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## A Note on Building and Leading Your Senior Team

As performance demands intensify in today's world of fast-moving global markets, an increasing number of executives seek strategic and operational assistance. They are relying upon senior teams to run their businesses.<sup>1</sup> Harnessing the energies of talented, diverse individuals to create coordinated action is a challenging endeavor. This task is even more complicated when the individuals are a highly visible collection of powerful senior executives who not only represent their particular businesses and functions but also are vying for their boss's position. The President and CEO of BMG International Rudi Gassner commented on the tensions inherent in senior management teams:

There is a built-in conflict in my team, and it is on purpose. I want the people who are responsible for their region being responsible for their region. So they have to be very selfish about being successful in their region—and they are competing with each other. And obviously, they may also be competing because of the succession question, and I keep that in mind about their influences. On the other hand, if there are successors in the group for me, I want every one of them being able to see the global picture. We are permanently in that conflict where somebody has to make successful business decisions in their region while maintaining the knowledge of the global impact of what he or she is doing.<sup>2</sup>

This note provides a framework for understanding the two sets of responsibilities involved in managing an effective team: (1) *managing the team's boundary*—scanning the competitive environment and managing relationships with those on whom the team is interdependent, and (2) *managing the team itself*—designing the team and facilitating the team process. We begin by defining the criteria for an effective team. Then, we provide an overview of the responsibility of managing the team's boundary—the process of creating a context conducive to team effectiveness. The context within which a team does its work has a profound impact on its outcomes. While this note does not discuss these matters in detail, it is important to acknowledge that a team does not operate in isolation. Finally, we turn our attention to the primary focus of this note—the responsibility of managing the team itself. After conducting in-depth interviews with 23 CEOs of major companies, Hambrick found that senior teams tend to have five main problems. They often encounter: (1) an individual executive with inadequate capabilities; (2) lack of critical expertise; (3) harmful rivalries; (4) groupthink; and (5) team fragmentation.<sup>3</sup> We provide insight into how to prevent or reduce these problems by identifying the key factors that shape the dynamics, culture, and effectiveness of senior teams. We also consider the challenges of leading global teams in an appendix accompanying the note. For more information on tactics for managing real-time team process, the reader is encouraged to review this note's companion piece *A Note on Team Process*.<sup>4</sup>

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## What is an Effective Team?

Managers should apply three *interrelated* criteria in assessing overall team effectiveness:<sup>5</sup>

1. The team *performs*. The team's output (e.g., decisions, products, services) should meet the standards of those who have to use it. It is not enough that the team itself is pleased with its output or even that the output meets some objective performance measure. After all, the various constituencies relying on the team's output may focus on different performance standards (e.g., quality, profitability, innovativeness).

2. Individual team members are *satisfied and learn*. Some teams operate in ways that frustrate the personal satisfaction of team members and thwart their development. Other teams provide their members with multiple opportunities to satisfy their individual needs and to continually stretch and develop. This is particularly important in senior teams where succession is at issue.

3. The team *adapts and learns*. Over the life of an effective team, the members learn to anticipate one another's moves and to respond appropriately to support those moves as they occur. They learn to revitalize and regenerate themselves (e.g., adapt their agenda and operating guidelines) in response to new demands placed on them by the organization or competitive environment. Less effective teams function in ways that lead members to distrust one another, resulting in the team finding it more difficult to work together on future initiatives. For instance, team members will be less willing to share their expertise and information with one another if the team culture becomes one of unbridled competition in which individuals play out "hidden agendas."

Too often team leaders rely solely on the first criteria, team output, when evaluating team effectiveness. On the one hand, this approach makes sense. If a team's performance is poor or negatively impacts key constituencies, it is hard to imagine that team members will find the team experience satisfying over the long term or that they will look forward to working together on future tasks. However, executives neglect the other two effectiveness criteria at their own peril. Many management teams have great difficulty learning and enhancing their collective capacity to innovate.<sup>6</sup> If team members do not feel their personal needs are being met, employee retention can prove difficult. Replacing talented executives is no mean feat. When a company loses senior country managers, for instance, key customer relationships can be impacted negatively and there are often few candidates to replace them. And as turnover statistics indicate, integrating outside senior hires can be a risky proposition, it can take months before they are full contributors. Furthermore, if team members are not satisfied, they are less likely to identify with the team and less likely to expend much effort pursuing collective goals.

## Managing the Team's Boundary

As the formal authority and the "nerve center" for their teams and companies, team leaders are uniquely placed to manage the team's boundary and thereby proactively create the context necessary for team success. If their teams are to be effective, executives must continually scan the competitive environment and monitor the activities of key external constituencies (e.g., the board, customers, competitors, regulators, financial markets, the media) on whom they are dependent. In fact, research demonstrates that external boundary management is key to team performance.<sup>7</sup> Executives must build and maintain key relationships with those outside the organization in order to detect changes in the priorities and needs of these constituencies and prepare the team for new opportunities and threats. The more turbulent the external environment, the more attention should be paid to competitive monitoring and communication with constituencies outside the organization.

Executives also need to manage relationships with those who are outside the management team but *inside* the organization. To do so, they must understand the power dynamics of the larger organization and invest time and energy in building and maintaining relationships with those on whom the team is dependent.<sup>8</sup> Many executives hoped that companies would become “one big happy family” with the new models of flat and lean corporations in which boundaries (of hierarchy, function, and geography) had largely been eradicated. They hoped that all politics would be eliminated. This notion is not only unrealistic, it is undesirable. Conflict among the different constituencies in an organization can be healthy and productive, as Hirschhorn and Gilmore point out in this illustration:

R and D has a legitimate interest in long-term research, manufacturing in the reducibility of a product, marketing in customer acceptance. A union member who confronts a foreman over an alleged contract violation, a regional vice president who wants to make sure her factories get more investment funds, and the director of a research lab who tries to protect his scientists from instructions from marketing are all engaged in necessary political relationships. These relationships can be extremely useful to senior managers, because they mobilize the different interests and perspectives that together add up to a comprehensive view of the entire situation.<sup>9</sup>

To eliminate political conflicts, executives would have to eliminate diversity, including the division of labor and specialization. Specialization is often necessary for organizational efficiency and productivity. Diversity and conflict are essential ingredients for creativity and innovation. The team leader is responsible for managing the inevitable trade-offs and for equitably negotiating and integrating his or her team's interests with those of others (e.g., superiors, peers in other functional or geographic areas). Rather than engage in political infighting, effective team leaders should seek creative win-win solutions as opposed to participating in zero-sum negotiation behavior.<sup>10</sup>

The first step in managing these dynamics productively is *analysis*. Analysis enables the team to anticipate and prepare for the inevitable political conflicts that arise, and anticipate how others will think and act in response to team decisions and actions. Political conflict is more likely to be found in organizations with more diversity, interdependency, and resource scarcity.<sup>11</sup> A sense of shared values and goals due to leadership or a strong organizational culture helps to prevent or reduce conflict. In contrast, precipitating factors that exacerbate these sources of conflict, include organizational change or crisis, a void in authority, and the formation of competing coalitions (apparent or nascent). If the company experiences an economic downturn, for instance, the leader can expect that the team might display some political infighting. Even though team members may have always gotten along, until they have been tested to make difficult resource allocation decisions, the leader may not know just how robust their decision-making approach has been.

Many people become cynical about the political realities of organizational life and pride themselves on never “stooping to playing office politics.” There are, of course, organizations with poisonous political climates filled with plotters and schemers who have little regard for the work they or others do. But as we have discussed, organizations are inherently political entities where different interested parties negotiate the allocation of scarce resources. Executives who ignore or fail to understand how power and influence work in organizations will find that they and their teams experience difficulty in being effective and ethical in their work. They will find themselves molded and constrained by their organization. In contrast, executives who understand political dynamics will have the potential to shape their environment.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to paying attention to the political context of the team, the team leader, at a minimum, must identify organizational structures, systems, or policies that interfere with the team's performance. All too often when senior teams go awry, the manifest interpersonal tensions are

symptomatic of more basic difficulties in the design of the team or its broader context. The leader should be prepared to suggest or implement organizational redesigns to eliminate obstacles to teamwork or fight for needed resources (e.g., a more timely information system). In particular, many companies base compensation solely upon individual results. Compensation signals to employees what the organization cares about. When compensation is indexed solely to individual performance, it is difficult for employees to accept the importance of teamwork. Team leaders may need to negotiate to adapt compensation to better reflect the work of the senior team.<sup>13</sup> In short, if an executive does not appropriately align his or her team with the broader organization, no amount of time spent managing the team itself will compensate.

## Managing the Team Itself

To create the conditions for team success, senior teams leaders must manage not only the team's boundary, but also the team itself. Executives cannot mandate teamwork. Rather, teamwork is a delicate act of architecture, facilitation, and coaching.

### *Designing the Team*<sup>14</sup>

**Setting the agenda** One of the first tasks an executive needs to address is setting the team's agenda. Members need a clear and compelling sense of what is expected of the team. The time the senior management team spends together is extremely valuable. To maximize the use of that time, the team must clearly comprehend their goals as a team and how their individual work interrelates. This is particularly key for senior management teams where members have significant businesses to run. These members will not value the team unless its agenda is grounded in the shared interdependencies among team members' areas. Simply because individuals are members of the same work unit or even share a joint task does *not* mean that they perceive themselves as interdependent or a "team," that is, as sharing a common agenda and benefiting from collective action.<sup>15</sup>

Although the team leader is ultimately held accountable as its chief architect, the leader alone need not determine the agenda. The leader and team members may find it appropriate to jointly decide on the team's agenda. Other things being equal, the more the leader empowers the team members and allows them to shape the agenda, the more buy-in and commitment they will bring to it. In general, more participative approaches take more time than directive ones. If time is of the essence, the manager may wish to decide the agenda unilaterally. In addition, while the overall direction for performance should be clear, the means by which the agenda is to be met need not be overly specified. Periodically reviewing how the team is spending its time, ensures the team is staying focused on its agenda and priorities. All too often, senior teams neglect looming strategic concerns, because the urgent drives out the important.

