

The Critical Steps to Building a High-Performance Team

Stores are already full of books on teams, teambuilding and leadership and still new books are published every year. Although, each author offers a somewhat different approach and a different language, everyone seems to agree high-performance organizations produce accelerated business growth through extraordinary teamwork, independent of market and competitive circumstances.

You might ask, if teamwork is so important, why are there so many different theories? And why do companies today still report their fundamental problems revolve around a lack of teamwork at all levels of the organization? Executives realize that the lack of teamwork impacts top line and bottom line results; however, while trying various approaches, they do not know how to effectively change what's going on. The organization experiencing different, uncoordinated approaches becomes cynical about the "flavor of the month" syndrome.

The first thing you must understand is high-performance teams rarely occur naturally. They must be created and managed. Real success in any rapidly changing business environment requires learning how to create and lead more effective teams. And second, organizations need to apply an effective working theory to consciously and systemically build teamwork within their organization. What you need is a theory that encompasses, systemically, all aspects of organizational life, from creating the strategic vision and winning customers, to implementing and executing the processes to support the strategic vision.

We believe such an actionable working theory exists. It comes out of the work of Fernando Flores, Humberto Maturana, John Austin, John Searle and Martin Heidegger. This theory is grounded biologically, linguistically and philosophically. The fundamental theory, simply stated, says we act in language and our language creates the reality from which we act.

Consequently, **the key to creating a high-performance team lies in understanding and embodying the language-action relationship.** This is critically important to building relationships, trust, gaining alignment and commitment to produce breakthrough results. In fact, accelerated value creation and the associated results is exponentially proportional to the conversational dynamics an organization is capable of achieving. What we mean by conversational dynamics is the conversational mode they use when they work together.

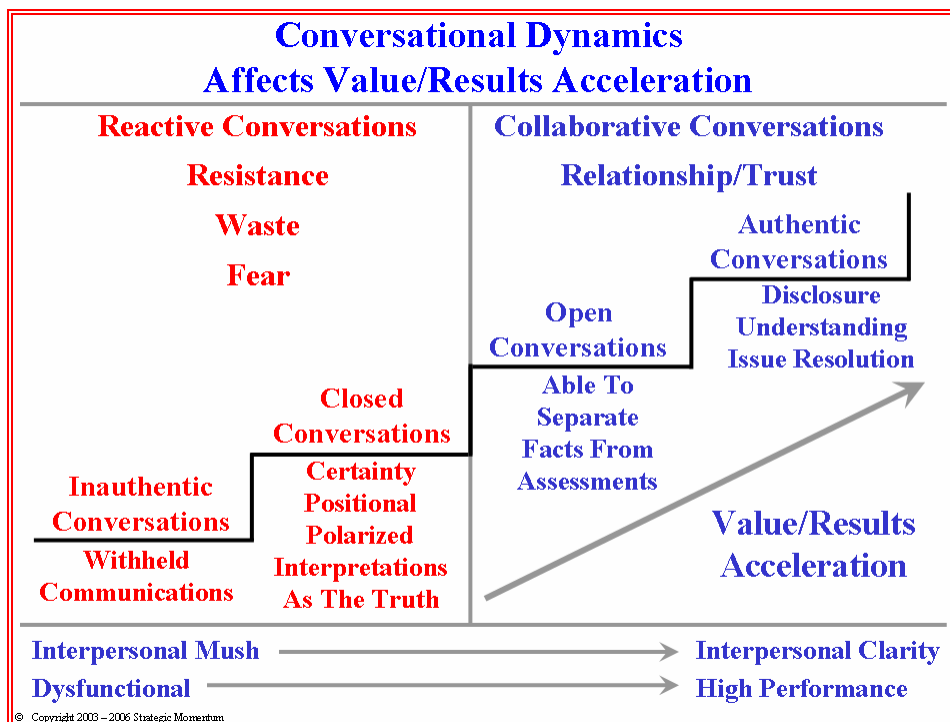
There are two types of conversations that occur in business today. There are reactive conversations and there are collaborative conversations. Reactive conversations are driven by resistance and fear and are very wasteful in that they prevent real issues from being discussed. Collaborative conversations help build trusting relationships, and are able to effectively deal with real issues, thus accelerating results.

