

# Bluteau DeVenney & Company

HELPING SUCCESS COME NATURALLY

## Team Performance Indicator

**Article:**

**Is Your Team  
Strategic**





## Is Your Team Strategic?

By Michael DeVenney

Most senior teams are not strategic. The lack of strategic leadership costs organizations' opportunity and limits potential.

A recent study by the Center for Creative Leadership revealed that 60% of all senior teams – some even called leadership teams – did not think or act strategically.

Maybe you have the "dream team". You have the absolute strongest performers in your organization as your executives. Remember the US Olympic hockey team of 1998 – an incredible group of the best individual athletes did not win as a team. Stars and superior performers do not a strategic team make.

The problem is that senior teams (whether they are executive teams, management teams or even Boards of Directors) become mired in the details of tactics. Senior teams work on "heads down" rather than "heads up" approach. Many senior teams operate on the basis of fires, silos and titles.

Where does your team stand?

Try to picture you are coaching your son or daughter's hockey team. You are facing a competitive team that has been ranked highly. Imagine you have three of your five players arguing amongst themselves, not back checking or passing the puck to each other. What are your chances of winning when 60% of your team is not focused on the game?

Now you see the problem with most senior teams – even those who have the title of leadership teams.

The focus on tactics happens easily and naturally for most teams. We are faced with time pressures and the need to produce results quickly. Fires occur and problems need to be resolved. Executives can spend the entire meeting talking about the daily details and

are just too busy to think about the future. Members bring individual agendas and use the time to "fix" their own areas.

As well, membership in most senior teams is a function of title or position. The organizational chart approach does not always bring the right mix of perspectives for strategic thinking.

Finally, there are often not clear and measurable drivers of success for the leadership teams. Teams work on what is in front of them and it is easy to go down other roads that may be interesting but not strategic.

All the offsites and "blue-sky" meetings in the world do not necessarily make your team strategic. The annual migration to a lovely resort with an excellent golf course does not immediately mean strategic thinking. Most offsites and strategy sessions are more forward planning and future tactics than strategic.

What is being strategic?

Strategic leadership teams balance the short-term and the long-term building the sustainable competitive advantage of the organization. They look where the puck is going not just where it has been. Being strategic is a way of thinking, acting, influencing and learning. All four of these aspects are needed in a team to work strategically.

A strategic leadership team that works effectively together not only builds and protects the ongoing success of an organization, it develops cross-functional relationships to prevent silos, creates a healthy working environment to retain top talent and it maximizes performance and productivity. Winning teams need to be strategic and not just tactical.

You can support your senior team to be strategic in a number of ways:

- Have regular monthly meetings devoted



only to strategy. Weekly meetings can be purely tactical and keep the organization moving. Combining strategy and tactics is nearly impossible and use different parts of your mind. You need to separate the meetings.

- For your strategic leadership meetings think about extending the membership to people who may not have the VP title but are in positions that would provide valuable and different perspectives.
- Ensure there are clear and measurable criteria for success for the team. Strategy is not mental meandering – you definitely want to be able to think outside the box but you also need to be clear on the objectives before getting out. Teams need a scorecard for success – what are the drivers of success for the team and what are the criteria for being successful as a strategic team?
- Using a strategic scorecard for the leadership team provides the platform for all of the four aspects – thinking, acting, influencing and learning. Teams use the scorecard to reflect, build, communicate and develop.
- Most of all, the team needs to be clear on the competitive advantage of the organization to know what strategic initiatives will fit. Your team needs to know the answer clearly for “Why your organization?”

Your strategic team is the author of your winning playbook. Strategic leadership teams support the success of your organization now and in the future.

Use the ideas outlined here to support your senior team to lead strategically.

## The Team Performance Indicator Assessment – Diagnosis and Solution

### *Introduction*

Is your team chasing their tails?

Have you ever watched a cat chase its tail? They run around in circles trying to grab their own tail, going nowhere and then get dizzy and fall over.

