

Why Teams Underperform

Leadership Skills

Team FME

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Preface

Rebuilding an underperforming team can be a huge challenge. This eBook explains why teams underperform and provides practical advice about how to identify and fix performance problems.

You will learn:

- The four essential behaviors you must demonstrate in order to turn around an underperforming team.
- How to deal with the problems inherent in matrix or cross-functional teams where you do not have authority over all of the team members
- The six 'silent barriers' to performance that cannot be tackled directly because they result from issues that senior management prefers to ignore.
- How to recognize the symptoms of GroupThink and prevent it from becoming a problem in your team.
- How to stop Ingroup behavior having an adverse effect on your team's performance and reputation within the organization.

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Introduction

All teams experience difficulties from time to time and it is your responsibility as a manager to resolve any problems as quickly as possible. Some team problems can be traced to an individual team member who is not performing as expected or who is causing conflict within the team. Understanding what motivates people, as well as why they become disenchanted with their work will enable you to address these types of problem.

However, sometimes the lack of progress, poor productivity, or interpersonal conflict is not the fault of any one team member but is down to the way that the team is organized and managed. Proper goal setting, clear role definition, and having the necessary processes in place to deal with the day-to-day management of the team are all important, as is your ability to anticipate problems and identify the early signs of underperformance.

What is actually meant by an 'underperforming' team? Any full explanation would need to include specific details that relate to the exact situation and environment of the poorly performing team. But in general terms what is meant by underperformance can be summarized in the following sentence:

An individual, team, division, or corporation is said to be 'underperforming' when their actual achievements fall below the level of performance required or a predefined objective is not attained.

For the majority of managers the required level of achievement is defined in your annual appraisal and should tie into your organization's mission. Your level of performance should be regularly monitored so that any aspect of poor performance does not come as a surprise to either you or your manager.

You should be regularly assessing, measuring, and reporting back to your team so that they know how well they are performing. The earlier you can isolate problems the sooner you can look for ways to resolve them.

There has been a lot of academic study into the reasons why teams underperform and some of this work is directly applicable to the types of team that you will find yourself responsible for. These are: Herzberg's Hygiene Theory, Hackman's work on leading teams, and the Six Silent Barriers of Beer et al. An understanding of this research will help you to understand why it is that teams underperform and what you can do about it.

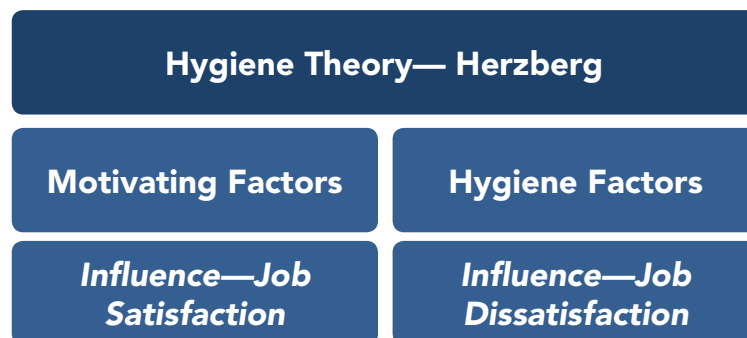
In addition, many project teams find themselves operating in a 'Matrix Management Environment,' which can create a specific set of problems that the project manager or team leader needs to be aware of from project inception.

Finally, there are two types of negative behavior that can develop when a group of people are working closely together. These can be very destructive because the team appears to be working well together and problems may not be obvious until it is too late to do anything about them.

This eBook describes all of these reasons why teams underperform and provides practical advice about how to identify and fix performance problems.

Herzberg's Hygiene Theory

The first piece of research that interests us was undertaken by Fredrick Herzberg in 1959 to investigate 'satisfaction at work.' The result of this research became known as Herzberg's Hygiene Theory (or the Two Factor Theory) and showed that those factors that gave a person satisfaction at work and those that resulted in dissatisfaction are quite different in nature.



Herzberg referred to those things that influenced job satisfaction as 'Motivating Factors,' whilst he called those that influenced dissatisfaction at work 'Hygiene Factors.'

