluated meetings up to that point. We had each of the team members rate the overall quality of their meetings on a scale of 1 to 100 (with 100 as the best possible score). We also had them rate decision quality in the same manner. The results were predictable. The average score for meetings was 41. (That's not as bad as it seems—the national average is 47.[2]) Decision quality, evaluated on the same scale, rated 46.

Next they completed a short survey, similar to the one in this Team Resources diagnostic, detailing specific problems that hampered meeting effectiveness. They discussed the survey results – emphasizing items with low scores and the root causes – and then laid out the ground rules for running future meetings (Figure 1). These guidelines established their meeting process.

Figure 1

Strategy Team Meeting Ground Rules

Meeting Schedule

1. When there is no reason to meet, we will not meet.
2. Attendance will be limited to our regular members. We will invite others to attend only when their expertise is needed.
3. Meetings will start and end on time.

Agenda and Minutes

1. We will limit our topics only to those that fit our team mission statement.
2. We will prepare the agenda for the next meeting at the end of each team meeting.
3. Each agenda item will include topics, outcome frames for each topic, time allotments, presenters, and required decision makers.
4. A final agenda, complete with pre-work, will be issued one week before each meeting.
5. Each meeting will begin with a brief status report of progress since the previous meeting.
6. Each team member will take his or her turn at being recorder for the meeting. Minutes will be finalized by the recorder within 48 hours of the meeting and will be e-mailed to each team member.

Meeting Ground Rules

1. We will respect each other's competence, opinions, and contributions at all times.
2. No side conversations are allowed.
3. Silence is hearty agreement.
4. Off-track (out of frame) topics that are nonetheless important will be noted on a flip chart for future reference.
5. We will address issues, not personalities. Personal attacks will not be tolerated.
6. We will be prepared for each meeting (having read the pre-work) and will stay for the entire meeting.
7. We will commit to be candid and open with each other.
8. Each meeting will have a facilitator to assist the team process.
9. We will briefly evaluate each meeting for efficiency and effectiveness in the interest of continuous improvement.

[2] Roger K. Mosvick and Robert B. Nelson, We've Got to Start Meeting Like This!, Indianapolis, IN, Park Avenue Productions, 1996, p. 4

Note their last ground rule in Figure 1, which says they will evaluate each meeting for efficiency and effectiveness in the interest of continuous improvement. They did this faithfully, publishing those scores in the meeting minutes. Every six months or so, they spent a little time talking about how they were doing and how could improve. They reviewed their ground rules and edited them accordingly. Scores from the first nine months of their effort are shown in Figure 2.

OUR TEAM MEETINGS

Figure 2
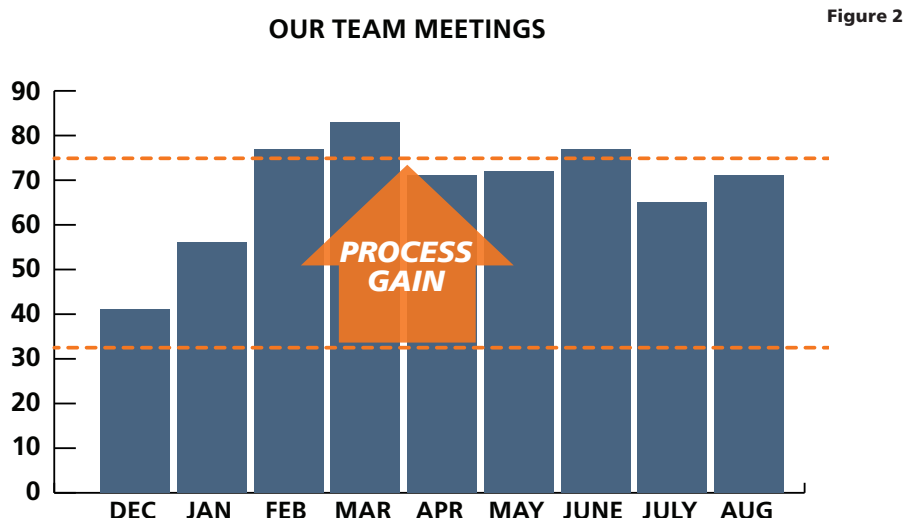
This is an excellent example of a team process in action. They designed their process and made it visible with a set of written ground rules. They monitored and measured both the process and results, and continuously improved in both areas. What the chart in Figure 2 doesn't show is that they were also able to cut their average meeting time by 50 percent and increase the average score for decision effectiveness to between 75 and 80 on a scale of 1 to 100. That's a process gain!