**What type of teamwork is needed?** After setting the team's agenda, the team leader has to determine just what type of teamwork is needed.<sup>16</sup> How much and what kind of coordination is necessary for the team to fulfill its agenda? As Drucker points out, teams often fail because their leaders are confused about which type of team they desire.<sup>17</sup> In an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, he makes a useful distinction between three types of teams: baseball-type teams, football-type teams, and tennis-doubles-type teams. It is important to note up front that relying on sports analogies to explain teamwork across gender and culture lines has limitations. As one Latin American executive remarked, "There is American football, and there is the football the rest of the world plays."

Drucker compares the baseball team to both the surgical team that performs an open-heart operation and the Henry Ford assembly line. He notes that on such teams the players "play *on* the team"; they do not "play *as* a team." They each have fixed positions that they rarely leave. The second baseman never pitches; the surgical nurse never does the anesthesiologist's job. Drucker notes that some of the advantages of such teams are that individual members can be clearly held accountable for their performance and trained and developed to the fullest extent of their individual potential. And because the interdependency among the members is relatively low, members have to make few adjustments to each other. Drucker states the case dramatically, arguing that each position can be staffed with a "star, no matter how temperamental, jealous or limelight-hogging each of them might be."

Drucker compares the American football team to a symphony orchestra or an the emergency room staff trying to save a heart-attack patient. Like those on the baseball-type team, the members of these teams have fixed positions. As Drucker puts it, "the oboe never comes to the aid of the violas, however badly they flounder." However, on these teams, players do play *as* a team. There is a common "score of music" which must be followed. If there are stars on the team, they are featured only if the score calls for a solo. Otherwise, team members must subordinate themselves to the team.

Finally, there is the tennis-doubles-type team, which Drucker compares to an improvisational jazz ensemble or self-managed manufacturing team. On these teams, the players have a primary rather than a fixed position. As Drucker observes, in this kind of team, "only the team performs; individual members contribute." Team members cover their teammates adjusting as necessary to their teammates' talents and weaknesses and to the changing demands of the game.

Each type of team requires distinct behavior from the leader and the members and each has different strengths and limitations. But in business, the baseball-type team, in which every position (e.g., marketing, manufacturing, finance, human resource management) does its job its own way is fast becoming obsolete. The baseball-type team is too inflexible; it only works well when the game has been played multiple times and when the sequences of its actions are thoroughly understood by everyone—circumstances seldom found in business today. While tennis-doubles-type teams are quite flexible, they require intense commitment, trust, and collaboration on the part of the team. Members have to be trained together and work together for some time before they can fully function according to the model. Because of this, most senior teams are not going to be tennis-doubles-type teams. Their work is not that interdependent and the focus of the team members is not primarily on the team but on their individual businesses. Most senior teams will aspire to the football-type team or symphony orchestra model where members each have their own role to play, but realize that they also need to integrate their work more closely with their colleagues. Of course, the more interdependencies that exist among functions and operations of senior team members, the more the team should aim to resemble a tennis-doubles-type team.

**Team composition** Once the team agenda has been determined and the type of teamwork needed to accomplish that agenda identified, managers have to address the composition of the team. With senior management teams, executives frequently inherit an existing management team composed of their direct reports. In such instances, executives should make a careful assessment of the individuals in the group in order to detect and correct over time any imbalances in the overall composition of their teams. Many executives have concluded after considerable experience, that when selecting a new member of the executive team, "chemistry" with the other team members should be a criterion almost as important as the executive's expertise and experience. While researching leaders who had taken their companies from good to great, scholars observed that these leaders "attended to people first, strategy second. They got the right people on the bus, moved the wrong people off, ushered the right people to the right seats—and then they figured out where to drive

it.”<sup>18</sup> The team’s needs may change over time. Executives should periodically assess whether the necessary knowledge and skills (technical, conceptual, and/or human) are present to fulfill the team’s agenda. For example, in the last decade, companies found information technology to be increasingly important to the success of their businesses. Despite this, many senior management teams did not include in their membership individuals with much experience in this arena. One financial services team, after many unsatisfying experiences working with an outside e-strategy consultant, created a standing committee of select members of the executive team and high potential middle-level managers with experience in technology. The executive team was able not only to develop an effective new approach to e-activities, but also to assess the strategic and leadership talent of key managers in the organization.

Senior management teams also frequently face the particular challenge of being composed of individuals who are not necessarily skilled at, or comfortable with, collaborating closely with peers.<sup>19</sup> Executives with the talent of a soloist but the temperament of an orchestra player are a rare breed.<sup>20</sup> A number of scholars who have done research on top teams have noted that executives who get ahead in U.S. firms often have very high needs for both power and achievement (as compared to affiliation), and are likely to have been rewarded over the course of their careers more for their individual efforts than their contributions as team players. Furthermore, because of succession issues, team members’ motivations and actions may be more influenced by their career agendas than that of the team.<sup>21</sup> A team can only be as strong as its weakest link. If coaching fails, managers need to be prepared to replace problem executives who are unable or unwilling to work closely with other members of the team—even when they are star producers in their own areas. More and more companies are taking a tough stance with those who refuse to collaborate. Admittedly, this is often difficult since each member of a senior team tends to be key to the organization.<sup>22</sup> But, if a senior team is to be truly effective, deficiencies in team skills cannot be ignored.

Executives should carefully balance the similarity/diversity mix of their team members. Members who have complementary experiences, expertise, and styles should be sought. In this regard, executives need to guard against hiring those “in their own image.” Most people have a natural tendency to be attracted to, and most comfortable with, people like themselves.<sup>23</sup> Team members, however, should be neither so similar that they are clones of each other and offer no added value, nor so different that they cannot learn from one another or work together. More homogeneous teams (e.g., in terms of values, perspectives, experiences) find it easier to build relationships, as homogeneity promotes trust and ease of communication. Hence, homogeneous teams initially have less difficulty than heterogeneous teams in integrating their efforts and working together productively. However, a greater breadth of perspectives, experience, and expertise can be brought to bear on the task at hand in more heterogeneous teams. Therefore, in the long term, these teams seem to display more creativity and problem-solving prowess.<sup>24</sup>

Size is also an issue. Enormous cachet is associated with membership in the senior team—but smaller teams are usually more effective. In fact, a problem-solving team of ideal size will most likely include between five and ten members. Because of this, some companies rely on nested senior teams composed of varying memberships. Some of the teams are decision-making bodies, others serve as sounding boards, while still others are convened for communication and coordination purposes. A variation of this design was used by GE’s corporate office during Jack Welch’s tenure. Welch managed day-to-day strategic decisions with the aid of two vice-chairmen. Quarterly, Welch, top staff, and leaders of GE’s 14 businesses met for two days to coordinate strategy and create “a sense of trust, a sense of personal familiarity and mutual obligation at the top of the company.” Welch explained that this same approach to management teams was used throughout the organization:

For example, each of the businesses has created its own executive committee to meet on policy questions. These committees meet weekly or monthly and include the top staff and line people from the businesses. Everyone in the same room, everyone with the same information, everyone buying into the targets. Each business also has an operations committee. This is a bigger group of maybe 30 people for each business: 5 staffers, 7 people from manufacturing, 6 from engineering, 8 from marketing, and so on. They get together every quarter for a day and a half to thrash out problems, to get people talking across functions, to communicate with each other about their prospects and programs.<sup>25</sup>

**Team Structure** Decisions need to be made about not only the selection of team members, but also how the team will be organized and perform its work. For instance, teams must establish which decisions will be made by the team, how they will be decided, how roles and responsibilities will be divided, how information and other resources will be shared, and how activities of different individuals and subgroups will be coordinated. As with agenda-setting, the executive may choose to make these decisions alone or make them jointly with the team members. Providing a framework about decision-rights (who makes which decisions) is critical. The options are outlined below:

Autonomous <sup>26</sup> :	The decision is made by the leader alone.
Delegated:	The decision is made by the team within parameters specified by the leader.
Consultative:	The decision is made by the leader with advice from team members.
Joint:	The decision is made by the team members and leader together through consensus. This means the decision is not made until both the team members and leader can actively support it, even if it is not their first choice.

Unclear expectations about these rights can lead to disaffection by individual team members and serious team dysfunction. The framework provides an agreed-upon process, which can facilitate debate and discussion about the substantive matter at hand. Executives are not distracted by worrying about who is empowered and accountable for what. They know in advance if they are only giving advice or input, or if they will really have influence on a given decision. Perhaps most critically, the team must agree upon which issues deserve to be joint decisions. Because joint decision-making is the most difficult and time consuming of the options, it should generally be saved for decisions about which members are highly interdependent or for matters of strategic significance. The decision-rights framework should be periodically reviewed and modified as necessary (see Exhibit 1).

Joint decision-making is almost impossible when teams are fragmented—an all too frequent occurrence in senior teams. To reduce or prevent fragmentation, it can be helpful to assign corporate-wide projects (e.g., a supply chain management initiative, the development of a succession plan) to an individual or subgroups of executives to lead.<sup>27</sup> Such assignments can increase the amount of interaction and dialogue among team members and increase their sense of shared interdependencies. For example, as the number of countries in which one company was operating grew from 17 to 37, a three-member European subcommittee was established. The subcommittee drove the development of a European-wide manufacturing and distribution strategy and significant cost reduction efforts.

The challenges of leading a senior team grow infinitely more complex when the senior team is global or virtual. As companies expand into international markets, key senior executives are located far from corporate headquarters. Virtual senior teams infrequently meet physically, but when they do, they have to make weighty decisions often under considerable time pressure. Building and maintaining effective team processes across time zones and cultural differences is difficult under the best circumstances. Because of its complexities, we have addressed this issue separately in the Appendix (see page 14).