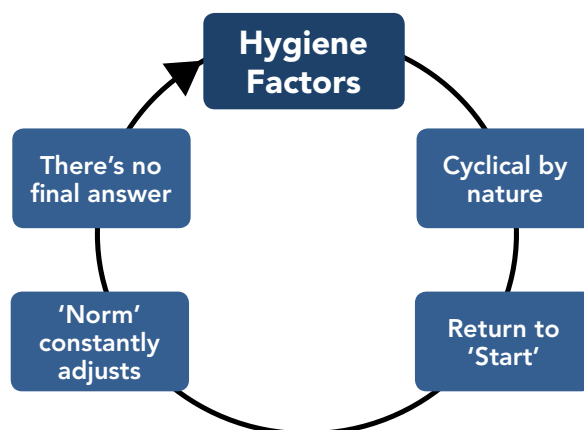
Motivating factors include: achievement, recognition, challenge, responsibility, promotion, and personal growth. As a manager, you can improve a team member's satisfaction in their work by making positive changes to the work itself, for example by providing opportunities to achieve goals or take on more responsibility.



To prevent dissatisfaction you should focus your efforts on hygiene factors. These include things like salary, benefits, job security, working conditions, supervision, company policy, procedures, and relationships with co-workers.

His findings showed that these two sets of factors act independently of each other and that increasing your team's satisfaction level will not automatically lead to a lower level of dissatisfaction. For example, if a team member is not motivated by the goals they are set then this problem will not go away simply because they are given a pay rise.

This is because the increased level of pay quickly becomes the norm. The same thing applies to improvements in working conditions, better relationships within their team, or any of the other hygiene factors already mentioned.



The cyclical nature of these hygiene factors means that you cannot reap the benefit of improving any of them for very long. The best that you can hope for is to keep the dissatisfaction at a sufficiently low level to avoid excessive staff turnover and absenteeism.

You can only make a lasting positive impact on your team's attitude by working on both hygiene factors and motivating factors together on an ongoing basis.

If you inherit a poorly performing team when you take on a new role or join a new organization your first action should be to identify the negative factors causing poor performance. You can then assess how easily you can alter the hygiene factors and what changes to make to the motivating factors, because to make any real changes in performance you need to address both.

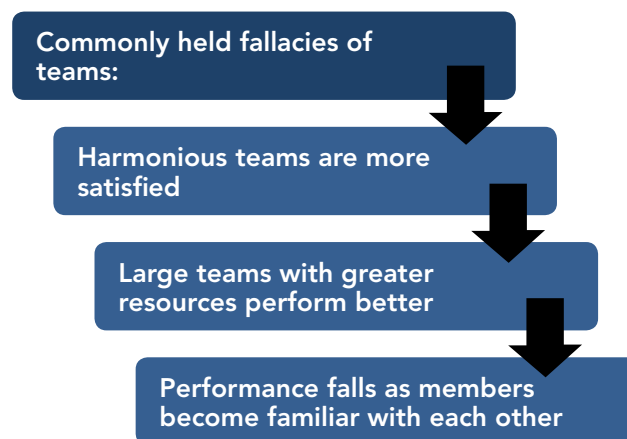
KEY POINTS

- ✓ Herzberg's Hygiene Theory shows that the factors that result in satisfaction at work and those that result in dissatisfaction are quite different in nature.
 - ✓ Motivating factors include: achievement, recognition, challenge, responsibility, promotion, and personal growth.
 - ✓ To prevent dissatisfaction you should focus your efforts on things like salary, benefits, job security, working conditions, supervision, company policy, procedures, and relationships with co-workers.
-

Leading Teams—Hackman

J. Richard Hackman, a Harvard University Professor of Social and Organizational Psychology, has spent his career analyzing team effectiveness. His research has shown that more often than not people work less effectively than one would expect. In many cases, team members have difficulty agreeing on the purpose of the team and the issues of coordination and motivation within the team erode the potential benefits gained from collaboration.

Hackman believes that a successful team usually has a disciplined and committed manager who determinedly sets the team goal, allows the team to select their own members and then define their own structure and processes. Unfortunately, this approach is rarely possible for you as a manager. In the real world senior management decide on a team's membership, and their reasoning for including certain individuals may be influenced by politics or simply by who is available.