It is funny for pets but not so funny for business. I see a lot of executive and management teams chasing their own tails.

People say they don't have time to stop and think – they are mired in the tactics and details of the day-to-day. They can't stick to a schedule because there are so many fires and they have to be on all the time. They show up late for meetings, run around putting out fires, double-book meetings or cancel late because “something just came up”, take calls during meetings and check “blackberries” during any and every conversation. Does any of this sound familiar for your team?

The outcome is no credibility. When people don't respect their own time and chase their own tails, they lose credibility personally and for their organization. People lose respect. Work is like an emergency ward and not too many of them are saving lives. We lose the synergy, leadership, and strategic focus needed and promised by an effective team.

You can say its growth or too many demands or whatever – the end result is no respect. Is this what you want for your team? Is this what you want for your business?

We can change. We can be a team that is strategically focused, leads effectively, and works with synergy for maximum performance and productivity. We need to diagnose first.



## ***The Diagnosis for Improved Team Performance***

Getting things done is the number one challenge facing all leaders – at all levels.

With more people, what should be easier becomes generally more difficult. The way teams are structured and work today does not realize the potential for leverage and synergy that is promised.

Despite good intentions, most teams are not working well and it costs organizations' opportunity and limits potential.

A recent study by the Center for Creative Leadership revealed that 60% of all senior teams – some even called leadership teams – did not think or act effectively.

Maybe you have the “dream team”. You have the absolute strongest performers in your organization on your team. Remember the US Olympic hockey team of 1998 – an incredible group of the best individual athletes that did not win as a team. Stars and superior performers do not an effective team make.

Where does your team stand?

Try to picture coaching your son or daughter's hockey team. You are facing a competitive team that has been ranked highly. Imagine you have three of your five players arguing amongst themselves. They try to go it alone rather than passing the puck to each other. What are your chances of winning when 60% of your team is not focused on the game? This is what is happening with most teams.

All the offsites and “blue-sky” meetings in the world do not necessarily make your team effective. The annual migration to a lovely resort with an excellent golf course or spa does not immediately mean strategic thinking or greater performance. Most offsites and strategy sessions are more about future tactics than strategic synergy.

A team that works effectively together not only builds and protects the ongoing success of an organization, it develops cross-functional relationships to prevent

silos, creates a healthy working environment to retain top talent and it maximizes performance and productivity. Winning teams need to be strategically focused, structured for synergy, and leading as needed by the organization.

The single greatest factor responsible for success or failure in execution is people. It is crucial that teams work effectively together.

There is a new normal. Capital and equipment used to be the drivers of organizational strategy – people rule now and businesses today are subject to a tightening vise.

- Customers have much higher expectations – the internet has changed everything in that our customers now are more informed and demand more value in turn.
- Competition is much greater and organizations constantly need to increase the value they provide to customers to avoid commoditization and irrelevance.
- The pace of innovation is much faster to keep ahead of the curve – we have to think not only of how customers use our products and services now but how will they need to use them in the future
- With the increasing global interconnection, the complexity of the variables facing business is much greater – analysis can no longer be linear, it needs to be branched.

Success in today's challenging and competitive business environment demands that leaders focus on getting their team basics right. Successful organizations require effective leadership now more than ever to perform. Decisions about people are challenging.

### **This is where people come into the equation.**

*When people were asked the following question, “On a scale of 1 to 10 – how effective are you in your work?” most people answered a 4 or 5. In organizations today, the average level of engagement and performance is about 47% of potential!*



The impact of this underperformance hits the bottom line. A Harvard Business Review study reported that on average organizations achieve about 67% of their potential financial performance.

### **Why are some of your key business teams underperforming?**

Teams are subject to “drift”. People are put together and called a team. We put people together without clearly assessing strengths and fit to the requirements of the position and hope it all works out. It doesn’t. Team members cite lack of clarity as to expectations for their work as the most significant problem in performing to their potential. People end up working on what is in front of them or what is talked about next rather than cohesively with their colleagues. Not knowing where we are going or who is doing what creates silos and stifles ownership. Leaders have to do it all because no one knows what to do. Even when we know what to do, do we know how to do it. Technical skills are not enough – maximum performance is a result of behaviours and interactions between team members. Are team members carrying out their roles as needed or expected?

