



Penna

Research report

Team Competency

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Background

What are the collective competencies required for teams to perform effectively?

This simple question marked the start of three years of joint research between Cranfield School of Management and Penna Consulting. Stimulated by the observation that non-work teams often perform better than teams operating in a business environment, the research partnership sought to identify the elements that differentiate high performing teams.

Armed with this knowledge, we felt we could develop a model that would identify those crucial team attributes that enable good teams to produce outstanding results.

This was no mere academic exercise. Our objectives were pragmatic. By identifying the collective competencies that create successful teams we could provide a benchmark for collective team assessment. And the findings of such an assessment would provide critical information for team development.

Who we talked to

Our research, described in more detail later in this report, included two levels of team research. Initially we looked at a range of business and non-business teams including a virtual team, a project team, the management team at Warwick Castle, a jazz group and Arsenal Women's Football club.

This stage helped us to establish a model of collective team competency which we tested and refined with an extensive questionnaire-based survey. We began with a sample of 100 volunteer teams of which 90 returned their surveys. This provided us with an overall sample of 530 individuals.

“What fascinated me was the way that football teams and orchestras take time to rehearse, to get the feel of a venue and to understand each other. Only then are they able to perform ‘for real’. Yet we put project teams together and immediately expect them to deliver results. I couldn't help thinking we had a lot to learn from non-work teams.”

Richard Finn

Main findings

- Our research resulted in the development of the Cranfield/Penna team competency model (see figure 1).
- The model recognises the importance of ‘mediating factors’ (such as leadership, the skills of individuals etc). However, we found it is the way that these factors interact with team competency that creates high team performance.
- We have identified four ‘clusters’ of collective team competence: enabling; resourcing; fusing; and motivating. These contribute to two key drivers of performance: the capability to develop a collective ability to do the task; and the capability to create an environment in which the team members feel able to deliver – and feel like winners.
- Each cluster is made up of between three and six competencies, listed on the following pages of this report. These 16 collective team competencies are the drivers of collective team performance.
- Different competencies tend to be important for different teams. The position of the team on the two-by-two matrix in figure 2 has an impact. Other factors can be identified in discussion with the team and through observation of the way the team works.
- Teams which understand the competencies that have most impact on performance and the competencies at which the team is collectively weakest, have invaluable information for prioritising the use of team development resources.

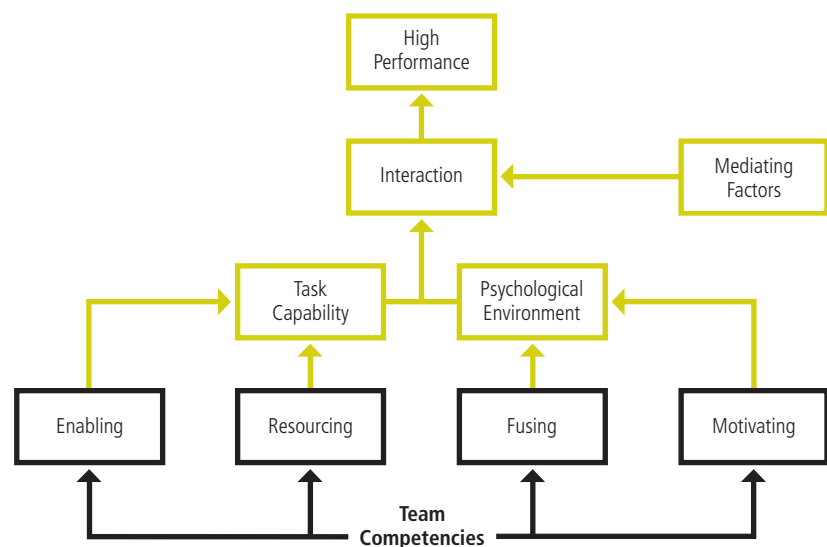


Figure 1. The Cranfield/Penna team competency model

The Competencies

The sixteen collective team competencies identified by this research are grouped into four clusters.