In their recent research, Hackman and his colleagues James Burruss, Debra Nunes, and Ruth Wageman were able to disprove certain beliefs often associated with teams that perform well:

- Harmonious teams are more satisfied in their work
- Larger teams with greater resources perform better
- Performance falls off as team members become more familiar with each other

In their book, *Senior Leadership Teams*, they explain that even though teams may not be totally harmonious the members can still feel satisfied after performing a task well and receiving recognition for it. They found that the satisfaction orchestra members felt after playing had more to do with how well their performance was received than how the members felt about playing together.

Larger teams may have greater resources at their disposal, but they also have a far greater number of potential communication paths between members. As a manager you will find that as the size of the team you have to manage increases, so does the occurrence of disruptions and conflicts between members. Hackman and his fellow researchers recommend that team numbers remain in single digits, although this is not always possible with workplace teams.

The third misconception that Hackman and his team dispelled was the belief that newer teams outperform well-established ones. There is a lot of research that shows that performance does not fall off as the team members become more familiar and comfortable with each other. A study conducted by NASA showed that fatigued or tired crews that had a history of working as a team made around half the errors of a team made up of fresh pilots who had not flown together before.

KEY POINTS

- ✓ The issues of coordination and motivation within a team can erode the potential benefits gained from collaboration.
 - ✓ Hackman's research suggests that there are some commonly held fallacies about teams and that smaller teams who are familiar with each other often outperform larger teams with no experience of working together.
-

Six Silent Barriers—Beer et al.

Mike Beer, a Professor of Business Administration at the Harvard Business School, has identified six 'silent barriers' that cause teams to underperform.

People working within the organization recognize these barriers, but they cannot be tackled because they result from issues that senior management prefers to ignore.



These silent barriers are:

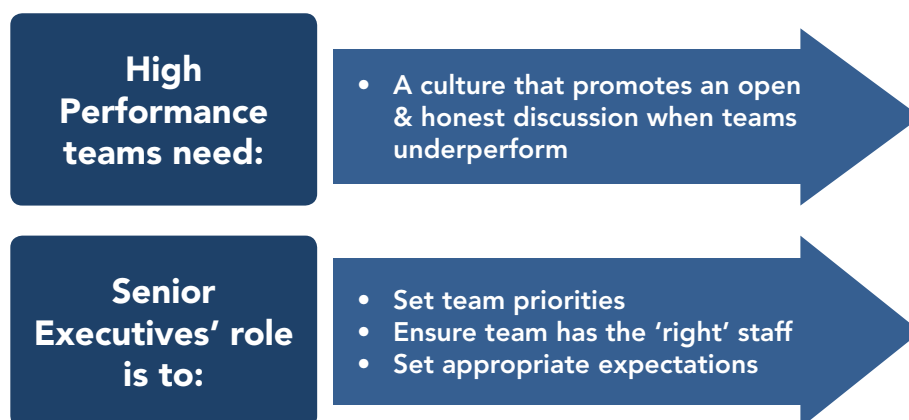
1. Unclear strategy and values, and conflicting priorities
2. An ineffective senior team
3. Leadership style is too top-down or too laissez faire
4. Poor horizontal coordination and communications
5. Inadequate leadership, management skills and development in the organization
6. Poor or closed vertical communications

Beer says,

'In organizations that exhibit these barriers, you see that the leadership team members are coming with their own agenda, and there is no effective senior team in place that is committed to the same strategy, priorities and values. The lower levels don't know what the top is trying to do and upper levels don't know what they want done. And there is silence; the lower level teams can't speak honestly with the top about what the problems are that block their efficacy—clear and common priorities and strategy or their pattern of management.'

Beer's conclusions are based on the work he and his colleagues have completed with several organizations, using a method called the Strategic Fitness Process, which utilizes organizations' employees as 'researchers.' In their work, Beer and his colleagues ask senior management teams to define their strategic direction in a two or three-page statement and to appoint a task force of 8-10 people who will go out and interview 100 employees across all parts of the organization.

Beer believes that solving the problems that these barriers create is the main issue for many managers. The process of reviewing and setting priorities is a continual one, which with careful monitoring shows when and where adjustments need to be made to ensure teams perform well.



Without these changes coming from the top levels organizations that have cross-functional teams will continue to be ineffective and show poor performance. This is espe-

cially true for global corporations where the need to coordinate across different business and geographic regions is essential.

Ultimately, senior management should aim to create a culture that allows constructive discussion on difficult issues without the need to find 'someone to blame.' To achieve this, the executive needs to define priorities, ensure the right employees are assigned to the right teams, and ensure that each team knows what is expected of it.