The research would say no.

To gain the most effective teams, leaders need to step back and understand their teams first. Leaders need to diagnose before attempting to cure. By clearly and accurately understanding the structure of their teams, leaders can answer the three key questions that underlie effective performance – are the right people in the right positions, are people working the right way to lead and perform, and are people focused on the right actions for success?

Diagnosis leads to the answers as to why teams are not performing to potential, where priorities should be placed, and what to do about it.

First, using accurate and reliable assessments, leaders can gain a tangible picture of the strengths and skills each team member brings to the team. Do their strengths work well together? Are there challenges of too much of good thing? Are the people

with the right strengths in the right places – or do they have the right supports? The sad truth is that only 18% of people state their strengths are being used in their work! What a lost opportunity!

The next step is to clarify, agree, and communicate the behaviors needed and expected of the team to perform most effectively. Do we know what is needed? Do we agree on what is needed? Has what is needed been communicated? These answers can create tremendous leverage in how people work together and achieve results. About 60% of team members do not believe their colleagues are working in the way needed to produce results.

Finally, the team needs to focus on doing first things first. The perspective of team members should be assessed in terms of strategic priorities, critical issues, and where attention is needed. Is there agreement or alignment? Do people see things the same of very differently? With clarity of perspectives, discussion can create alignment of energy, resources, and actions to achieve greater results.

The foundation to make decisions to engage people for more effective performance starts with diagnosis – assessing the matching of strengths and positions, clarifying the expectations for interactions and leadership, and focusing on priorities for success.

It is tempting to just tell people what is needed and where attention should be placed to get where you want them to be. Short term – energy is expended. However, it is quickly lost from lack of investment and ownership.

Diagnosis takes a short time and yields tremendous clarity and confidence. It identifies the most effective places to target performance improvement initiatives and reveals whether there is agreement about the priorities for action. It exposes blockages that will inhibit progress and enables teams to create their own improvement agenda. It benchmarks your team for growth and captures the perceptions of the entire team in order to evaluate performance and potential. It defines the team culture, how decisions are made, and if needed people are missing to support the strategy



Leaders can benchmark their team against key performance indicators and clarify overall team effectiveness. Despite the complexity and uncertainty of the new normal, diagnosis by measuring and evaluating team performance factors remains the key to increasing profitability and productivity.

Diagnosis is designed to accomplish one thing – to help teams improve performance to execute better. It is a benchmark for success.

### ***The High-Performing Team: The Keys to Success***

- Supervisor ... “A lot of the team are not happy and morale is down”
- Leader ... “Yes, but we’re still getting results right?”

Getting results at any cost ends up costing a lot – to the organization, to the team, to the leader, and to the customer. Building and leading an effective team is the answer to achieving the highest level of results and building sustainable success.

The critical element of teamwork is leverage. When you leverage the strengths of other people, you achieve much more than you ever could alone. More importantly, when you leverage the strengths and provide meaning you achieve maximum performance. You gain the benefits of more money, more time, and less stress.

Why is it so difficult to get your team to work together and get things done effectively?

The directive approach has often been the method leaders fall back to in order to just get things done. Giving orders and telling people what to do and when to do it can cut the chase and get to the bottom line. The problem is that people don’t always do as told and if they do it is without ownership and engagement. Results are fine in the short team but suffer going forward and no synergy is created to achieve more.

Using authority may sound like a mistake just the new leader makes but it plays out at all levels of organizations and regardless of how long someone has been in a leadership position (note they have a leadership position but are not actually acting as a leader).

So, we need to think differently to get maximum performance and results.

Real success is the result of building and leading an effective team.

Getting the right people in the right places doing the right things at the right time is the goal.