### *Facilitating the Team Process*

Effective team leaders pay attention not only to team context and design but also to team process—how the team gets its work done. The role of the leader is not to dictate how the team members should go about their collaborative work. Rather, it is to help them *learn* how to minimize the "process losses" that invariably occur in groups and take advantage of the potential synergistic "process gains."<sup>28</sup> In the following pages, we address the critical process factors that shape senior team culture and effectiveness (see **Exhibit 2** for a diagram outlining the relationships between boundary management, team process, and team effectiveness). For a more extensive discussion of this topic please see the companion note mentioned in the introduction, *A Note on Team Process*.

**Shaping the team's culture** A leader can facilitate the team's process by shaping the team's culture—the basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by the team members, that operate unconsciously, and are "taken-for-granted."<sup>29</sup> Leaders should try to influence, as much as possible, certain manifestations of the team's culture: the team norms, routines, and values. These set the tone of team interactions and become the "rules" for how team members are to behave and get their work done. Teams develop norms concerning, among other things, the following:

- (1) Distribution of power and influence: Are the informal leaders the members with the most expertise, longest tenure, and most charisma? Are some subgroups more influential than others?
- (2) Communication patterns in the group: Who talks the most? Who talks to whom? How are interruptions handled?
- (3) What topics are considered legitimate for discussion: Can the team address both issues of tactics and strategy, or does strategy fall under the manager's purview? Can emotions be expressed? Can the team discuss its process?
- (4) How conflicts are managed: Can differences of opinion be aired freely? Is there much pressure for conformity?

Such norms tend to impact profoundly team effectiveness. For example, a team, to be effective, must work in a manner in which members' contributions are weighed appropriately. Teams in which everybody has exactly the same degree of influence about all matters are generally not very effective. Ideally, individual team members' influence on a given issue should reflect their expertise about that issue and the extent to which they will be affected by it. However, the degree of team member influence too frequently reflects other, often less appropriate, factors including verbosity, status in the organizational hierarchy, or demographic criteria such as ethnicity and gender. On senior teams, the proportion of revenue for which each team member is responsible often impacts power and influence. This frequently results in executives representing more mature markets having more influence than those representing emerging markets. As a result, the priorities and needs of the emerging markets, the company's future sources of growth, may be short-changed.

Team norms or expectations about how members should behave are established and reinforced very early in the life of a group. Initial patterns of behavior often become the team's norms. For example, those who dominate the conversation in early meetings will be identified as the informal team leaders, while those who are quiet initially will discover it hard to break into the discussion later. Imbalance in participation can be a problem because substantial research shows that the most frequently stated ideas tend to be adopted by the group, regardless of their quality.<sup>30</sup> Team members will defer to persons from more powerful functional areas in the organization without adequately evaluating their suggestions, and ignore proposals offered by those who represent the less powerful support or staff functions, even when they have the relevant expertise. And once norms are in place they have a "life of their own."



Team leaders cannot dictate what the norms will be; instead, they can only influence them, for instance, through the formal design of the group, team composition and structure, or by role-modeling desired attitudes and behavior. Team leaders should be especially cognizant of the impact that their leadership style has on the team's norms (e.g., do they tend to use a "push" or a "pull" influence style?; do they tend to rely on a more directive or participative style?).<sup>31</sup> Once productive team norms are established, the leader should make an effort to sustain them by rewarding constructive team behavior. For instance, when evaluating and rewarding team members' performance, leaders should pay attention not only to *what* they have done, but also to *how* they accomplished it (e.g., although a vice-president has surpassed quarterly targets, has he or she done so by creating problems for and alienating the other members of the team?). We are all familiar with cases in which the "squeaky wheel" and "freeloader" got ahead at the expense of "team players."

Norms are difficult to change unless something fairly remarkable (e.g., the team reaches a milestone<sup>32</sup>, encounters a novel situation, or receives an intervention) occurs to force the team to revisit them explicitly. Hence, leaders should strive to encourage the development of productive team norms when they first take charge of their teams, as opposed to letting them emerge "naturally." Of course, executives frequently inherit intact senior teams from their predecessors. Too often, executives attempt to make changes to the team right away without first conducting a diagnosis of the interrelationships between aspects of the team culture (e.g., norms, subgroups, informal leaders) and effectiveness. Inevitably they run into resistance even when the changes are needed. Pfeffer provides valuable insight into the dilemma:

A strong culture really constitutes a ... paradigm, which prescribes how to look at things, what are appropriate methods and techniques for solving problems, and what are the important issues and problems. A well-developed paradigm, or a strong culture, is overturned only with great difficulty, even if it fails to account for data or to lead to new discoveries. In a similar fashion, a ... paradigm provides a way of thinking about and investigating the world, which reduces uncertainty and provides for effective collective action, but which also overlooks or ignores some lines of inquiry.<sup>33</sup>

In today's dynamic competitive environment, leaders must be prepared to be change agents, able to mobilize the diverse members of their team to move toward ever-shifting targets. In this regard, leaders should equip their teams with mechanisms for periodically evaluating their process. For example, team members are often unaware of what their norms are. By raising awareness of the team's norms and routines, the team will be in a better position to make necessary modifications to improve team performance. Indeed, teams that engage in self-monitoring and self-correcting of their process and performance are more effective than those that do not. As we all know, constructive individual performance appraisals are not easy to do; team appraisals are even more complicated.<sup>34</sup> But without feedback, teams, like individuals, have difficulty learning and developing. Senior team leaders should work to establish norms that make discussion of the team's process legitimate and routine.<sup>35</sup>

**Coaching the team** Perhaps team leaders can most constructively think of their role as team "coach" as opposed to team "conductor."<sup>36</sup> Too often, senior team leaders assume that the team members know how to work together effectively. In fact, as mentioned earlier, team members may *not* know how to "work it out among themselves." Team members may have the technical expertise necessary to complete a task but not the human or interpersonal expertise. They need guidance and coaching about how to be effective team members. They also need to spend sufficient time together to grow to trust each other as a team. eBay CEO Meg Whitman said of her senior team:

I figured out early on that if we were going to work together as a team we needed to throw the ball around a lot before we could walk out on the court. So we spent a lot of time together,

which was at odds with the pressure to get back to work, check voice mail, and check e-mail. But, I've found that throwing the ball around has been very helpful, because we're now able to have pretty short and focused discussions, figure out what the points of view are, and make a decision quickly.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the intensely time constrained internet mentality, Whitman insisted that her team hold two-to four-hour long, weekly management meetings supplemented with periodic all-day retreats. How many executives would have agreed to set such a schedule when revenue was growing at a 49% quarterly rate?<sup>38</sup>

Coaching is not just a one-on-one activity; sometimes, the team leader needs to coach the team as a group. The leader should be prepared to offer specific suggestions on how to improve team process. Senior teams are required to make many important decisions about complex and ambiguous matters. The amount of task-relevant information and vested interest possessed by individual team members will vary depending on which decision the senior team is tackling. For example, teams have a well-documented tendency to share information that is commonly held rather than the unique information individuals possess. This tendency can become problematic when task-relevant information among team members is asymmetrical—as is often the case in senior teams comprised of representatives from different functions or business units. Although it can feel contrived at first, the team leader can propose more structured decision-making processes to maximize participation and information sharing. The team leader could split the team into two groups with the first group researching and proposing a solution, and the second group offering critiques and counter proposals. This decision-making approach not only improves information sharing, it also forces team members to consider how proposed solutions will impact other aspects of the business than their own.

Leaders should also provide feedback to the team as a whole about its process and performance (relying on all three effectiveness criteria). If a team is experiencing difficulties, it is critical to determine why (i.e., is it due to an effort, talent, and/or performance strategy problem), so that an appropriate solution can be implemented. The objective should not simply be to build and maintain the team, but rather to continuously improve the way it functions. Great teams do not start out great; they only get that way through experience and practice.

## Managing Paradox

Teamwork is hard work because it is a process of managing paradox. To this end, let us step back to consider the four conflicting forces at the heart of team life (see **Exhibit 3**).

**Embrace individual differences and collective identity and goals** As discussed earlier, team effectiveness usually demands a mix of diverse individuals. For the team to benefit from the diversity, the team has to have a process that allows for the different voices—perspectives, priorities, styles—to be expressed and heard. To the extent that these different voices are in fact brought into the open, there will inevitably be conflict and perhaps competition among team members. Too much conflict and competition, however, can lead to a "win/loss" mindset instead of a problem-solving collaborative approach to working out issues. The goal is to integrate the individual differences and mobilize them in pursuit of the team's common objective. Effective teams allow for individual difference and freedom, yet have a team agenda in place to which all team members are committed.

**Foster support and confrontation among team members**<sup>39</sup> If team member diversity is to be acknowledged and differences of opinion encouraged, the team needs to develop a culture of trust and psychological safety that encourages team members to support one another.<sup>40</sup> In such a culture, team

members are cohesive. They are genuinely interested in what others think; they are willing to listen to and clarify what is being said. They are open to accepting the leadership and influence of others whose expertise, information, or experience are relevant to the decision or task at hand.