The findings of these research studies illustrate that some team performance problems may originate from cultural factors that you have no control over. Nonetheless, being aware of these issues should help you to understand why a team may be underperforming despite your best efforts.

KEY POINTS

- ✓ Mike Beer has identified six 'silent barriers' that cause teams to underperform.
 - ✓ These barriers cannot be tackled because they result from issues that senior management prefers to ignore.
 - ✓ These silent barriers are:
 - ✓ Unclear strategy and values, and conflicting priorities
 - ✓ An ineffective senior team
 - ✓ Leadership style is too top-down or too laissez faire
 - ✓ Poor horizontal coordination and communications
 - ✓ Inadequate leadership, management skills and development in the organization
 - ✓ Poor or closed vertical communications
-

Why do Teams Underperform?

Many of the factors highlighted by Herzberg, Hackman, and Beer are not things that you as a manager have direct control over. For example, you will need to work within existing organizational policy with regard to working conditions; your executive may not be prepared to adopt a culture where 'silent barriers' can be openly discussed; and you may not be able to respond to market pay increases when you have a defined salary/bonus budget.

However, there are some general symptoms that you can watch out for as manager. These will indicate that your team, or a member, is not performing as well as you would expect.

- Absences from the team and its activities that are lengthy and cannot be explained
- More frequent displays of conflict and frustration, often unjustified
- Lack of enthusiasm and motivation to perform tasks
- Rumors and gossip heard on the organization's grapevine about your team are on the increase
- A clique develops so that these people protect themselves from the stigma of poor performance

You will need to be constantly monitoring and observing how each of your team members is performing and look for signs of reduced productivity. Assessing how well your team's performance compares to other teams in your organization is also an essential part of your role. If you notice a reduction in performance, understanding why this has occurred and addressing it are essential.



The most common reasons teams or individuals underperform are:

- Lack of clarity and focus
- Lack of ability
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of direction
- Lack of motivation

Lack of Clarity and Focus

If team members keep on asking exactly what they should be doing, by when, and how they should actually perform the task then this indicates that their responsibilities have not been specified clearly enough.

This type of behavior may also imply that they need more feedback from you so that they understand how well you want them to do the job. Many jobs can be expanded to fit the time available, and you should regularly review the team's work to prevent this from happening. It is quite common to see team members spending a lot of time 'perfecting' things that don't really need it rather than doing an adequate job and then moving on to another task. For example, if a team member is preparing a document for use within the team, then you might consider accepting a less polished format than if it was going to be more widely circulated.

Lack of Ability

One of your members, or the team itself, may be underperforming because they have been assigned a task that they are not skilled or knowledgeable enough to undertake.

To prevent this situation arising, you should have an appreciation of each team member's capabilities. You can assess how much additional training and coaching you can offer to help develop their skills, but in the end you need to make a judgment on how well their skills match the task requirements. This inability to perform the task may also be due to a lack of resources, whether it be in terms of people, materials, or funds.

In your role as team leader you need to ensure that higher levels of management are made aware of the skill level of your team, manage their expectations of what tasks your team can accomplish, and feed back when constraints exist.

Finally, to ensure you only have capable members added to your team you should take an active role in the selection and induction of new members.

Lack of Confidence

Your team may find itself performing a new role or task following a reorganization or merger. This may result in a lower level of performance as the change causes the team to lose confidence in their abilities to handle the new tasks and processes.

Sometimes as a manager you will notice that an individual, despite having the right qualifications, just doesn't seem to perform as well as you expected. This can be because they don't possess the required behavioral skills, or they lack the interest to adjust and learn the new skills that are necessary for their role.

This person could also just not fit into the social make-up of your team even though they have the right skills. In this instance often the individual begins to feel unappreciated, and they may even feel ostracized by the rest of the team. As a consequence their performance declines, and the situation deteriorates because the rest of the team resent carrying an underperformer.

Lack of Direction

This is probably one of the most common reasons for underperformance. As a manager you should make certain that the goal and task descriptions you provide are as clear as possible. For more information on this topic you should see our eBook 'Personal Productivity—Effective Goal Setting,' which can be downloaded from www.free-management-ebooks.com.

If your own goals are poorly defined it will not help the performance of your team. This could be due to one of the 'silent barriers' described by Beer and his team of researchers. Often this results from senior management having hidden agendas, which undermine performance and bring about a culture of mistrust.