Think about how your team works now. Are you getting the performance you want? Is the team working to provide maximum results? Are people engaged and showing initiative?

Most team leaders answer no to these three questions. A Gallup Organization survey showed that more than 80% of teams do not achieve optimal performance and only 17% of team members feel that decisions are made effectively to move the team forward.

More than four of five teams are not performing effectively.

What happens is that we lose money, we waste time, we waste energy, and we lose customers.

- Team Leader ... “If I don’t come up with the ideas, nothing happens – they just do what is in front of them and wait for me to tell them what’s next.”

Team leaders are frustrated with trying to understand the dynamics of how to get people to work together effectively. From one of our private team performance studies, we found five core challenges leaders experience with their teams:

1. Team members are not focused on the customer – they lose sight of what needs to be done to keep the customer happy



2. Team members don't work from the same page – there is a lot of duplication of efforts and no one really seems to know what the other does
3. Team members do second things first – people just do what is in front of them and don't look at the big picture of what is most important in their work
4. Team members are not accountable for results – people don't take responsibility or ownership and pass the buck
5. Team members don't communicate clearly with each other – rather than talking to each other, people just stay in silos

We need to resolve these issues to get to the real success – leveraging the strengths and motivation of others to achieve maximum performance.

Leaders want to see engaged team members stepping up and taking initiative, working from the same page proactively and collectively, doing first things first, and staying focused on the customer to do what is right and provide an excellent experience.

Where do you start?

The first step is with the leader to make sure the environment is right to support a high-performing team. Getting there requires attention to seven elements.

**Have a vision and strategy.** Without a vision outlining a bigger future, people will not invest themselves. We want something to believe in and commit our energy and strengths to helping to make happen. Leaders need to clarify their vision on a regular basis. One of the top three factors supporting a highly engaged team is seeing the big picture. Leaders rarely do this. Our recommendation is to commit to a quarterly session with the team simply to confirm the vision.

With the vision is clarity of the values that are most important to the team. To realize the vision, values explain the behaviors and beliefs that are needed by the team. Clear values determine how people will work together.

A clear strategy is also needed to understand how to make the vision happen. Teams need to see the five actions that will achieve results. Once teams see the vision and the strategy, they understand what is most important and how they can contribute. Innovation happens more when teams see the strategy and what will help success. A big point here is that teams want leaders to update the strategy and stick to the plan – not bouncing from idea to idea. With clarity comes focus and greater results.

**Focus on the drivers of success.** Strategies fail because of people. Teams need to clarify what is most important to move the vision forward and their part of the plan. Clarity of roles and accountabilities is often the greatest complaint from teams. People need to know the four or five key responsibilities and actions they need to focus their time on to support the vision and strategy. When team members know how they contribute and see how their work relates to the bottom-line of the vision and strategy, initiative results.

Leaders need to take time to outline the strategy, confirm the key drivers for each team member's work, and connect the dots to the desired results. Leaders often people will just get it. We can't get it without clear expectations. From there, teams will welcome accountability and take ownership for performance improvements.

**Understand and apply strengths.** The dynamics of maximum team performance is based on the ability to put people in positions that use their natural strengths. Each of us has skills and experience, personality preferences, and instinctive strengths that support our performance and achievement. As well, those dimensions affect the overall team performance as well as individual work to achieve synergy. Leaders need to take time to make sure the right people are in the right positions to leverage the energy of the team.

Assessments are available today that provide highly accurate and reliable means to assess team strengths and structuring people and positions for success. We all want to succeed and provide meaningful contribution – putting someone in a position and hoping they work out is not the answer. Leaders need to invest in proven team analysis to set people and the team together up for success.



**Measure for effective execution.** Athletes measure all dimensions of their performance to maximize their ability to win. Businesses talk about it but don't do a great job of measuring for success. We generally just measure financial performance and general results. Although important, such measures do nothing to indicate where people contribute to success, what is working and not working, and what needs to be done next to take the right actions to achieve the desired results.

