

"Leadership is a group or team function. The leader's job is to create the conditions for the team to be effective." Robert Ginnett

Leading a Great Team: Building Them From the Ground Up, Fixing Them on the Fly

A presentation by

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Synopsis by Rod Cox

"When leaders are asked if they know which teams are doing well and which are doing poorly, they can usually identify them. In fact, most team members of poorly operating teams can sense that condition as a part of ongoing team dynamics. But when asked, "What makes the good ones good?" or "How can you help the poorly operating teams?" they typically cannot answer, or have such widely diverse opinions as to be not very helpful."

In this presentation, Dr. Robert Ginnett shows how The Team Effectiveness Leadership Model (TELM) identifies leverage points for change and then points the way to pragmatic solutions. TELM *"resembles systems theory approach with inputs on the left (i.e., individual, team, and organizational factors); processes or throughputs in the center (i.e., what one can tell about the team by actually observing team members at work); and outputs on the right (i.e., how well the team did in accomplishing its objectives)."*

Dr. Ginnett's team research included commercial aircrews, surgical teams, NASA teams, Triple-A hockey teams (which turned out not to be teams at all, but individuals trying to excel for themselves), military airlift crews, executive teams that historically recognize individual performance over team performance; dental teams, pharmaceutical research teams, women's lacrosse teams, bomber crews and legal teams.

Dr. Robert Ginnett, the developer of the TELM, is a Senior Fellow at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) and lead instructor for the Leadership at the Peak program for corporate CEOs, Presidents and their direct reports. Prior to joining CCL, Ginnett was a tenured professor at the United States Air Force Academy where he served as Director of Leadership and Counseling. His background includes leadership of an 875-man combat force in Vietnam. An organizational psychologist by training, Ginnett's graduate education includes an MBA, two additional Masters degrees, and a Ph.D. in organizational behavior from Yale University. He is co-author of the best-selling undergraduate textbook, *LEADERSHIP: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience*, now in its 4th edition. His next book, *Leading Great Teams*, is due out in 2006.

The concepts, quotes, figures and graphic models in this synopsis are based on Dr. Ginnett's Portland presentation, as well as on CCL on-line articles.

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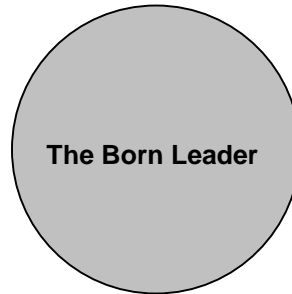
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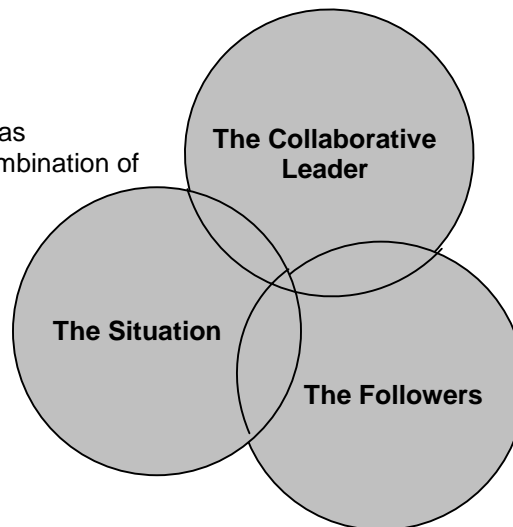
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"Every team is made up of three essential, overlapping parts: the leader, the follower and the situation. Thus, to lead teams, we need to know more about teams than about leading." However, few if any of us has been trained to assess situations adequately and fewer still have been trained to be effective followers.

We have a tendency to see leadership as



when we should be seeing leadership as an overlapping combination of



This concept dispels decades of leadership myths which had at their core the notion that a strong leader could create success irrespective of the followers and the situations at hand; that leadership is an innate skill, born more than developed; that the essential set of personal leadership attributes (strength, intelligence, pragmatism, etc.) could be taught; that these attributes, when applied, will create strong teams and dependable outcomes.

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But a 1947 study seeking to define consistent leadership traits came up empty-handed with only low positive correlations, at best. Curiously, leaders with the prerequisite skills were often weak and leaders without the skills were often strong. More recent studies conclude that leadership has more to do with how we behave around other people as well as how we work collaboratively for mutual gain. A leader without cooperative followers cannot accomplish the tasks nor satisfy the stakeholders. And yet most leadership training is about developing personal attributes, not about collaborative skills.