Lack of Motivation

Some of your team may just not care about doing a good job, and they may even avoid working altogether. This lack of motivation can have a variety of causes, including personal problems, lack of career development opportunities, and increased pressure because of reduced resources.

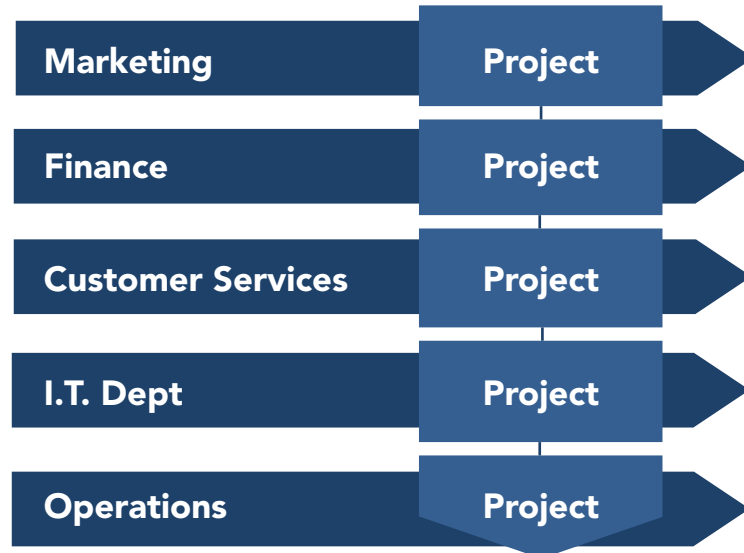
Motivating your team will often be handled as part of their appraisal system, but this is not enough in itself. You also need to be monitoring and feeding back to each individual how well he or she is doing on an ongoing basis. If the team is involved in boring or repetitive work then motivation may be your number one priority.

KEY POINT

- ✓ The most common reasons teams or individuals underperform are: lack of clarity and focus, lack of ability, lack of confidence, lack of direction and lack of motivation.

Matrix Management Issues

Many managers find themselves operating in a 'Matrix Management Environment.' Matrix or Cross-Functional management is a technique of managing people through a series of dual-reporting relationships instead of a more traditional linear management structure.



This style of management is popular in highly collaborative projects that bring individuals from functional departments (e.g. marketing, customer services, finance, etc.) into the project team. This means that most of the project members operate under a dual authority system—they report to their own line manager as well as the project manager.

For you as the project manager this means that you will have to ensure your communication channels between you and the line managers are effective. In addition, appreciating that the line managers' priorities are often going to be different to those of your project will help you when discussing the availability of resources. If not handled properly, this has the potential for conflict and confusion, which will inevitably lead to a decrease in performance.

One key aspect of maintaining your team's performance in this matrix structure is getting the 'right' resources at the time required by the plan. If your team members are willing but lack the necessary skills to perform their project role then the whole team's performance will decline.

The success of the matrix team structure is reliant on senior management's support for the project and for establishing the correct procedures and processes that support this type of environment.

KEY POINTS

- ✓ Matrix management is a technique of managing people through a series of dual-reporting relationships instead of a more traditional linear management structure.
 - ✓ This means that some team members operate under a dual authority system—they report to their own line manager as well as the project manager.
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Turning Underperformance Around

Warren Bennis is an American scholar, organizational consultant, and author, widely regarded as a pioneer of the contemporary field of Leadership Studies. He has written approximately 30 books on leadership. Bennis believes that the only way to get the best performance from your team is through your own behavior.

Does your behavior display that you know where you are going and why it is important that you get there?

Does it show that you care for each member of your team, the team as a whole, and attaining the team goal?

Bennis refers to four behaviors managers must become competent in to be good leaders. These are management of attention, meaning, trust, and self.

- Attention—sum up goals in a way team can buy into
- Meaning—clearly state aims and priorities
- Trust—build rapport and open, honest communication
- Self—lead by example

Bennis says that only when someone has learnt these competencies will they be able to display them in their behavior and become a good leader.

A common element of such behavior is the ability to communicate clearly and concisely with others. Good communication, whether verbal or written, should remove any uncertainty by using the S.S.U. principle in all exchanges.