We believe scorecards based on actions (rather than just results) are the single best management tool to separate teams that try from teams that win. Scorecards connect the vision and strategy with the driving actions that create the results. Measuring actions provides real time analysis to make the best decisions and take the right direction to achieve success. Leaders need to take their strategic plans and build action-based scorecards to connect the end game to the actual play – and each team member should have an individual scorecard that connects their contribution to the overall team results. Connected scorecards create clarity, focus, and the sense of urgency needed for a team to win.

**Communicate to connect.** For teams to perform effectively and work well together, they need regular and consistent communication. Regular team meetings that focus on tactics (who does what by when) keep everyone on track and in touch with what other people are doing to keep the action moving, reduce duplication, and support collective teamwork. Additional meetings for strategic progress updates and visioning should support the big picture view for everyone. Most important, team members need individual time from their leaders to gain feedback on their performance – how they are doing, what they are doing well, and where they need to improve. The second greatest factor supporting employee engagement is access to regular, honest, and direct feedback – hearing both the good and the bad.

When leaders are asked what is their top drivers of success providing team member feedback always makes the top five. What driver is most often deferred or not provided? Again, feedback is always the winner. Leaders know what is needed and need to invest the time to make it happen. For team members to reach optimal performance they need input to

get there. Annual performance reviews are not the answer. Feedback is needed monthly and structured correctly.

Communication needs to be open, consistent, and regular. Amazingly, leaders need to invest only about four hours each week to cover the communication investment.

**The client foundation.** Underlying team success is the need to stay focused on the client. In the end, work only happens as long as we satisfy the needs of the client. Every team has clients – they may be external or they may be internal but all teams serve an end client. Leaders need to clarify with the team who the client is (oddly enough, teams don't always have the same client in mind) and how the team creates value for them.

Creating competitive advantage is about understanding the defining elements of the team's work that provide differentiated value for the client. Leaders should work with the team to show how their work creates the end product or service experience for the client. Exercises, such as "staple yourself to an order", that walk teams through the various workflow steps and what it is like for the client are exceptional to increasing team performance.

The number one factor that teams selected as most important for team success is client experience. Getting teams to work effectively together needs to be founded on what is most valued by the client.

**Enjoy the journey.** This aspect of teamwork sounds like it doesn't fit. Are we really saying that social activities are important for team success? Yes – over and over again, we are saying just that. Teams that socialize together get along better together and achieve higher performance. We are not saying that everyone needs to be best friends and that the leader should become a social director. What we are saying is that when we know each other outside of work, we form a community and work more effectively together.

One of the key elements that team members are looking for in an organization is a feeling of community and friendship at work. Leaders need to support that type of environment. It does not need to



be expensive – you just need to commit the time for people to come together and build a community at work.

Before leaders complain about the challenges in their teams and the trouble getting people to work together to generate results, they need to first look in the mirror. Are they doing what needs to be done to create the right environment for high performance?

The seven aspects of the high-performing team can be achieved by all leaders and teams. We are all under pressure to create more for less and in a shorter period of time. Telling people what to do may seem like the shortest route to the results. In the end, being directive gets you behind. You spend more and more time putting out fires and reacting to situations.

If you want to be a leader of a high-performing team, step back and assess your team for the seven aspects and do what you need to do to provide the environment that is needed for team success. You will win.

### Toolbox

If you are interested in building and leading a high-performing team, contact us for our Team Performance Indicator Report Card and the Team Performance Workshop. For more information, please email me privately at [Michael@bluteaudevenney.com](mailto:Michael@bluteaudevenney.com). You can also visit our website at [www.bluteaudevenney.com](http://www.bluteaudevenney.com) for more information.

If you are interested in putting in place a diagnosis for your team's performance, please contact me for more information. You can reach me by calling emailing privately to [Michael@bluteaudevenney.com](mailto:Michael@bluteaudevenney.com). You can also visit our website at [www.bluteaudevenney.com](http://www.bluteaudevenney.com) for more information.