Enabling

1. Communicating

How well the team accesses, disseminates and absorbs information, including the effective use of formal communication channels.

2. Integrating

The team's ability to plan and co-ordinate actions and play to each member's strengths. A team has to become integrated to ensure effective task actions.

3. Adapting

The team's collective flexibility in the face of change. This includes such aspects as role substitution, finding effective solutions to problems, and being able to make radical changes to plans if new demands require it.

4. Situational Sensing

How effectively the team keeps its collective eye on the bigger picture. This includes monitoring team performance, and a shared understanding of what requires ongoing assessment.

5. Evolving Expertise

How well team members share and develop their 'domain' expertise – ie. the expertise that is relevant to the project or team role.

6. Creating

The team's collective approach to creative problem solving – from idea generation to implementation.

Resourcing

7. Knowing

The quality of the team's intuitive shared understanding of how to achieve a goal in the short-term and the long-term.

8. Contextualising

The accuracy of the team's common understanding of the organisation, its goals and structure, and the environment in which it operates.

9. Team wisdom

The team's collective knowledge about the team itself – knowing the strengths and weaknesses of team members, recognising what team colleagues have knowledge of, and sharing an understanding of the team's structure.

Fusing

10. Emotional Maturation

The level of empathy within the team – sensitivity to each other’s feelings and concerns, and the willingness to challenge inappropriate behaviour.

11. Bonding

How well the team manages social integration and creates a sense of fun, in ways such as social events outside of work.

12. Openness

The effectiveness of the team environment in encouraging freedom of expression. This requires honesty, confidentiality, and a willingness to discuss personal weaknesses that can be overcome collectively by the team.

13. Affiliating

The strength of team cohesion and loyalty. Do team members feel they belong to the team and loyal towards it.

Motivating

14. Committing

How well the team achieves collective commitment to the task and ensures equal efforts from all team members.

15. Inspiring

How successfully the team creates a shared sense of fulfilment and desire to perform.

16. Believing

The strength of the team’s belief in its own abilities and worth. This includes celebrating success, maintaining morale, and dealing with criticism in a positive manner.

Turning research into action

Penna's team competency research has led us to develop six key ideas for helping you to make the most of your collective team competency.

1. Communicate

Tell the team what you are doing, what you are thinking, what your plans are. Then get everyone else to do the same – that way, your team will know what each other is doing, there won't be misunderstandings and the team will 'mesh' more effectively.

2. Increase your team's knowledge

Ensure they know all about the task, all about the environment in which they operate and all about each other. They will know how to achieve the task, what each of them can do and how to deal with any barriers from the outside.

3. Give your team a chance to gel

This could be through informal social events, working together on projects or by facilitated development programmes. If they really know each other, they will work together more effectively.

4. Keep the motivation high

Tell them they can do it, highlight their strengths, identify opponents' weaknesses – make them believe in themselves and their ability to achieve.

5. Create an open environment

One with both praise and appropriate criticism. If you can engender an honest and valued environment for your team, you remove yet one more barrier to success.

6. Measure your team against the collective competencies

Use them to inform the focus of your development activities by identifying those areas in which the whole team needs to improve.

To find out how your team can be assessed against the sixteen collective team competencies identified by this research please call +44 (0)1753 784000.

The research

The researchers

The research was a joint initiative between Cranfield School of Management's human resource network and Penna Consulting plc. It was led and conducted by Professor Shaun Tyson and Dr Tim Mills at Cranfield and Richard Finn and Sinclair Stevenson of Penna.

The method

Our research was divided into three stages.

Stage 1 – Secondary research

An extensive literature search revealed no serious previous research into collective team competency. However, two important characteristics emerged that define the context within which teams operate: task structure and membership stability.

The degree to which a task is structured is bound to have meaning for the competencies required. A highly structured task requires attention to detail and discipline, whilst a task with little structure demands creativity and spontaneity.