Good Communicators:

Use Straightforward language

Make requests Specific

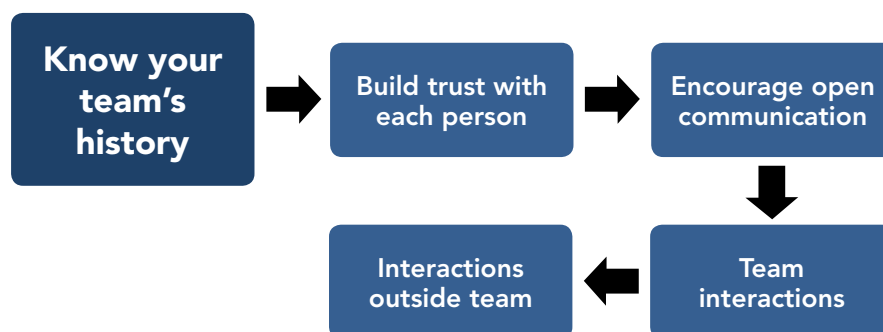
Check for Understanding

This means that you communicate with others by making your requests very specific, use straightforward language free of jargon and ambiguity and finally check that you have been clearly understood. By communicating in this way you will ensure that your team is confident of your direction and that you care about them.

Learning Your Team's History

Before you can make real progress with your team you need to appreciate what has gone on before you became their manager. This will take time and requires you to build up trust so that individuals can be honest in answering your questions.

Using your organization's appraisal system with its regular progress meetings will help develop this trust with your team as they can be assured of the confidentiality of your discussions. Over time you will build up a rapport with each member that encourages them to perform to the best of their ability.



You also need to understand the nature of past interactions outside of the group, both within the organization and with external parties. By identifying any problems in this area you can begin to rebuild respect and understanding in these relations so that future relations have a positive impact on your team's performance.

By understanding what has gone before you can get a true picture of what steps you need to take to restore the self-esteem and motivation of your team. You demonstrate through your own behavior that you will seek answers to their problems and coach them how best to meet their targets.

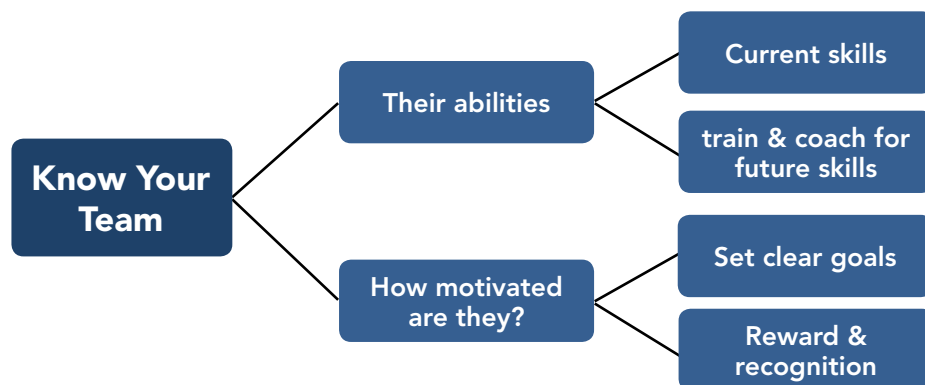
For example, the week after bills are sent out your Customer Support Team always complain of irate customers calling back because their replacement bill hasn't arrived the

following day as promised. On investigation you discover this is because the system only reprints bills once a week. Letting your members know of this process means that they can then inform the customers appropriately and avoid setting unrealistic expectations.

Know Your Team

By investigating the history of your team you can discover how successful previous managers have been in establishing incentives to motivate the team and how well each member's abilities match their role. Many books on leadership tell you that by carefully choosing the members of your team, problems of lack of ability and motivation are resolved! You will rarely come across situations where you can do this, however, because you will usually have to work with the team you are given or inherit.

Your first action should be to understand each of your members in terms of the abilities they have now, their likely potential, how motivated they are, and if there is anything that will motivate them further. There will only be certain issues you can influence, for example guidance, support, coaching, and recognition. So try to avoid discussing things that you have no control over, such as pay structures or organizational policy.



You can use the appraisal process to your advantage by conducting short quarterly or monthly reviews of progress with your team members to not only monitor how well they are performing but also to gain valuable information about any issues that they feel are holding them back. These issues may be due to a lack of integration within the team, and depending on the nature of your team you may find conducting Peer Evaluations an excellent way to discover the root causes and possible solutions.