However, if the team members become *too* supportive of one another, they begin to stop confronting each other. In very cohesive groups, strong norms to preserve harmonious and friendly relationships can evolve and "groupthink," as opposed to critical thinking, can occur. Members will stop critiquing each other's decisions and actions, suppressing their own thoughts and feelings, sometimes at considerable personal cost. The team will end up making decisions with which some individual members privately disagree because no one wants to be responsible for creating conflict. This is more likely to occur in senior teams as time passes without turnover.<sup>41</sup>

Conflict management in senior teams is a key challenge, so we are going to take the space here to delve more deeply into the topic. If a team is to become highly productive, its ability to allow constructive conflict and creative abrasion is vital.<sup>42</sup> However, as Eisenhardt et al. noted in "How Management Teams Can Have a Good Fight," the political complexity of senior teams makes honest conflict difficult.<sup>43</sup> A candid discussion of team members' different points of view and frank questioning of underlying assumptions results in stronger, more creative decisions. This kind of conflict, known as task conflict because it relates to the work of the team, is healthy and essential to a high-producing team.<sup>44</sup> Conflict, however, is not always constructive. Escalating disagreement can create stress, strained emotions, and tense relationships among team members. This kind of conflict, known as affective or interpersonal conflict, can quickly undermine the effectiveness of a team. These negative emotions can lead team members to personalize substantive debates and develop cycles of negative attributions about the motives and capabilities of other team members.

Effective teams seek to engage in task conflict while minimizing affective conflict.<sup>45</sup> As David Hume, a philosopher, put it, "truth springs from arguments amongst friends." This is easier said than done because of the conscious and unconscious concerns team members bring to the table. Team members are grappling with three loaded questions, "Am I accepted? Do I have value? Do I have influence?"<sup>46</sup> Because members often seek the answers to these questions in the interaction of the group, they can take task conflict personally. One of the main benefits of teamwork is the diversity of viewpoints team members bring to bear on their task. If conflict is a problem in the team (either the lack of task conflict or the presence of affective conflict), then it is very unlikely that all those points of view will be heard. It is also less likely that team members will share sensitive information or feel comfortable pointing out inconsistencies in others' thinking.

Once affective conflict has emerged, it is important not to ignore its existence. Unfortunately, many groups in business develop norms that allow only for the expression of positive feelings or feelings of disagreement. The problem with suppressing strong negative feelings is that they usually resurface later. For example, a person who is angry about what someone said in an earlier meeting might actually be unknowingly retaliating later in the discussion when he or she disagrees with that person or criticizes his or her idea regardless of its merit. Retaliation is usually disguised in terms of substantive matters and often has only a hint of irrationality to it. For example, as individuals pursue their personal agendas or jockey for power and status in the team, problem-solving meetings can degenerate into speech-making sessions or polemic debates in which antagonists strive to win arguments rather than address problems. As a rule, addressing such behavior as soon as possible is better; the longer it is allowed to go on, the harder it will be for the team to discuss the problem as frustrations and anger rise.

**Focus on performance *and* learning and development** The third paradox is focusing simultaneously on current performance and on learning. Our competitive environment exerts a great deal of pressure to focus on current performance. But, it is critical that senior teams devote attention to

the long-term health of the organization, setting strategic direction and building organizational capabilities. Producing results today while having an equally strong concern for generating innovation for tomorrow is not easy given the pressures managers face. Trade-offs between making a particular decision "correctly" or using it as a developmental experience will sometimes have to be made. Mistakes have to be treated as sources of learning rather than simply reasons for punishment, if risk-taking, and hence development and innovation, are to be encouraged.

The senior team is an important forum for testing and developing the leadership and general management competencies of team members. One CEO of a start-up who had a relatively unseasoned team had to learn to "resist the temptation" to provide answers to recalcitrant problems he had delegated to members of his senior team. Instead, he invested time in team meetings to let them engage in joint problem-solving, enabling them to develop their business judgment. Rather than seeking resolution about an issue from the executive on the team with the most relevant expertise, it can pay to delegate that issue to another executive who needs to develop that area of expertise. Having executives do the same thing repetitively can reduce their personal satisfaction and commitment to the company. A professional service firm found in exit interviews that key executives were leaving because they were not permitted to explore new areas of the business. The Managing Director had been reluctant to rotate people's assignments; clients preferred continuity. But his single-minded focus on current performance and needs led him to lose executives and compromise client relationships anyway.

**Rely on managerial authority and team member discretion and autonomy** The fourth paradox involves negotiating a delicate balance between the authority of the leader and the discretion and autonomy of the team.<sup>47</sup> Team leaders cannot delegate final accountability for the team's performance, and delegation does not mean giving up control. The more autonomy given to the team members, the more important it is that they be committed to a common agenda (i.e., the control mechanism). More effective teams tend to be flexible; they balance the authority between the team leader and the team in ways best suited to the issue at hand as outlined in our discussion of decision rights. In fact, in well-functioning teams in which there is a high degree of mutual trust, leaders are given more latitude to decide things without having to explain or justify their actions. While in less effective teams where there is often little trust, team members will question even the most innocent or innocuous suggestion the team leader makes.

### *Managing Paradox as Leadership Style*

These paradoxes can be thought of as four continua of one's leadership style. Team leaders are often most comfortable operating at one end or the other of the continua. An executive's style impacts team culture and process, and hence, team effectiveness, so it is critical executives be aware of their style. A team leader needs to pay attention to how he or she makes team members *feel*. A leader should be especially aware of unintended consequences of his or her style. For example, one leader encouraged "healthy competition" among the team members to "raise the performance bar." Indeed, the performance bar was raised, but she soon discovered that the team was becoming inwardly focused. The members seemed to devote more attention to internal political issues than was appropriate. The leader also noticed the development of competing coalitions as executives built alliances to protect their particular fiefdoms. If dominant coalitions emerge they are difficult to dismantle and often act primarily to maintain their power position, rather than in the best interests of the organization.

The people who are most effective team leaders are versatile and possess the ability to adapt their behavior (or place on the continua) to the specific needs of the situation.<sup>48</sup> Developing this capacity requires empathic skills, practice and commitment. Adding a new behavior to one's natural repertoire of behaviors takes about six months. Without feedback on style, it is hard to appreciate the gaps between intent and impact. Unless team leaders demonstrate openness to others' opinions, people will

be reluctant to honestly tell senior team leaders how they feel about them because of their seniority. If executives punish the messenger of bad news, they will end up surrounding themselves with “yes sayers.” More and more companies are implementing 360° feedback systems to combat this dilemma.

### *Attending to the Triangle of Relationships*

Senior executives have to concern themselves with three sets of relationships: their relationship to each of the team members as individuals; their relationship to the team as a whole; and each individuals' relationship to the team as a whole. Relationships along one leg of the triangle are affected by relationships along the others. In teams where the leader is the equivalent of the CEO, managing these relationships carefully is even more important because of the increased power-distance between the team leader and the team members (e.g., a belief among team members that the leader has ‘favorites’ can be quite damaging). Hirschhorn describes the downward spiral of mistrust and poor performance that can occur when managers fail to balance their attention and manage the triangle of relationships:

For example:

- The executive pays too much attention to his role as the leader of the whole team.
- He neglects some members' feelings that their distinctive contributions are not being acknowledged.
- Some members withhold their best thinking from the team.
- The team seems passive and uninvolved.
- The executive feels that the team is “ungrateful” because he has been emphasizing how he wants to be the manager to the *whole* team, and they are not responding.

Similarly,

- An executive pays too much attention to each of her individual relationships with each of the team members.
- Many team members feel that they have a special relationship with the team leader.
- Some team members feel that they can represent the leader’s authority in the group, that they are the team’s rightful leaders.
- Team members find it difficult to work together.
- The executive, therefore, justifies her neglect of the team as a whole, since, after all, they can't work together.<sup>49</sup>

### **A New Strategic Imperative**

Out of necessity, more and more executives have shifted from dealing with problems themselves or on a one-on-one basis to solving problems collectively in senior teams. Too often, however, senior teams do not live up to their potential because of the complexities of team life. Effective senior teams do not evolve naturally. Their leaders have to proactively build the collection of individuals who work with them into a team (see **Exhibit 4** for a checklist to help with this task). Admittedly, this is uncomfortable for many. It is, as one executive driving a corporate turn-around explained, a new and challenging way of operating:

You can't mandate that people work like a team. You can't mandate that as a priority—that is unless you're a fool. These things come subtly. People have to *want* to work together; they have to see how to do it. There has to be an environment for it and that takes time. It's my highest priority right now but I don't write it down anywhere because it's not like other

priorities. If I told corporate that building a team was my prime goal they'd tell me, so what? They'd expect that as part of making things better.<sup>50</sup>

## Appendix: Leading and Building Global Teams

*Culture causes members to see reality very differently. Each of us believes, of course, that our perception of reality is the correct one. Culture, which we begin learning almost at birth, leads us to believe that our way of thinking, acting, and doing things is the only rational way of thinking, acting, and doing. But, to impose our way of seeing things and doing things will seem strange, ridiculous, or unfair to someone of another culture.<sup>51</sup>*

*-Michael J. Marquadt and Lisa Horvath in Global Teams*

With the globalization of the economy, many executives have found themselves in charge of global teams, that is, teams composed of people from different nations. Research on what it takes to lead these teams effectively is still in its infancy. In the followings pages, we highlight the key findings of this work and its implications for action.