In a classic training exercise, participants are asked to arm-wrestle their closest tablemate. The goal? To get an imaginary \$1000 for every time the tablemate is pinned. A physically strong person paired with a physically weaker tablemate might be able to do this twice in the four seconds allowed. Seldom do the arm-wrestling partners think to cooperatively flip their arms back and forth so that each of them "wins" several thousand dollars. Instead, they automatically go into a competitive stance. This is understandable. In our society, competition – you versus me – is implied. Predictably, most participants go straight into personal-gain mode just as they are likely to do in professional environments.

The critical need to include in our leadership the situation and the followers cannot be overstated even though few universities teach "situationship" or "followership" and no parent is likely to jump for joy when his child comes home with an award for followership. But aren't we all followers? Don't we all report to someone? It is through the actions of followers that any leader reaches his goal. When a leader fails to take the situation and the followers into consideration, outcomes are likely to be flawed or less productive.

Or even fatal. The 1979 United Airlines crash in Portland occurred when the plane landed in a suburban forest having run out of fuel. The Captain – who at the time was the most senior DC-8 Captain for the entire United fleet – ignored co-pilot and flight engineer warnings about depleting fuel levels because he was focused on determining the cause of a "bump" noise heard on initial approach. After circling for over an hour – despite the co-pilot and flight engineer warnings – the engines ran out of fuel and the plane went down. This was indeed a leadership error by the Captain; but in a larger sense it was a team error, a deadly combination of lack of planning and coordination between the leader, the followers and the situation.

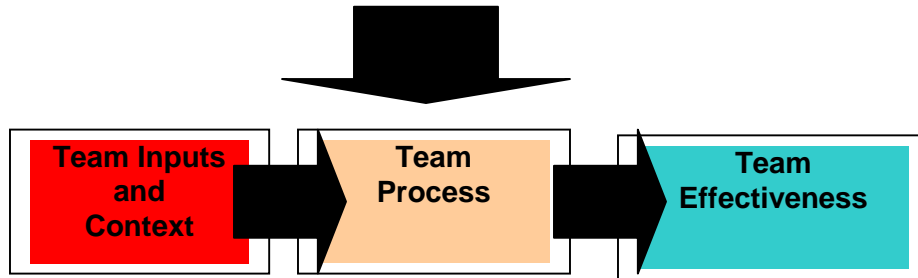
It has been said that we can know everything we want about individuals, but when they are put into a team, we often don't know anything about how they will perform. Consider:

1. America is not a team-based culture. We are an individual achievement culture.
2. Most of what many managers know about teams comes from their high school coaches and the coaches were often wrong. The attitude "if everyone gives 100%, 100% of the time, we'll win" dooms the team because it's focused on individual achievement, not team achievement. In the human heart, if all the muscles are working (contracted) at the same time, the heart fibrillates and ceases pumping. In a healthy heart, half the muscles are relaxed at the same time as the other half are tensed.
3. Much of the published research on U.S. teams is based on limited *in situ* studies. For example, the well-publicized Tuckman model (Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing) considers research from only two study groups: college students and patients in group therapy.

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General Systems Theory Applied to Teams

Traditional Focus for Team Interventions



There is good reason for the convention of team process focus. This is where the magic happens or doesn't. It is the historical point of intervention. However, it presents serious shortcomings when the focus on team process is stronger than the focus on team inputs and context.

In 1980 study, Kaplan researched team process consultations. He found that at the end of the consultation, people were generally satisfied. They liked the attention to immediate results. But he also found that process consultation had almost no effect on team effectiveness in the long term. This is because the process consultation focused on the symptoms rather than the cause.

