Figure C6.4   The Five Conditions of Effective Teams

1. **Task Focus**

    - Is the team's task well defined and articulated, and does it focus on improving student learning?

    The lowest level of development would indicate that the team focuses most of its energies and attention on logistics, or that its goals are not well defined. Or, more critically, that its goals do not have student learning at their center and that their focus is driven by crises or pressing school needs. At the highest level of achievement, the team's focus is proactive and team meetings are directed toward improving the planning and measuring of student progress. Team conversations are dialogues that help team members develop new understandings about teaching and learning. It should also be understood that one of the team's goals is to make clear that teacher learning is an ongoing process in and of itself and that this learning directly contributes to student achievement.

2. **Leadership**

    - Does the team encourage leadership by all its members?

    A low level of achievement in this area occurs when leadership roles are assumed reluctantly, or forced upon a member, or when leadership is assumed by the strongest or most vocal person on the team. A higher level of functioning occurs when potential leadership roles are distributed so that they are available to all team members in one way or another, and at one time or another. In high-functioning teacher teams, both novice and veteran teachers are empowered to take risks, and individual teacher instructional expertise is valued and utilized by all team members.

3. **Structures and Processes**

    - Does the team determine ways to work together to achieve agreed-upon goals?
    - Can the team articulate its structure and the team processes it uses to accomplish its goals?

    A team cannot function well if its goals are poorly defined or if articulated goals are arrived at merely to satisfy low expectations of the team's abilities to affect student learning. Does the team apportion resources effectively to accomplish its goals? Does the team know how to access and enlist outside expertise? Highly effective teams have a process for deciding if certain tasks are best accomplished by individuals or by the group, and the team *continuously* adapts plans and processes to ensure that the team's focus is on students' learning needs.

(Continued)

4. Collaborative Climate

- Does the team promote a working environment that generates trust, communication, and synergy?

It's easy to avoid conflicts by never confronting serious issues and achieve harmony by simply allowing only the more dominant members to have a voice in conversations. Yet successful teams do not shy away from conflict; rather, they understand that there are benefits to be gained from conflict resolution. Teams have to find ways to legitimately and strategically make critiques within the team. Members should be encouraged to directly express their ideas, positions, and feelings, coupled with learning how to listen, react, and integrate different points of view. To encourage constructive arguments, teams could designate a devil's advocate or naysayer, or have a norm that no important decisions are to be finalized before contrary points of view are aired and discussed. These strategies can help teams recognize that seeking to resolve conflicts for mutual benefit is a means to promote team effectiveness. There is a difference between *collegiality*, which is simply a cooperative relationship between colleagues, and *collaboration*, which means working, collectively and successfully, to get the work done.

5. Personal Accountability

- Is there an expectation of performance improvement for both the team and the individual?
- Is there any *articulated* expectation of accountability?
- Do team members fail to complete tasks or deliver unacceptable levels of quality?

In a team that is functioning at mid-level, you might expect variable quality, with some assigned tasks completed well. In those teams, individuals may hold themselves accountable, but there is no process in place to hold individuals accountable for accomplishing team goals. In the highest-level teams, all members complete tasks effectively; the team holds all members accountable for their performance; all members share responsibility for the team's success and for the success of all students within the purview of the entire team.