### Does Nationality Make a Difference?

Scholars do not yet agree about the relative impact nationality plays in determining an individual's behavior and the group dynamics of a global team. Indeed, an individual's behavior on a team may be affected by a number of factors, including nationality, business/organizational experiences, and other, nonwork-related life experiences (see **Exhibit 5**).<sup>52</sup> For example, research suggests that organizational culture can reinforce or reduce the impact of nationality on an individual's behavior.<sup>53</sup> In addition, the more individuals have been exposed to other nationalities, the less likely they are to conform to the behavior associated with their own nationality.<sup>54</sup>

There is growing evidence, however, that nationality does impact team functioning to the extent that nationality affects team members' perceptions, behavior, and interactions. Nationality has been found to affect individuals in a variety of ways: it influences individuals' cognitive schema (e.g., assumptions, perceptions, knowledge), values, demeanor (e.g., preferred nonverbal communication patterns) and language—and consequently, their behavior on global teams. Diversity in demeanor (conversational style, emotional expression, punctuality, body language) can result in significant costs in terms of interpersonal tension and mistrust. Small, seemingly trivial types of demeanor differences can matter a great deal, often aggravating stereotyping and resulting in breakdowns in cohesion and communication. Some effects of diversity, such as differences in demeanor, are readily apparent, others, like differences in values, are more difficult to discern. For example, there are cross-national differences on the individualism-collectivism dimension.<sup>55</sup> In individualistic cultures (e.g., the United States and the Netherlands), people tend to use personal characteristics and achievements to define themselves, view relationships as more short-term, and value individual welfare over that of the group. In contrast, in collectivistic cultures (e.g., Japan and Brazil), people tend to be highly committed to the interests of the group with whom they identify; they value group harmony, unity, and loyalty over individual identity and accomplishment. Not surprisingly, team-based work designs have been easier to implement in countries with collectivistic as opposed to individualistic cultures.<sup>56</sup>

We must emphasize that the findings of research on cross-national differences describe differences in *central tendencies* across a population. The behavior of a particular individual of a given nationality may *not* conform to that of the national average. For example, Hofstede found some managers from the United States who held a more collectivistic orientation than many of the managers he studied in Japan.

## The Impact of Diversity

Teams composed of individuals with diverse national backgrounds can face special challenges in functioning effectively, but also have particular advantages that enrich their performance. Adler summarizes the disadvantages and advantages of cultural diversity in teams:

Diversity makes group functioning more difficult because it becomes more difficult to see situations in similar ways, understand them in similar ways, and act on them in similar ways. Diversity makes reaching agreement more difficult. Employees from the same culture . . . trust each other more readily. In culturally diverse groups, misperception, misinterpretation, misevaluation and miscommunication abound. Stress levels increase, and employees frequently disagree, implicitly and explicitly, on expectations, the appropriateness of information, the [or] particular decisions that must be taken. Diversity increases the ambiguity, complexity and inherent confusion in the group's process. These process losses diminish productivity.

Although encountering more process problems, culturally diverse groups also have the potential to work more productively than do homogeneous groups because their wide range of human resources allows them to function more creatively . . . multicultural groups invent more options and create more solutions than do single culture groups. Diversity makes it easier for groups to create more and better ideas. It allows them to avoid the trap of "groupthink." It often forces members to pay closer attention to the contributions of colleagues.<sup>57</sup>

**Team Agenda** Whether or not a global team will be able to benefit from its diversity in part depends upon its agenda or task. Research shows that multinational diversity creates the most difficulties for teams involved in coordinative tasks—such as executing an already developed business strategy which involves elaborate and well-orchestrated interaction among team members. Such tasks do not require creativity as much as interpersonal reliability, speed and perhaps most importantly timely mutual adjustment among team members. Teams engaged in computational tasks (tasks in which a bounded amount of fairly clearcut information needs to be assembled and analyzed) are little affected by their global nature, and teams engaged in more creative tasks (such as global strategy development) benefit from their “heterogeneity in values and cognitions.”<sup>58</sup>

**Team Composition** The diversity of a group depends not only on the number of members with different nationalities, but also on how different these nationalities are from each other. Furthermore, as the number of team members with widely different cultural backgrounds increases, the cultural “distance” between each nationality increases as well.<sup>59</sup> For example, in a longitudinal study of 30 global teams in a cross-section of industries, Hambrick, Davidson, Snell, and Snow examined the impact of “amount of diversity” on team performance. They concluded that, “...a group that consists of Norwegians and Swedes is not as diverse as a group that consists of Norwegians and Saudis, which in turn is not as diverse as a group of Norwegians, Saudis and Americans.” The greater context of the team’s organization also affects the extent to which nationality differences are noted and reacted to. The global teams in a multinational energy company with staffing policies of posting employees in various regions of the world over the course of their careers, might experience fewer problems than teams in a high technology company that was created through national acquisitions and whose team is made up of individuals with little international business experience. Other things being equal, the more heterogeneous the workforce of an organization, the less likely diversity within the team will be associated with problems.<sup>60</sup>

The practical implications of these findings are not straightforward. A team leader often does not have much control over the team’s task and/or amount and type of diversity; the leader inherits particular team members as a by-product of the company’s strategy and human resource policies.



But, at least, team leaders should be cognizant of the additional complexities their particular team might face given its work and composition.

## Special Process Challenges

**Shaping a Common Culture** There are no universal expectations or norms for how team leaders or members are to behave. As with other aspects of global teams, the rule here is assume nothing, and explicitly state everything. Thus, it is wise to discuss with the team, at the beginning of the relationship, the role the team leader will take, what the team can expect from the leader, and the kind of the team culture and process that would be most effective. These conversations are not easy to have. Some team members will be reluctant to even admit that there might be cultural differences for fear of accusations of bias. But the truth is that many of us do hold beliefs and attitudes (both positive and negative) about people from different nations, and, as described earlier, there is evidence that some differences do exist. The team leader should role model and reward team member's for evaluating each other on the merits of their ideas and performance, thereby discouraging the unconscious, and all too easy tendency, of stereotyping along national lines. Executives need to familiarize themselves and their teams with the different cultural backgrounds of the team's members and the way in which the different backgrounds might impact expectations about the appropriate team member behavior. In particular, team members can be sensitized about how the typical demeanors of their own nationalities might be viewed by others. This will help dispel erroneous stereotypes the team may hold.

The team leader needs to address two areas of culture in particular, subgrouping and communications norms.

**Subgrouping** Global teams have the potential to break down into informal subgroups along national lines. Considerable research shows that individuals are more likely to feel comfortable with and communicate with others who are similar to them. In a global team, this can be a strength, as each member may bring to the team access to different networks and diverse sources of knowledge. The strength becomes a weakness, however, if there is no integration across the different national subgroups and/or competing coalitions evolve along national lines.<sup>61</sup> Teams with individual representatives from many countries do not have pre-existing, natural subgroups and are more likely to form their own group identity.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, teams with a few small groups of people from different nations are in particular danger of falling into distinct coalitions. If the team's task encourages competition among team members than these tendencies will be exacerbated.<sup>63</sup> Setting a clear and compelling team agenda and shaping a culture which encourages rigorous decision-making and values diversity can help overcome the potential negative consequences of subgrouping.

**Communication** As we discussed in the facilitating team process section earlier in this note, teams develop norms about communication. Because communication across cultural and language barriers can be daunting, establishing appropriate communication norms is key in global teams. The team needs to be aware of and sensitive to the different preferences each member has in communication. For example, team leaders should intervene if team members who speak more slowly (because they are using a second language or simply have a naturally slower pace) are frequently interrupted. Team leaders should also pay attention to how team members prefer to deal with conflict. In some countries it is acceptable, and perhaps even valued, for team members to state explicitly when they do not agree with each other. In contrast, in other countries, team members might express their disagreement by breaking eye contact or making non-committal statements that the others can choose to pursue. Optimizing the participation of each team member requires adaptation on everyone's part. Working together to develop communication strategies, team

members with less direct styles of communication may need to learn to be more direct, and those with more direct styles may need to learn to discern the cues that signal that their less direct colleagues wish to be queried so they can contribute.

Global team leaders also need to assess the empathic and active listening capabilities of team members. Most executives are trained to be advocates.<sup>64</sup> They are rewarded for being problem solvers—for figuring out what should be done, putting forth their plans for action, and influencing others to adopt them. In contrast, their inquiry skills—the ability to ask questions—have gone relatively undeveloped and unrecognized. But, as executives grapple with complex issues, divergent from their personal experiences, inquiry skills become essential. Executives need to access and embrace the diverse expertise and perspectives of other people. They need to learn how to balance advocacy and inquiry to promote active listening and mutual learning.<sup>65</sup>

In active listening, the speaker states his or her point of view. The listener replies with what he or she understands the speaker to be saying and makes inquiries if he or she does not. This process continues until the speaker agrees that the listener's reply reflects an understanding of the speaker's initial statement. As you might guess, active listening takes time and attention, especially at first. But, it is an exercise that can expose team members' assumptions and hence prevent misunderstandings. For example, after months of unsuccessful discussion about reducing overhead, an American executive of a health organization was very frustrated. When he stopped advocating and began inquiring more, the executive learned that three of his German team members had no idea what he meant by "overhead." One member had looked it up in his dictionary and only found "overhead projector!" This kind of example may seem silly, but we could report hundreds of them. Videotaping an important meeting of the team can be an important tool to assess the effectiveness of the team's communication.<sup>66</sup> This can be a powerful, but threatening intervention. If the team leader has not been engaged in coaching the team, this is probably not the place to start.