Similarly, teams in which the membership is closed and unchanging have more opportunity to learn to work together and plan set moves than 'open' teams in which the members have to hit the ground running and find out about each other as they work together.

These two characteristics led us to develop a two-by-two matrix which helped us to select a range of teams for in-depth study.

	Stable team membership	Unstable team membership
High task structure	example: Football team	example: Project team
Low task structure	example: Jazz group or virtual team	example: Senior management team

Figure 2. The stability/structure matrix

Stage 2 – Qualitative research

Our qualitative research focussed on five teams: a football team, a project team, a senior management team, a virtual team (ie. a team that worked together by teleconferencing, email etc) and a jazz group.

Clearly, these diverse teams required a flexible approach to research. For the footballers we analysed video footage, identified and investigated critical incidents, interviewed players and non-players and watched the team at work. Observation, backed by interviews, was also the approach used for the jazz group.

For the work-based teams, interviews and surveys were used much more extensively – and over a longer period.

This research enabled us to develop our initial proposed model of team competency and a questionnaire to measure team performance against the model.

Stage 3 – Quantitative research

The final stage of research was to test and refine our model with a large sample of teams. We established a group of 100 volunteer teams and distributed questionnaires to all team members. Questionnaires from 90 complete teams were returned, providing 530 individual responses.

In order to measure the predictive validity of our questionnaire we included questions about team performance as perceived by the team and any external ratings. In addition, the questionnaire had in-built measures of reliability and also enabled us to establish individual and group norm information.

“You think ‘Hang on a minute. This is my mate here’ and you know you want to roll your sleeves up and get stuck in. You’re willing to run that extra yard.”

Football player interviewed as part of the research

Collective Team Competency

Our research revealed sixteen team competencies (described on pages 3 and 4) which interact with each other and with other factors to create high performing teams. For example, one of the competencies describes the extent to which a team understands its environment. If it fails to do this, it is likely to either miss out on potential opportunities for success or, even worse, get some things seriously wrong. Another competency looks at the extent to which a team believes in itself. If a team really believes that it can undertake a task and win, it is likely to increase its success rate one hundred fold.

Interaction

The team competency model (figure 1) shows that the relationship between the competencies is interactive rather than cumulative. For example, for the management team at Warwick Castle, creativity was a key competency. But this level of creativity could only be achieved because the team was also highly competent at creating openness.

The collective team competencies also interact with mediating factors such as leadership, available resources and so on. Mediating factors can also have a direct impact on team performance.

Beyond Belbin

Many researchers have searched for ways of promoting effective team working over the years. Meredith Belbin made perhaps the most influential contribution to the field by describing the team roles that must be filled by suitable people to ensure optimum team performance. So ideas and creativity are provided by the Plant, the Team Worker provides the 'social lubrication' for the team, whilst the Completer checks the details, removes the errors and delivers the job on time.

Clearly the competencies of the individual team members and the 'shape' of the team are crucial to overall team success. This research does not suggest that we consign Belbin to the dustbin of outmoded management ideas. However, our findings suggest that to focus purely on the individual team members is to see only a part of the picture. And yet an extensive literature review suggests that this approach forms the basis of most team development programmes.

Ongoing research

This new understanding of the way teams work has been used to help a number of teams improve their performance. From target-driven sales teams to the senior management team in one of the UK's biggest new universities, we have found that these new insights provide a practical, focused approach to training needs analysis for teams.

Now Penna Consulting is able to offer assessment of your team against the sixteen collective team competencies.

The assessment service combines expert support and analysis with exclusive access to our on-line or paper-based team competency questionnaire to provide a comprehensive report on your team. We can even develop a team development programme to close any competence gaps.

All the data collected from the team analyses we conduct are stored on a growing database of team competency, eventually enabling us to benchmark teams against sector averages.

For more details about the service please call +44 (0) 1753 784000.

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Our network
extends across:

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