HIGH PERFORMANCE MEETINGS REQUIRE WORK FOR GREAT REWARD

Most of us are familiar with the concept of "reaping what we sow", but in very few activities can you reap the rewards from good investment as quickly as in meetings. With a little planning, some focused preparation, some good communication, and some very clear guidelines, your team can quickly see significant improvements in the effectiveness of its meetings. And who knows - quite possibly, when you've dealt with some of the details that have been pulling your team off track, you may even have a little fun in the process!

You have completed the
# Team Meetings Profile™ Report
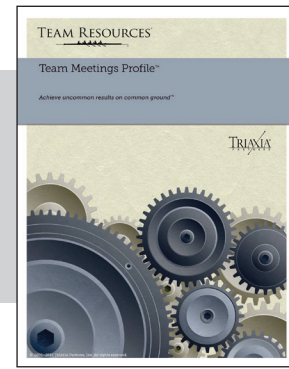
Also available from

TEAM RESOURCES®
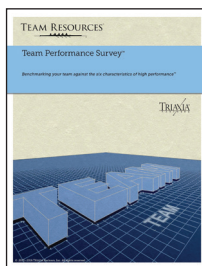
TEAM PERFORMANCE SURVEY™
MEASURING YOUR TEAM AGAINST THE SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH PERFORMANCE™
The Team Performance Survey™ assists your team in evaluating its strengths and weaknesses against in each of the six characteristics of a high performance team. The resulting report enables your team to address and prioritise its needs with the confidence of knowing they are targeting the right issues.
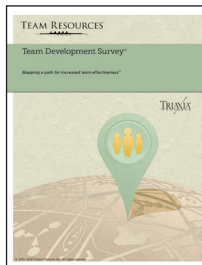
TEAM DEVELOPMENT SURVEY™
**MAPPING A PATH FOR INCREASED TEAM EFFECTIVENESS**™
The Team Development Survey™ enables your team to visually identify its current stage of team development, and better understand its potential for greater synergy and team effectiveness. By measuring your team's capabilities in the factors that drive cooperation, this report enables your team to clearly map its path for growth.
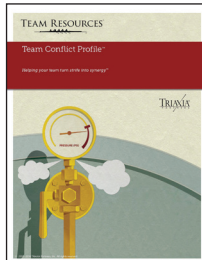
TEAM CONFLICT PROFILE™
HELPING YOUR TEAM TURN STRIFE INTO SYNERGY™
This Team Resources® diagnostic enables your team to identify and address conflict issues that derail team effectiveness. The report highlights attitudes, actions, and processes that can stifle your team's ability to work together. Utilizing this information, the team will be able to give immediate attention to the key issues driving conflict and define a clear path for improvement.
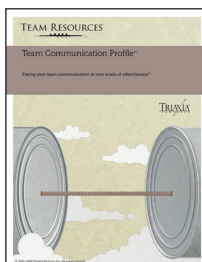
TEAM COMMUNICATION PROFILE™
TAKING YOUR TEAM COMMUNICATION TO NEW LEVELS OF EFFECTIVENESS™
The Team Resources Team Communication Profile™ helps your team assess its ability to communicate. Effective team communication doesn't just happen, but demands the application of time-tested principles and processes. This diagnostic enables team members to identify and address specific issues that clutter and confuse team communication.