You must first ensure that such an exercise is viewed in a constructive way and not seen as a witch-hunt. You will need to be explicit in your instructions so that everyone knows what is expected of them, how you will use the findings, and how you will communicate them to the team. For example, you may want to present the broad findings to the whole team and discuss how these affect performance, and then talk more specifically to individuals as part of the appraisal process

If you wish to involve your whole team in this process it is referred to as a 360° evaluation. Each member rates all other members of the team (including themselves and you as leader) against certain criteria of your choosing, with '1' being poor and '5' being excellent. Your criteria could be:

- How reliable is the person?
- Is the person a team player?
- Does the person show a positive attitude towards other team members?
- Are the person's skills a valuable asset to the team?
- Does the person show a positive attitude towards their work?
- Is this person someone you would be happy to have leading you?
- Does this person suggest innovative ideas that help the team?
- Is this person supportive of other members?
- Does this person carry their fair share of the workload?

All these ratings are done anonymously and the resulting spreadsheet indicates where each individual is strong and areas that need development. It will also show you the breadth of skill across the whole team and highlight any gaps you team may have.

For example, an individual may be seen by the majority of the team as someone they are happy to be led by, but from your other research you know that the person does not recognize this attribute in themselves. In this case, you have identified someone others are happy to follow, but who needs coaching and mentoring in order to achieve this leadership role.

This information will help you to come up with a development plan for each team member that enables him or her to work on their strengths. If you have the flexibility to alter

roles within your team in accordance with what you have learnt about each person then this will help to maximize motivation and performance.

An equally important part of this process is to review the resources your team has to work with. Do they have the necessary systems and equipment they need to perform their role? For instance, in our Customer Support Team example you may be able to gain 'read only' access for the team to certain systems that enable them to give more informed answers to callers.

KEY POINTS

- ✓ Before you can make real progress with an underperforming team you need to appreciate what has gone on before you became their manager.
 - ✓ You also need to understand the nature of past interactions outside of the group, both within the organization and with external parties.
 - ✓ By investigating the history of your team you can discover how successful previous managers have been in establishing incentives to motivate the team and how well each member's abilities match their role.
 - ✓ This information will help you to come up with a development plan for each team member that enables him or her to work on their strengths.
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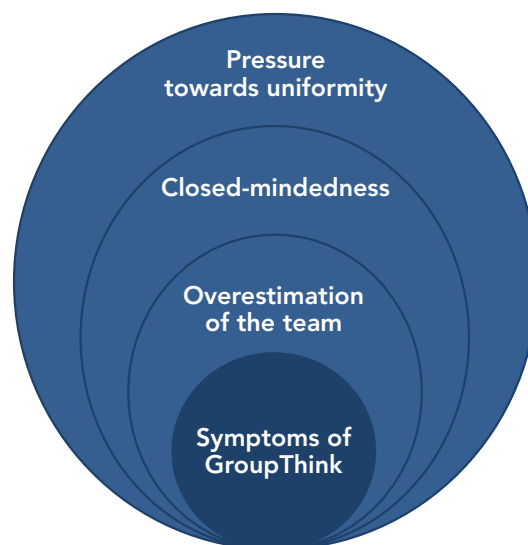
GroupThink and Ingroup Behavior

GroupThink was a term coined in 1972 by Irving L. Janis, an American research psychologist and professor at the University of California. He described it as an observable fact that groups tend to ignore or discredit information that does not fit in with the group's ethos and beliefs. There are several famous historical events where GroupThink has been implicated. Two examples are Pearl Harbor and the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster.

In 1941, the Americans received several reports that the Japanese were preparing for an attack on Pearl Harbor. But as this was the headquarters of the US fleet and was believed to be secure these warnings were ignored. The result was that on December 7 the US fleet sustained extensive damage, with devastating numbers killed. The event brought the United States into World War II.

In 1986, the space shuttle Challenger broke apart 73 seconds into its flight, causing the deaths of its seven crew members. The Rogers Commission investigation found that NASA's organizational culture and decision-making processes had been key contributing factors to the accident.

They discovered that NASA managers had known about a potentially catastrophic flaw in the design of the rocket booster since 1977, but had failed to address it properly. The managers also disregarded warnings from engineers about the dangers posed by the low temperatures on the morning of the accident, and failed to adequately report these technical concerns to their superiors.