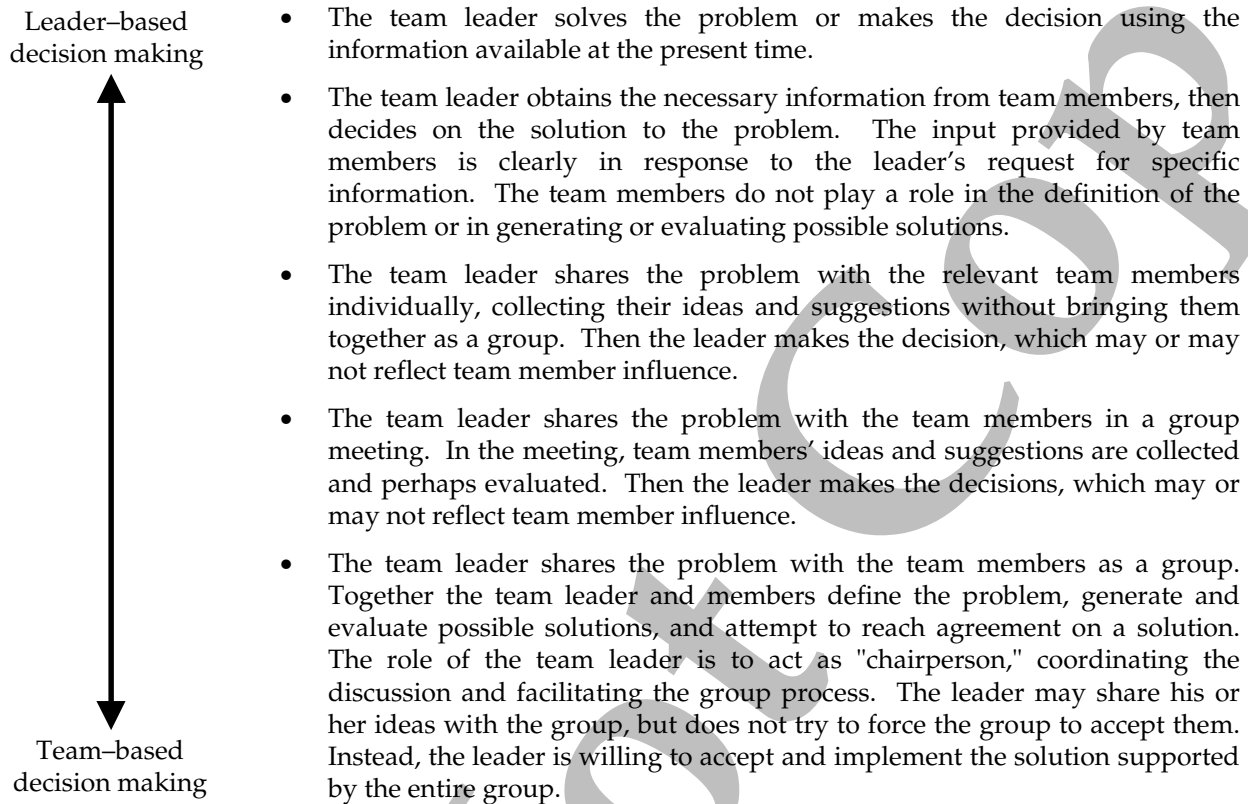
**Communication in Virtual Teams** The challenges of communicating within a global team are compounded when global teams are also virtual (as many of them are). We all rely on context—gestures, facial expressions, background information, and other non-verbal cues—to infer meaning and build trust. The tools through which virtual teams frequently communicate (e.g. email, fax, telephone, "virtual workspaces") create environments where trust development is difficult because the context around the communication is often limited. This can lead to unintended consequences. For example, when communicating through email, individuals are less likely to share information with each other and more likely to escalate conflict than in face-to-face communication.<sup>67</sup> These dynamics are especially important to keep in mind when leading global teams made up of members from what are referred to as "high context" cultures. In high context societies, such as Japan, China or Mexico, the context around the spoken or written word may be as important or more important than the actual words themselves. Countries such as Germany and English Canada are considered low context societies, where the facts are the most central aspect of communication, and frequently provide adequate information for decision-making.<sup>68</sup>

Some of the negative attributes of using these communication tools can be mitigated if the parties have already met face-to-face. Executives are often reluctant to hold face-to-face meetings because they are so expensive in both time and cost. But most executives with experience leading global teams have come to value the investment. If periodic meetings are not possible, team leaders should insure that their teams take time at the beginning of projects to share background information—an important antecedent of trust that is frequently neglected in digital communication. The team should also develop guidelines for the use of virtual communication tools (e.g., what kinds of communication are better disseminated in what media, when it is appropriate to use "cc" or "bcc").

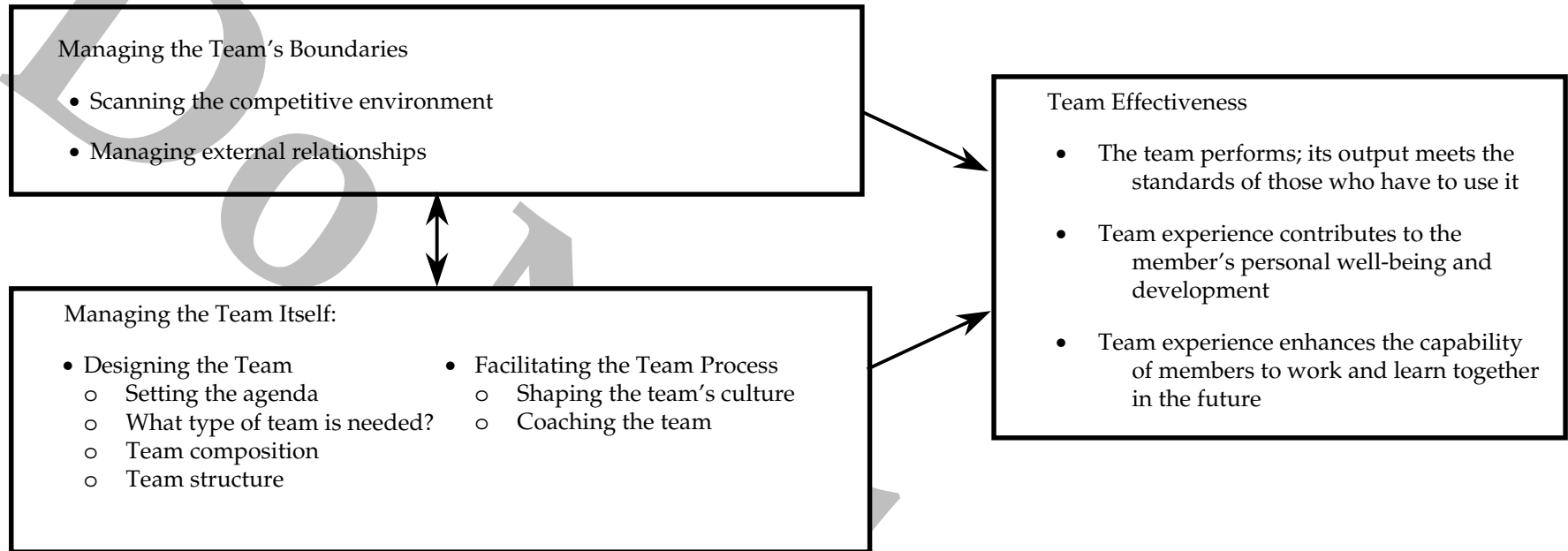
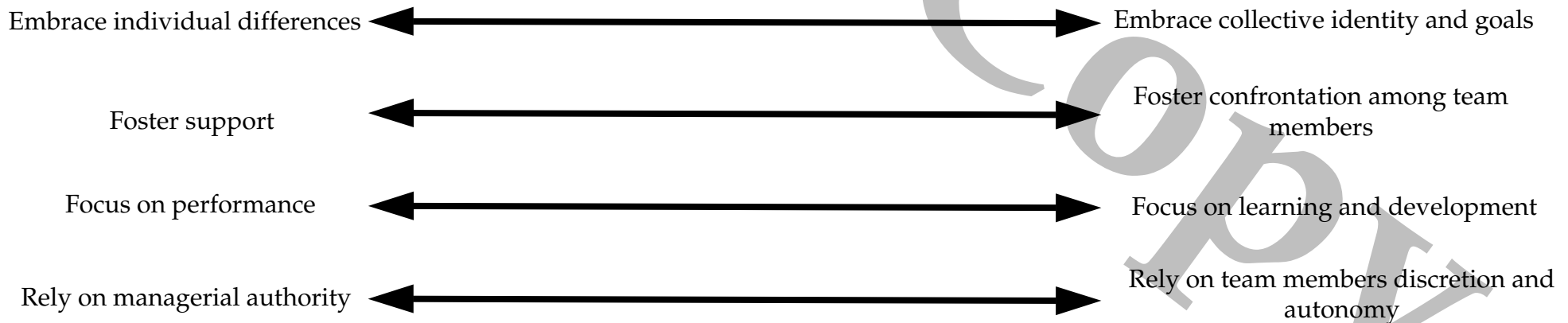
## Building Trust

The essential challenge facing the team leader is the development of trust within the team. An integral step in building trust is acknowledging the special challenges and opportunities of global teams. While that may seem obvious, the majority of executives who work abroad receive no cultural training or preparation.<sup>69</sup> This is where the team leader's role as coach and guide becomes critical. Only when team members are aware of the potential impact of diversity, can the whole team work together to avoid the pitfalls and maximize the potential of cross-national collaboration.

Team leaders should ensure *all* members of the team are prepared to adapt to each other. Too often, team members in the that minority—those whose nationalities are different from most of the team—have less power and influence and do the lion's share of adaptation in global teams. If adaptation is not reciprocal, developing a feeling of mutual trust among team members is difficult. Only senior teams comprised of members who trust each other will be able to address the complex decisions that they must make on behalf of their organizations.

**Exhibit 1** Decision Rights Framework

Source: Author

**Exhibit 2** Managing Your Team**Exhibit 3** Managing Paradox

**Exhibit 4 A Checklist for Senior Team Leaders****Do you manage the team's context?**

- ✓ Are you ensuring that information flow in both directions between the team and its constituencies?
- ✓ Do you act to remove barriers for the team, such as political roadblocks?
- ✓ Do you fight for the resources the team needs and promote the team's interests with key stakeholders in the organization?

**Have you put conditions in place for team effectiveness?**

- ✓ Does the team have a clear mandate or purpose?
- ✓ Are the right people on the team? What shortcomings need to be addressed?
- ✓ Has the team structured itself so that work can be done efficiently?

**Has your team agreed upon a common, meaningful performance goal?**

- ✓ Have you clarified expectations and deliverables which are linked to the agenda?
- ✓ Do you revisit the goal frequently to insure the team is still committed to it, and it remains meaningful?

**Do you have a rigorous decision-making process?**

- ✓ Does the team spend sufficient time identifying and framing the problem?
- ✓ Are information and alternatives identified and examined thoroughly?
- ✓ Has the team developed a decisions-rights framework? How does the team ultimately make decisions? Is the team aware of and comfortable with the process that is used?