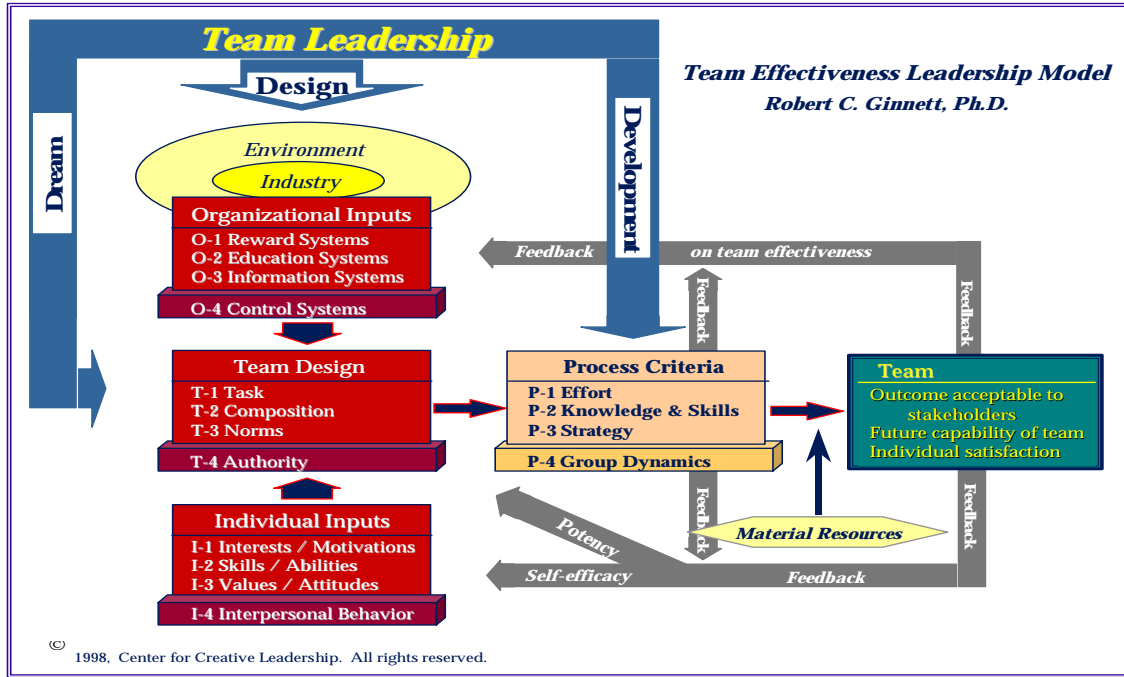
If your dentist were to give you a shot of Novocain to relieve a toothache, you would be very pleased with the immediate cessation of pain. But that doesn't fix the tooth; the pain assuredly will return as soon as the Novocain wears off. The fix needs to be in the input side. Hence, a new model for leadership effectiveness has to start with team inputs and context.

TELM: A Better Model for Team Interventions

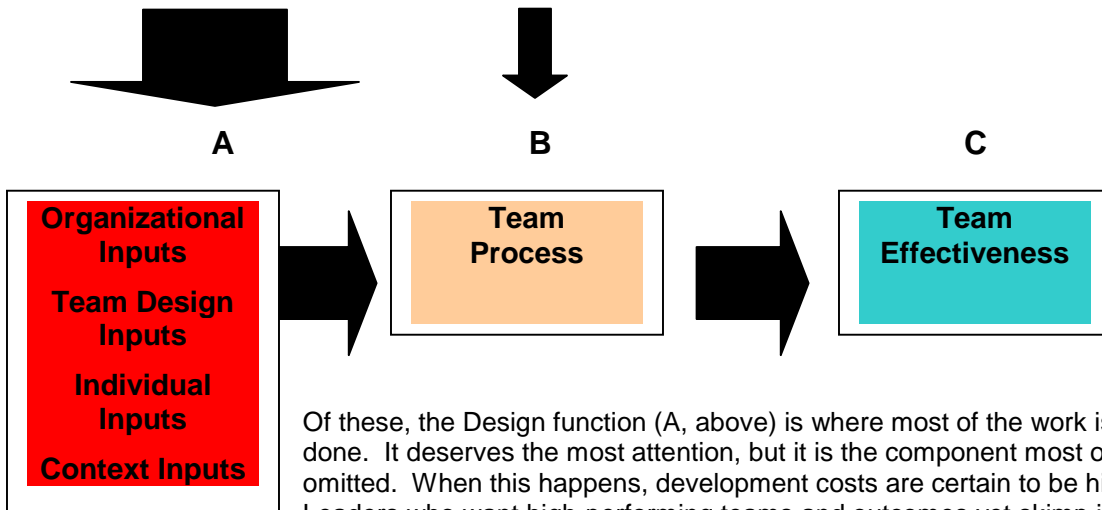
Usually leaders know when their teams are doing well or doing poorly, often by paying attention to team dynamics. But what makes the good ones good? And how can you help the teams that are not doing well? Using TELM, you can put your finger on the leverage points and you can initiate the preferred change.

In TELM, the major leadership functions – Dream, Design and Development – are applied through Inputs and Context. Achieving team effectiveness requires paying attention to all three of the critical Team Leadership Functions.

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To establish an effective new team, you first set the Direction (Dream); you then lead the Design (Inputs): and third, you lead the Development (Process).



Of these, the Design function (A, above) is where most of the work is done. It deserves the most attention, but it is the component most often omitted. When this happens, development costs are certain to be high. Leaders who want high-performing teams and outcomes yet skimp in putting money and effort up-front make a serious mistake, the equivalent to buying a Yugo and then attempting over time to upgrade it to Mercedes-Lexus-BMW levels. It doesn't work.