Reactive conversations are inauthentic and closed while collaborative conversations are open and authentic. Inauthentic conversations occur when the individuals involved are unwilling to share the private and unspoken conversation hidden behind their public one. Inauthentic conversations appear superficial and result from a fear of negative consequences. They create no value in so far as you do not know where people stand on the issue under discussion. Closed conversations appear to be confrontational. People are

willing to share their viewpoints but are not willing to listen openly to others' perspectives. Closed conversations have some value, but only if the participants persistently work through the issues. However, a high price is paid in terms of time and stress. Open conversations begin to generate much higher value. In open conversations, participants are willing to share their data and the basis for their assessments with others to produce mutual learning. Participants work together with mutual respect to build a shared interpretation and a shared commitment to action. Authentic conversations deal with interpersonal relationship and trust issues. Authentic conversations focus on restoring relationship and trust when breakdowns occur, to insure on-going alignment and commitment.

When a team's predominant mode of conversation is inauthentic and/or closed, we find there is a high degree of resistance, waste and fear. We see these types of conversations as reactive, producing interpersonal mush and highly dysfunctional teamwork. Business publications and studies suggest companies that stay in this mode have higher than average turnover and lower than average business results.

When a team's predominant mode of conversation is open and/or authentic, we find they create a high degree relationship and trust resulting in higher levels of innovation and creativity. We see these types of conversation as collaborative, producing interpersonal clarity and a highly functional, high performance team. The same business publications and studies suggest companies that stay in this mode have lower than average turnover and higher than average business results.



Developing a high-performance organization requires transforming the way team members think and act to create action focused, commitment based teamwork. How a team thinks and acts impacts the team's ability to collaborate, build relationships and trust, innovate, align, and manage the commitments necessary to achieve breakthrough results. How a team thinks and acts also impacts the team's ability to achieve these results in light of the inevitable breakdowns.

So, the question becomes which is the predominant mode operating in your company, and how is it working for you? If its not working, here is what is needed to create a highly collaborative, innovative organization capable of producing breakthrough results.

7 Critical Steps to Build a High-Performance Team

1. Create a Vision, Build Alignment and Commitment – The creation of a team occurs when the leader declares a vision and the team is brought into existence to bring that vision into reality. Teams have to learn to interact effectively to create, speak and act on genuine commitments in order to fulfill the vision. These commitments become the basis for building alignment and powerful team relationships.

2. Focus on Producing Powerful Action – Teams learn to increase the velocity with which ideas and projects are translated into reality. High-performance teams are able to mobilize quickly, innovate faster than their competitors and execute flawlessly in pursuit of their vision.

3. Build and Manage Relationships and Trust– High-performance teams achieve higher levels of creativity, innovation, and commitment by learning to increase the level of relationship and trust among the team members. In the absence of complete trust, people have a tendency to withhold their ideas, observations or questions for fear of some negative consequence resulting from their honesty. This withholding of ideas and observations significantly impacts creative thinking, creative resolution of breakdowns, and over time, results in a significant loss of intellectual capital.

High-performance teams learn that relationships live within the context of the conversations people have, or do not have with one another. Deep trusting relationships, coupled with powerful authentic conversations, create the collaboration, commitments and the coordination of action necessary to build competitive excellence. When team members do not have a strong relationship with one another, they do not develop deep levels of trust, and they will not make the risk taking commitments necessary to truly accelerate business performance.

4. Produce Commitment Based Teamwork – High-performance teams understand and embody the specific set of commitments that are the foundation for an authentic team. Simply stated, the basis for a solid team is not a set of techniques you can get from a book; but a set of commitments that come from the heart. These commitments generate the actions and practices that generate extraordinary teamwork and produce extraordinary results.

The commitments consistently manifested by high-performance teams include shared ownership of the vision which includes the purpose, mission and values of the team, a commitment to relationship and trust, a commitment to 100% responsibility and a commitment to full accountability for the promises each team member makes. The sense of ownership for the company, department or project will replace the automatic reaction to blame someone, and the negative mood blame creates.

5. Hold Review Meetings – High-performance teams will learn new ways of participating in review meetings to produce highly collaborative results more productively. They have to learn how to set the mood of the meeting, make overall assessments against the mission, assess the status of the promises made by the individual team members, declare and manage breakdowns, and reassess the coherence of the plan and its consistency with the mission.

6. Challenge the Creation of Breakthroughs – High-performance teams have to learn to look beyond ordinary, business as usual, performance improvements to a commitment to generate breakthroughs. When breakthroughs are seen as possible, they will begin to occur.

7. Effectively Manage Breakdowns – High-performance teams have to learn to shift problems from an occasion for complaint or distress to an opportunity to regenerate commitments and create new pathways to accomplish them. This results in a quicker return to action with renewed energy for the work, and ultimately produces accelerated rates of project fulfillment, and decreased in cycle time.