

## Searching for Excellence: *Why Teams Fail*

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In the search for every competitive edge, business leaders are creatively seeking increases in team performance. Every possibility is being explored: powerful incentives, intensive individual feedback and coaching, multiple types of empowerment training, etc. Along with these productivity-enhancing strategies are vast numbers of tools, products, instruments and systems. What is lacking in almost all of these approaches is an in-depth understanding of team research that identifies critical success and failure factors. Not folklore beliefs or commonly held assumptions, but hard facts based on scientific studies in team effectiveness. From an extensive review of research on teams, Batrus Hollweg has identified 3 cornerstones with each cornerstone having 2 underlying characteristics that separate failures from successes in team performance.

**A LACK OF TALENT** – Team members lack the Abilities and Knowledge necessary to successfully perform their jobs or function as team members.

– **ABILITIES DEFICIT**

*“None of us is as smart as all of us.”*

– Ken Blanchard

Each team must have collectively all the aptitudes necessary to achieve the team vision. Blanchard’s “all of us” in a team setting is limited to the existing team members and, consequently, a lack of any of the critical abilities may doom the team to failure. Ability here refers to the basic characteristics developed early in life that are very difficult to change. Batrus Hollweg has identified 4 categories of basic abilities:

- Cognitive talent, (verbal, quantitative, abstract, etc.)
- Social intelligence (E.Q.)
- Emotional resilience
- Fundamental work attributes (conscientiousness, ambition, etc.)

Every organization understands the vital importance of having diverse, talented members who are capable of

learning, adapting, teaming and solving problems. So why are there so many hiring mistakes and derailing executives in today’s environment? Is it because teams don’t understand what capacities are necessary for their success or is it because management is unable to accurately identify these talents in individual candidates? How many times have we heard, “We thought he had the capabilities necessary but he had difficulty so we had to outplace him”? When this occurs, initial excitement and enthusiasm are replaced with disappointment and the process starts all over. How do organizations break this vicious cycle?

– **KNOWLEDGE DEFICIT**

*“The winds and waves are always on the side of the ablest navigators.”*

– Edward Gibbon

When knowledge is combined with ability, a formidable force is created. Every experienced leader knows the joy of watching a talented and knowledgeable team pursue its vision: roadblocks suddenly dissolve, solutions to old problems quickly appear and rough operations become smooth. Some of the basic types of knowledge are:

- Technical (accounting, IS, legal, etc.)
- Operational Systems and Processes
- Industry Knowledge
- Managerial and Leadership Knowledge

What kinds of knowledge are critical for our team’s success and how much is needed? Do we hire it from the outside or develop growth internally? What mix of knowledge is necessary for our goal achievement? Answers to these questions significantly impact our team selection and our ultimate success or failure. If most companies are trying to address these questions, why are so many errors made and so many teams not being fully successful?

**A LACK OF ENERGY** – When there is little Meaningfulness and a low level of Respect, team energy plummets.

– **MEANINGFULNESS DEFICIT**

*“Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I will remember. Involve me and I will understand.”*

– Confucius

A fundamental human desire is to find a sense of meaningfulness in our work. We want to find purpose and fulfillment in our daily activities. For some it is a mission, for others, it is a sense of belonging and for others it is the enjoyment of the work activities themselves. Outstanding leaders understand this critical human need and spend time and effort helping the teams and team member develop greater meaningfulness. To do so requires knowledge of each team member so that the work activities can be modified or that members can be placed in jobs that maximize their feeling of purpose. Some of the types of meaningfulness Batrus Hollweg found in its research are:

- Identification with the mission and vision
- Enjoyment in the work itself
- Fulfillment from personal relationships
- Involvement from participation

If leaders know the importance of meaningfulness (and most do), why is there so much dissatisfaction in today's workforce? Are we too busy? Do we not know how to satisfy the need for purpose in others? Are we too dissatisfied or cynical ourselves to take action?

– **RESPECT DEFICIT**

*“Real teams don't emerge unless individuals on them take risks involving conflict, trust, interdependence and hard work.”*

– Katzenbach and Smith  
The Wisdom of Teams

Respect is the underlying foundation of trust and empowerment. Organizational and team environments that lack this key ingredient will rarely achieve the synergy necessary for outstanding performance. Talent and knowledge will lie fallow because the teams will lack urgency, stamina and commitment. Probably every individual in the workforce has a fundamental need for respect from others. Respect means different things to diverse kinds of people. Some need respect for their expertise, others need respect for their individuality and others need it to confirm their importance. The

following are some of the types of respect necessary for high performance teams:

- Respect for the individual
- Respect for contributions
- Respect for the mission
- Respect for the values
- Respect for autonomy

The empowerment movement is founded upon respect and every U.S. manager has been exposed to these concepts over and over again. Most leaders have listened to lectures, participated in workshops and read numerous books on empowerment. So why is it so difficult to create an atmosphere of respect in the organization or team? Why do so many feel disenfranchised and unappreciated? Why are so many teams having an energy crisis? Do we not understand the basic concepts or are we unable to translate ideas into action?

**A LACK OF FOCUS** – Teams without Goal and Role clarity are like travelers wandering aimlessly because they have no map.

– **CLEAR GOALS DEFICIT**

*“A successful team is a group of many hands but one mind.”*

– Unknown

Research has shown that the number one reason for team failure is the lack of a clear, elevating goal. Goals must touch both minds and hearts and focus the team's energy everyday on tasks that propel success. Distractions from these important tasks dissipate energy, waste resources and frustrate team members. Clear goals (long and short-term) provide not only inspiration but also priorities and critical feedback to the team on its performance. Most teams need the following types of goals:

- Mission
- Vision
- Values
- Strategic plan
- Tactical plans

With all the focus in modern business on strategic planning and goal setting, why are so many teams still confused about their strategy and priorities? Are we that poor at planning? Has business become so complex that everything seems to be important? Is

business moving so quickly that we cannot take time to develop effective plans of communicate these plans?

## – ROLE CLARITY DEFICIT

*“It takes two wings for a bird to fly and when you have a left wing flapping hard and the right wing not keeping up, you go in circles.”*

– Unknown

Team member role definition is one of the unsung heroes of team success. Batrus Hollweg’s research has identified clarity of roles as a key component in high performing teams but it is often shunted to the bottom of the list of importance. Why? Because poor role definition disguises itself as many other plausible problems. Role confusion easily hides as personality conflicts, as ego driven turf battles or, surprisingly, as low self-esteem. Individual motivation and willingness to set high goals is impacted by the clarity of roles in teams.

If there is little shared understanding of team roles, energy is dissipated through duplication or, conversely, key responsibilities are dropped between the cracks. Some of the dimensions underlying role clarity are:

- Individual responsibilities
- Major individual priorities
- Task responsibilities
- Responsibility for decisions
- Responsibility for quality

Our experience and research at Batrus Hollweg indicates a significant level of role confusion in teams. Are teams compromising their productivity by not realizing the importance of role clarity? Are the demands changing so rapidly that we can’t keep up? Do most leaders lack the experience and tools necessary to provide clarity?

## CREATING PEAK PERFORMANCE TEAMS

Batrus Hollweg’s 30+ years of experience and its research on successful teams have resulted in a powerful model for creating high performance teams. This model is comprised of a team philosophy, a step-by-step transformational process and a set of tools. By using this model, managers and leaders are trained to understand team dynamics and implement changes that result in increased team performance. All the materials and steps were developed to help managers significantly increase the

- necessary competencies of all team
- members needed to achieve the vision
- dynamic energy necessary to create sustained intensity of effort
- effective focus to maximize team productivity.

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