Such events are extreme examples of a situation where teams or groups of people felt that maintaining harmony and consensus within the group was more important than realistically appraising alternative courses of action. Janis identified three basic symptoms of GroupThink:

- **Overestimations of the Team**—the members believe that their moral code is high and as such anything they decide is good. This feeling of goodness also prevents fear of failure during a crisis.
- **Closed-mindedness**—members construct rationalizations in order to discount warnings and other forms of negative feedback that, taken seriously, might lead group members to reconsider their assumptions. Team members view groups outside of their team in a negative way and this enables the team to minimize decision conflicts between ethical values and expediency.
- **Pressures toward Uniformity**—members don't want to deviate from the consensus of the group so keep quiet about any misgivings they may have. This behavior minimizes any doubts they have themselves, and they block from their minds any information that brings the group's beliefs into question. This silence is seen as acceptance, and any member expressing doubt comes under severe pressure to conform to the shared values.

As a manager you are mostly likely to come across the issue of GroupThink if you are working in a highly cohesive team that is under considerable pressure to make a decision or meet a deadline. Such pressures can result in team members preferring to seek consensus rather than realistically appraise alternative courses of action.

This means that decisions made in this way by a GroupThink team are unlikely to achieve a successful outcome. You should view GroupThink as a continuum rather than something that is either present or absent within a group or team. Remember, some disagreement is a good thing as it demonstrates that issues have been thoroughly debated prior to a decision being reached.

You also need to be mindful that if your team has been together for a long time, or has been through a stressful time, it may exhibit what sociologists refer to as the Ingroup/Outgroup phenomenon. A primary purpose of team building is to create an 'ingroup'; this

is perfectly reasonable, and helps the team to overcome internal differences in order to confront external problems.

However, one of the unintended consequences of this bias is that team members may come to view people outside of the team as an 'Outgroup,' towards which they feel contempt or opposition, or against which they desire to compete. If left unchecked, this behavior can become very destructive and have an adverse effect on the team's performance. It can also damage the team's image and standing within the organization.

You will need to ensure that you educate and illustrate to the team their own and others' importance in achieving the organization's objectives. Your best approach in defeating GroupThink and Ingroup/Outgroup behaviors is to follow five steps.



These steps are:

1. Team leaders should encourage each member to challenge ideas and present objections.
2. Team members should talk to and solicit ideas from people outside the group.

3. Outside experts should be invited to attend some team meetings.
4. Management should avoid expressing opinions about the preferred outcome.
5. Assign a Devil's Advocate at critical meetings. This person seeks to engage others in testing the quality of the original argument so any weaknesses can be identified. The original position is then either improved or abandoned.

Whether you inherit a team exhibiting GroupThink or InGroup/Outgroup behavior, or you see the early signs of this behavior becoming a pattern in your team, you need to create a working environment where openness, participation, and new ideas are encouraged and welcomed by all.

This stage of the process of turning your team around should not be rushed and can take up to 12 months to complete. Once you have developed your team so that they want to perform their tasks as well as have the right skills and knowledge to perform the tasks well, this will become a constant cycle of management activity.

Summary

Rebuilding an underperforming team can be a huge challenge. Occasionally, problems can be traced to an individual team member who is not performing as expected or who is causing conflict within the team. This issue is probably the easiest to deal with provided that the individual accepts that their behavior is causing a problem and they are open to the idea of additional training or reassignment.

If on the other hand, you find yourself in a situation where there is widespread discontent then you should initially focus your efforts on so-called 'hygiene' factors. These include things like salary, benefits, job security, working conditions, supervision, company policy and organizational procedures.

You will need to ask yourself whether any of these are at odds with your industry norms. If they are then 'quick fix' solutions are unlikely to work, as team members will feel that they have legitimate grievances that need to be addressed.

Some of these factors may be beyond your authority to improve but if you can make a compelling case to senior management then the underlying problems may not be insurmountable.

There may also be 'silent barriers' that cause teams to underperform. These barriers cannot be tackled directly because they result from issues that senior management prefers to ignore.

It can be very frustrating when team performance problems originate from cultural factors that you have no control over. Nonetheless, being aware of these issues should help you to understand why a team may be underperforming despite your best efforts.

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