**Do you facilitate the development of appropriate norms and rules of engagement?**

- ✓ Do you encourage and support task conflict?
- ✓ Do you encourage collaboration and make the team a safe place in which to share sensitive information?
- ✓ Do you encourage frequent process reflections?
- ✓ Do you treat mistakes as a source of learning rather than a reason to punish?
- ✓ Do you think about and describe your role in team terms instead of individual or hierarchical terms?

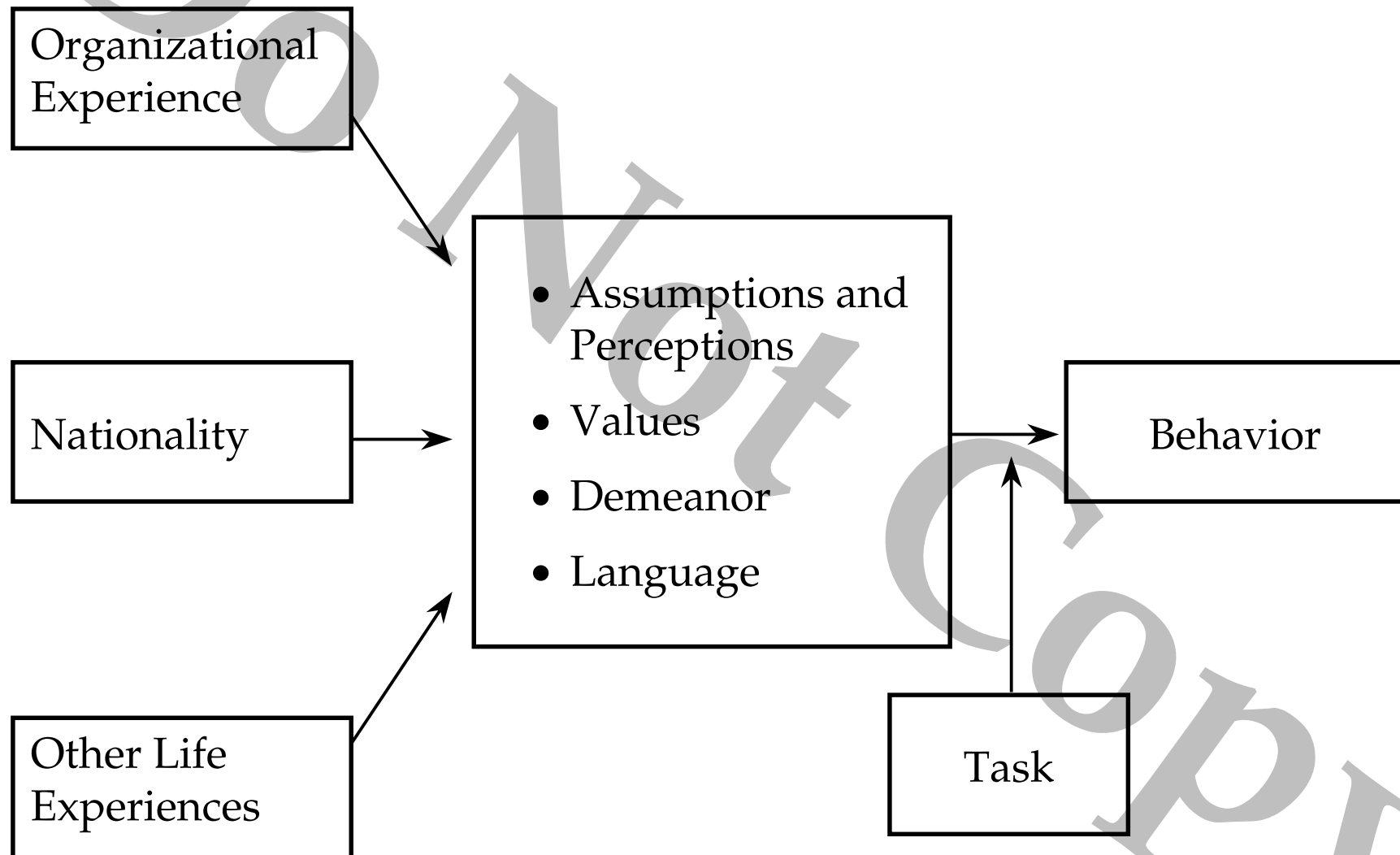
**Do you facilitate communication within the team? Do other team members?**

- ✓ Do you keep track of who is participating and encourage those who are not?
- ✓ Do you make space for different conversational and participation styles?
- ✓ Do you encourage active listening? Does your team concentrate on what is meant rather than how it is said?
- ✓ Is influence based on task-relevant knowledge and skill rather than external status and personal dominance?

**Are you sensitive to team diversity?**

- ✓ Do team members make an effort to understand and adapt to each other's working styles?
- ✓ Do team members understand how diversity, such as demographic differences, might impact members' participation and influence?
- ✓ Has the team discussed process strategies for fully utilizing and embracing diversity?

Exhibit 5 Impact of Nationality on Individual Behavior



Source: Hambrick, et al.

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There have been countless books and articles written on leading teams, especially in recent years as organizations have begun to rely more heavily on teamwork as a way of adapting to the current competitive environment. If you would like to read more about leading your team, the following references are a good place to start. (Note: We have not included readings from the vast literature on leadership; however, much of that work touches at least indirectly on team management.)

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<sup>1</sup> This note addresses leading ongoing work teams as opposed to temporary work teams. By "leading a team," we mean leading the *group* performance of one's subordinates (especially one's direct reports) as opposed to managing their individual performance. Group performance is more than the simple sum of individual performance. Groups cannot be understood solely in terms of their collective individual member characteristics. Groups have their own dynamics (e.g., stages of development, problem-solving processes, norms, cohesiveness) which have an impact—positive or negative—on group performance.

<sup>2</sup> Rudi Gassner, speech at Harvard Business School, Cambridge, MA, October 8, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> D. C. Hambrick, "Fragmentation and the Other Problems CEOs Have with Their Top Management Teams," *California Management Review*, 37 (3), 1995: 110 – 127.

<sup>4</sup> Linda A. Hill and Maria T. Farkas, *A Note on Team Process*, HBS No. 402-032.

<sup>5</sup> See for example, J. R. Hackman (ed.), *Groups that Work (and Those that Don't)*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> See P. M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, New York: Doubleday Currency, 1990. Senge goes on to note that team learning in other domains such as team sports and the performing arts is more the norm than the exception. It is no accident that in recent years, management researchers have begun to study how sports team coaches and orchestra conductors do their work. For more on team learning, see David Garvin, *Learning in Action: A Guide to Putting the Learning Organization to Work*, Boston: HBS Press, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of how team composition can improve boundary activity, see D. Ancona and D. Caldwell, "Compose Teams to Assure Successful Boundary Activity," E. A. Lock (Ed.), *Basic Principles of Organizational Behavior: A Handbook*, Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> For an in-depth discussion of managing the external relationships, see *Exercising Influence*, HBS No. 494-080.

<sup>9</sup> L. Hirschorn and T. Gilmore, "The New Boundaries of the 'Boundaryless' Company," *Harvard Business Review*, May-June 1992, 108.

<sup>10</sup> See for example, Roger Fisher and William Ury, with Bruce Patton, editor, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> See for example, Jeffrey Pfeffer, *Managing with Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations*, Boston: HBS Press, 1992.

<sup>12</sup> See for example, Linda A. Hill, *Power Dynamics in Organizations*, HBS No. 494-083.

<sup>13</sup> For further discussion on compensation, look at Jeffrey Pfeffer, "Six Dangerous Myths About Pay," *Harvard Business Review*, May/June, 1998: 115-117.

<sup>14</sup> See the sections on managing teams in R. L. Hughes, R. C. Ginnett, and G. J. Curphy, *Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience*, Homewood, IL: Irwin, 1993.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of 'real teams', see J. R. Katzenbach and D. K. Smith, "The Discipline of Teams," *Harvard Business Review*, March-April 1993: 111-124.

<sup>16</sup> See D. G. Ancona and D. A. Nadler, "Top Hats and Executive Tales: Designing the Senior Team," *Sloan Management Review*, Fall 1989: 19-28. They provide a framework for ascertaining what type of teamwork is needed given the team's "environmental and structural context."

<sup>17</sup> P. Drucker, "There's More than One Kind of Team," *Wall Street Journal*, February 11, 1992: 16.

<sup>18</sup> Jim Collins, "Level 5 Leadership: The Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve," *Harvard Business Review*, January 2001, 67 – 76.

<sup>19</sup> See for example, D. C. Hambrick, "Fragmentation and the Other Problems CEOs Have with Their Top Management Teams," *California Management Review*, 37 (3), 1995: 110 – 127.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, J.K. Murnighan and D.E. Conlon, "The Dynamics of Intense Work Groups: A Study of British String Quartets," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 36, June, 1991: 165-186.

<sup>21</sup> See for example D.A. Nadler, "Executive Team Effectiveness," *Executive Teams*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998: 21 – 39.

<sup>22</sup> W. K. Hengen, "Managing Moments of Truth," *Management Review*, 87 (8), 1998: 56 – 60.

<sup>23</sup> See for example, T. A. Judge and G. R. Ferris, "The Elusive Criterion of Fit in Human Resource Staffing Decisions," *Human Resource Planning*, 15, 1992: 47-67, for a description of typical pitfalls managers encounter when making hiring decisions, especially people "different from themselves."