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To diagnose issues in a sub-performing team and find the Process Criteria

leverage points, follow the model backward, starting with Processes and moving back to Inputs to find appropriate solutions:

- If your team is having problems with Effort (P-1), then examine Reward Systems (O-1), Tasks (T-1) and Interests/Motivation (I-1).
- Knowledge and Skills issues (P-2) require a look at Education Systems (O-2), Team Design Composition (T-2) and Team Skills/Abilities (I-2)
- Strategy issues (P-3) beg you to consider Information Systems (O-3), Norms (T-3) and Values/Attitudes (I-3)
- If the issue is Group Dynamics (P-4), then look at Team Control Systems (O-4), Team Authority (T-4) and Team Interpersonal Behavior (I-4)

Laid out another way, the Process Criteria leverage points and corresponding solutions may be plotted as follows:

When the effectiveness measurements indicate a problem with:	Look at these Inputs:		
	Organizational Inputs (O)	Team Design (T)	Individual Inputs (I)
Effort (P-1)	Reward Systems (O-1)	Tasks (T-1)	Interests/Motivation (I-1)
Knowledge and Skills (P-2)	Education Systems (O-2)	Design Composition (T-2)	Skills/Abilities (I-2)
Strategy (P-3)	Information Systems (O-3)	Norms (T-3)	Values/Attitudes (I-3)
All of the above are built on foundations of:			
Group Dynamics (P-4)	Control Systems (O-4)	Authority (T-4)	Interpersonal Behaviors (I-4)

The foundation blocks (Group Dynamics, Control Systems, Authority and Interpersonal Behaviors) are critical. In a building with a bad foundation, the walls crack, the doors stick and the floors tilt. In an organization, a bad foundation may produce symptoms seen as disgruntled, non-productive employees; insufficient or missing critical information; non-symbiotic teams; and poor outputs. Whether it's a building or an organization, it is nearly impossible to compensate for a bad foundation.

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In the Challenger O-Ring disaster, the bad foundation was an edict that the Shuttle missions had to become commercially viable (e.g., to pay for themselves). This compromised the previous zero-tolerance environment. Under the new mandate, even a slight delay could push the venture into the red so there was a predisposition to ignore warnings including one by a sub-contractor, just one day before launch date, that low ambient temperatures could cause an o-ring to fail. That warning, tragically, proved to be accurate.

The components of TELM are not "new stuff," but how they are structured is new:

C. Team effectiveness is built on:

- outcomes acceptable to stakeholders (i.e., meeting their satisfaction)
- future capability of the team which must improve over time without burning people out
- individual satisfaction. This does not mean coming to work pegging out on the fun meter. Teams can be frustrating. Satisfaction is not a vacuum of 'bad', but it has to achieve at least a break-even between positive and negative. Note that the leader doesn't make this happen: the team makes it happen.

B. Team process criteria are built on a foundation of group dynamics (P-4). It includes:

- effort, but not 100% of the time (P-1)
- knowledge and skills either in the team or within easy access (P-2)
- strategy: are you doing it in a reasonable fashion? (P-3)

A. Team Inputs and Context include the three components that move the team forward:

- Organizational Inputs: reward systems (O-1), education systems (O-2) and information systems (O-3), built on a foundation of Control Systems (O-4)
- Team Design: tasks (T-1), composition (T-2) and norms (T-3) built on a foundation of Authority (T-4)
- Individual Inputs: interests / motivations (I-1), skills/abilities (I-2) and values/attitudes (I-3) built on a foundation of Interpersonal Behavior (I-4)

Note: The combinations of letters and numbers (e.g. O-1, T-4, I-3) identify the location of that component in the TELM model, above.

There are three **outputs** that are absolutely essential for the team to be effective:

- outcomes that are acceptable to the stakeholders
- future capability of the team
- individual satisfaction

There are four critical processes that if done well (leaving nothing out) will greatly increase the likelihood that the team will be effective. Use these real-time to diagnose problems:

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- effort – Can you see it?
- knowledge and skill – Can you hear it?
- strategy – Can you smell it? (If it stinks, it's bad strategy.)
- group dynamics – Can you feel it (gut reaction)?

It makes sense for a good team detective to spend time in Process where problems can be seen most easily. But having done that, apply the whole model. Examine the Inputs and work through the appropriate Process Criteria leverage points to arrive at solutions. For example, when the outcomes indicate a strategy problem, look at:

O-3: Availability of the critical data needed by the team to accomplish its tasks. Create an information system (not necessarily IT) to help teams do their work. This can be very simple, perhaps a pager that helps members of a far-flung team stay in touch.

T-3: Norms. Norms are team – not individual – conditions and they are hugely powerful. They are the often unwritten "rules" and expectations that determine what is right and wrong to do as a team member. They assess how individual behavior impacts organizational behavior. For example, the "code of silence" that may be found in military and law enforcement groups is a norm. So is the expectation that everyone on the team will be involved in every decision that affects the team, or that in a classroom no one will ask the teacher to increase the amount of homework. Often the avenue for solving norming issues is through a strong emergent leader, someone within the group who commands respect.

I-3: Values and attitudes. These intangible realities are among the most difficult to change since they come in the door when someone is hired. If the values and attitudes of an employee are at serious odds with that of the organization, the fix may be termination of employment.

Q/A Insights and Applications

- a. Leaders typically go down to the individual level to coach; however, more coaching power is obtained by going up the chain. In other words, spending the equivalent time working with four people is likely to yield four times the output.
- b. When you are assigned to be the team leader, you must have control over the tasks as well as the way to get and exercise authority. Without these, you are doomed. Either get them or leave the position.
- c. If you were given \$100K to use on increasing the effectiveness of your organization, you would get the greatest benefit by spreading it out to all of the levels: the organization, the team and the individuals. These levels are interconnected and each is critical to success.
- d. How to change the tires while the team truck is rolling down the road at 70 mph? When you want to assist already-underway teams that are having difficulty; first, diagnose what

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is wrong, and second, apply the appropriate leverage points taking care to chose those that fix problem. Leave everything else alone.

- e. In most organizations, the individual compensation system drives the work when what is needed is for the team to drive the work.
- f. How to get maximum individual focus alongside maximum team performance? In the old model, a new team member might be introduced with the encouragement, "Please welcome Mary to our team." A more appropriate introduction would include, "Mary has joined our team so now we have a new team." Every component of every team affects every other component.
- g. With the Navy SEALs (the military Sea, Air and Land teams that conduct unconventional warfare, counter-guerilla warfare and clandestine operations) every team member learns every other team member's role to some extent so that everyone is a potential backup. Synergy is built into the SEALs team.
- h. If an individual is causing problems, work with him/her to change behaviors, of course. But if that doesn't work, get rid of the person. "Change, or change-out," is the model. The root of this type of problem is often a failing in the interpersonal behavior block.
- i. Challenge strategy. Add conflict around tasks to keep from becoming stagnant. Conflict is fine if it is focused on the task, not the individuals.
- j. At the individual level, problems are often about the values and attitudes. Consider whether the individual has the values and attitude necessary to work in the team.
- k. Note that not all work is geared toward teamwork. Many jobs are individual in focus and application. If they are working and all of the components including outcomes check okay, don't try to force them into a team matrix. "Team poetry sucks."
- l. Teams tend to set norms to reduce interpersonal conflict.
- m. TELM can assist you in setting up the critical components so that you don't have to fix them on the fly later. If you ever get the luxury to build a team from the ground up, start on the left of the model and move to the right. The model is front-loaded. If this is not done, it will need redoing down the road.
- n. Before you bring in a motivational speaker for a team lacking sufficient effort, thoughtfully consider that the "fix" is much more likely to be found in clear design and appropriate inputs. Off-site team building seldom hurts if done independently of team-strengthening efforts. But it rarely helps in terms of overall team effectiveness.
- o. Which component is most impactful in aiding or getting in the way? Look first at the informational systems, formal and informal. Is the information being held by a few? Often necessary information is not getting down to everyone who needs it.

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- p. Leadership is proactive. Management is reactive. Flexible leadership is based on team need.
- q. "My behavior is the best predictor of how others will behave to me." Impact your team by being the team player you expect them to be. As a leader, you always impact the team you are on, for better or worse. One of the best ways to increase performance of your team is to increase your own performance as a leader—not as yet another worker—but as someone who creates the conditions for the team to be effective.
- r. A great way to practice your skill with TELM diagnosis is to watch another team with which you are not directly involved. The task of your own team (with which you are intimately involved) can often mask the process variables that are occurring all around you. If you are watching a team where you have little or no relevant task knowledge, you are much more likely to be able to see the process variables as they present themselves.

"This model [TELM] details a method for diagnosis of team problems and identifies key leverage points for creating appropriate conditions for teamwork. . . . A group is effective if (a) the team's productive output (goods, services, decisions) meets the standards of quantity, quality, and timeliness of the people who use it; (b) the group process that occurs while the group is performing its task enhances the ability of the members to work together as a team in the future; and (c) the group experience enhances the growth and personal well-being of the individuals who comprise the team."