<sup>24</sup> It is no accident that organizations are relying on more interfunctional (i.e., diverse) teams to get work done now than before. However, the relative benefits and costs of team homogeneity and heterogeneity seem to depend in part on the nature of the team's task (e.g., when efficiency is needed, more homogeneity should be sought; when creativity is important, then more heterogeneity is advantageous). In recent years, there has been an increase in research on the impact of demographic diversity (gender, race, ethnic origin, nationality) on team process and performance. There is still much to be learned in this area. See for example, W. E. Watson, K. Kumar, and L. K. Michaelson, "Cultural Diversity's Impact on Interaction Process and Performance: Comparing Homogeneous and Diverse Task Groups," *Academy of Management Journal*, 36, 1993: 590-602 or M. Marquardt and L. Horvath, *Global Teams*, Palo Alto: Davies-Black, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Noel Tichy and Ram Charan, "Speed, Simplicity, Self-Confidence: An Interview with Jack Welch," *Harvard Business Review*, September/October, 1998.

<sup>26</sup> Adapted from V. Vroom and P. Yetton, *Leadership and Decision Making*, Pittsburgh, PA: University Press, 1973.

<sup>27</sup> For more on role overlap and ambiguity in senior teams, see D. C. Hambrick, "Fragmentation and the Other Problems CEOs Have With Their Top Management Teams," *California Management Review*, 37 (3), 1995: 110 – 127, or Thomas M. Hout and John C. Carter, "Getting It Done: New Roles for Senior Executives," *Harvard Business Review*, November-December, 1995: 139 – 140.

<sup>28</sup> Synergy occurs when the added value of a team is greater than the "process loss," or overhead, incurred through coordinating collective work.

<sup>29</sup> See for example, E. H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991 for an in-depth discussion of culture.

<sup>30</sup> Norman R. F. Maier, "Assets and Liabilities in Group Problem Solving: The Need for an Integrative Function," *Psychological Review*, 74 (4), July 1967: 239 – 248.

<sup>31</sup> See for example, the classic article by R. Tannenbaum and W. H. Schmidt, "How to Choose a Leadership Pattern," *Harvard Business Review*, May-June 1973: 162-170.

<sup>32</sup> See Connie Gersick, "Time and Transition in Work Teams: Toward a New Model of Growth," *Academy of Management Journal*, 31 (1): 9 – 42.

<sup>33</sup> J. Pfeffer, *Managing with Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1992: 26.

<sup>34</sup> See for example, *Note on Performance Appraisal*, HBS No. 478-019. Although this note focuses on providing feedback to the individual subordinate, much of the advice is relevant to providing feedback to the team of subordinates—in particular the discussion of the trade-offs associated with the different feedback delivery strategies: "tell-sell," "tell-listen," and "joint problem-solving."

<sup>35</sup> See for example, *Note on Managing a Task Force*, HBS No. 478-002; although the note focuses on the management of a task force as opposed to an ongoing senior team, the discussions on managing early meetings and on group process offer relevant and helpful suggestions.

<sup>36</sup> See for example, D. L. Bradford and A. R. Cohen, *Managing for Excellence: The Guide to Developing High Performance Contemporary Organizations*, New York: Wiley, 1984 and R. Evered and J. Selman, "Coaching and the Art of Management," *Organizational Dynamics*, Autumn 1989: 16-32.

<sup>37</sup> Linda A. Hill and Maria T. Farkas, "Meg Whitman at eBay, Inc. (A)," HBS No. 401-024.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Parts of this section are excerpted and adapted from Linda A. Hill and Maria T. Farkas, *A Note on Team Process*, HBS No. 402-032.

<sup>40</sup> Amy Edmondson, Richard Bohmer, and Gary Pisano, "Speeding Up Team Learning," *Harvard Business Review*, October, 2001: 125 – 132.

<sup>41</sup> See for example, D. C. Hambrick, "Fragmentation and the Other Problems CEOs Have With Their Top Management Teams," *California Management Review*, 37 (3), 1995: 110 – 127.

<sup>42</sup> See for example, Dorothy Leonard-Barton and Walter Swap, *When Sparks Fly: Igniting Creativity in Groups*, Boston: HBS Press, 1999, or Warren Bennis and Patricia Ward Biederman, *Organizing Genius: The Secrets of Creative Collaboration*, New York: Addison-Wesley, 1997.

<sup>43</sup> K. M. Eisenhardt, J. L. Kahwajy, and L.J. Bourgeois III, "How Management Teams Can Have a Good Fight," *Harvard Business Review*, July / August 1997, HBS No. 97402.

<sup>44</sup> David L. Bradford and Allan R. Cohen, *Power Up: Transforming Organizations Through Shared Leadership*, New York: Wiley, 1998.

<sup>45</sup> David A. Garvin and Michael A. Roberto, "What You Don't Know About Making Decisions," *The Harvard Business Review*, September 2001: 108 – 116.

<sup>46</sup> David L. Bradford, "Building High Performing Teams," *The Portable MBA in Management*, New York: Wiley, 1993: 38 – 70.

<sup>47.</sup> See for example, D. A. Whetten and K. S. Cameron, *Developing Management Skills*, New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1993 for a review of the research on how to delegate effectively.

<sup>48.</sup> For more elaborated descriptions of the paradoxes inherent in team life, see for example D. L. Bradford and A. R. Cohen, *Managing for Excellence: The Guide to Developing High Performance Contemporary Organizations*, New York: Wiley, 1984 and K. K. Smith and D. N. Berg, *Paradoxes of Group Life: Understanding Conflict, Paralysis, and Movement in Group Dynamics*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987.

<sup>49.</sup> L. Hirschhorn, *Managing in the New Team Environment: Skills, Tools, and Methods*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1991: 14-16.

<sup>50.</sup> J. J. Gabarro, *The Dynamics of Taking Charge*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1987: 85-87. See also the research on why high-potential managers derail, M. M. Lombardo and C. D. McCauley, *The Dynamics of Management Derailment*, Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership, 1988.

<sup>51.</sup> Michael J. Marquadt and Lisa Horvath, *Global Teams*, Palo Alto: Davies-Black, 2001.

<sup>52.</sup> See for example, D. C. Hambrick, S. C. Davison, S. A. Snell, and C. C. Snow, *When Groups Consist of Multiple Nationalities: Toward a New Understanding of the Implications* and S. C. Davison, C. C. Snow, S. A. Snell, and D. C. Hambrick, *Creating High Performance Transnational Teams: Process, Phases, and Pitfalls*. Reports sponsored by and available from the International Consortium for Executive Development Research, Lexington, MA. Also, see R. M. Kanter and R. Corn, "Do Cultural Differences Make a Business Difference?: Contextual Factors Affecting Cross-Cultural Relationship Success," *Journal of Management Development*, special issue on cross-cultural management, Winter 1994.

<sup>53.</sup> See for example, Jennifer A. Chatman, Jeffrey T. Polzer, Sigal G. Barsade, Margaret A. Neale, "Being Different Yet Feeling Similar: The Influence of Demographic Composition and Organizational Culture on Work Processes and Outcomes," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 43, 1998: 749-780.

<sup>54.</sup> Donald C. Hambrick, Sue Canney Davison, Scott A. Snell, and Charles C. Snow, "When Groups Consist of Multiple Nationalities: Towards a New Understanding of the Implications," *Organization Studies*, Berlin, 1998: 181-205.

<sup>55.</sup> See for example, G. Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1984. See also D. Thomas and E. Heaphy, *International Use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®*, HBS No. 498-038.

<sup>56.</sup> See for example, M. Erez and P. C. Earley, *Culture, Self-Identity and Work*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993 and F. Trompenaars, *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., New York: McGraw Hill, 1998.

<sup>57.</sup> N. Adler, *International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), Boston: P. W. S. Kent Publishing Company: 128-129 and 132-133.

<sup>58.</sup> D. C. Hambrick, S. C. Davison, S. A. Snell, and C. C. Snow, *When Groups Consist of Multiple Nationalities: Toward a New Understanding of the Implications* (Report sponsored by and available from the International Consortium for Executive Development, Lexington, MA): 168.

<sup>59.</sup> Ibid, 157-158 and 172.

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<sup>60</sup> Frances J. Milliken and Luis L. Martins, "Searching for Common Threads: Understanding the Multiple Effects of Diversity in Organizational Groups," *Academy of Management Executive*, 21 (2), 1996: 402 – 433.

<sup>61</sup> Katherine Y. Williams and Charles A. O'Reilly, "Demography and Diversity in Organizations: A Review of 40 Years of Research," *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 20: 77 – 140.

<sup>62</sup> P. Cristopher Earley and Elaine Mosakowski, "Creating Hybrid Team Cultures: An Empirical Test of Transnational Team Functioning," *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(1), 26 – 49.

<sup>63</sup> Linda K. Larkey, "Toward a Theory of Communicative Interactions in Culturally Diverse Workgroups," *Academy of Management Executive*, 21 (2), 1996: 463 – 491.

<sup>64</sup> They report that managers, particularly in the United States and Europe, are trained and rewarded for being advocates.

<sup>65</sup> For a general examination of the importance of inquiry and listening, please refer to Carl R. Rogers and F.J. Roethlisberger, "Barriers and Gateways to Communication," *Harvard Business Review*, November/December 1991 or Linda A. Hill, *Building Effective One-on-One Work Relationships*, HBS No. 497-028.

<sup>66</sup> J. Distefano and M. Maznevski, "Creating Value with Diverse Teams in Global Management," *Organizational Dynamic*, 29 (1), 2000: 45-63.

<sup>67</sup> See for example, "The Electronic Negotiator," *Harvard Business Review*, January/February 2000: 2 – 3. For a reflection on the potential and pitfalls of "virtual workspaces" look at "Communicating with Virtual Project Teams," *Harvard Management Communication Letter*, HBS No. C00-12E.

<sup>68</sup> Deborah L. Duarte and Nancy Tennant Snyder, *Mastering Virtual Teams*, San-Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2001.

<sup>69</sup> Michael J. Marquadt and Lisa Horvath, *Global Teams*, Palo Alto: Davies-Black, 2001.