Accountable Teams — Extraordinary Performance

How to Create Strong Teams Through Clarity and Commitment

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ABOUT LEE HECHT HARRISON

Lee Hecht Harrison (LHH) (www.lhh.com) helps companies transform their leaders and workforce so they can accelerate performance. In an era of continuous change, successfully transforming your workforce depends on how well companies and their people embrace, navigate and lead change. Change within the organization, and their career. At Lee Hecht Harrison we use our expertise in talent development and transition to deliver tailored solutions that help our clients transform their leaders and workforce so they have the people and culture they need to evolve and grow. We are passionate about making a difference in peoples' careers and building better leaders so our clients can build a strong employer brand.

INTRODUCTION

This was a team disaster looking for a place to happen.

It was a gathering of the executive team of a large telecommunications company at a world-class resort in Florida. The core event for the gathering was two straight days of departmental briefings where each Executive Vice President (EVP) would have to present an update on his or her progress, and then endure a pointed inquisition by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Though none of the executive team enjoyed the experience, no one would ever admit to it in public. With the focus on competing presentations, each EVP would work for weeks to come up with something that could withstand both the harsh scrutiny of the CEO and the judgmental scrutiny of peers. It really felt less like a junket at a world-class resort and more like a forced march into the Roman Coliseum.

At this team meeting, trouble finally erupted. A core issue had been building for months. The EVP of Sales finally put forward a proposal to take over the company's call center operations — a chronic source of concern — from the EVP of Operations. An uncomfortable silence fell over the meeting; everyone knew this was an issue, but they were hoping it would be deferred
to another meeting. The CEO didn't want the team dynamic to sour the mood for the round of golf they had planned later that day.

The heads of Sales and Operations went back and forth at each other for nearly an hour, with all the other members of the team watching. Some were relishing in seeing the conflict unfold in front of them; others were squirming in their seats because their tolerance for such conflict was low. Finally, having heard enough, the CEO waded into the argument.

Now he could have asked for more time to consider all sides, or he could have asked the two battling executives to meet in a sidebar to work out a plan to improve the call centre going forward. Instead, he decided to take
a side.

The CEO endorsed the proposal from the EVP of Sales. Case closed. This left the head of operations humiliated, isolated, and feeling more than a little blindsided. All of that was bad on its own, but what happened after that meeting really added fuel to the fire.

Each member of the executive team went back to his or her own departmental management team and delivered their own version of what happened, with some versions bearing little resemblance to what actually took place. Shock and dismay was expressed about the CEO's decision to choose a winner on the spot. People started choosing sides and digging trenches. The lines were drawn — it was an all-out war.

How, you might wonder, did this team get to this point?

It was quite clear that the members of this team didn't enjoy each other's company, largely because they didn't really know each other. Where there should have been a common mission or purpose, there were only silos and turf wars. The team's planning processes were flawed and decision-making relied solely on the whims of the CEO.

And as for the CEO, here was a team leader who was not managing team dynamics to get the best synergy and outcomes from his executives.

This group may have called itself "the executive team," but there was nothing team-like about the way in which it functioned.

If this were an isolated incident, it would serve mostly as a cautionary tale for organizations and leaders who may observe the early onset of some of the same symptoms. But the fact is that this scenario is playing out in teams and organizations all over the world. That's unfortunate because teams are more important today for organizational success than ever before. We need them to be stronger than they have ever been; but as you will see from our research findings, they simply are not.

TEAMS ARE CRITICAL

Companies today are experiencing a high degree of disruptive change, such as the onset of new technologies, intensifying global competition, sweeping demographic changes, increased regulatory pressures, and political and economic uncertainty. Along with the disruptive influence of artificial intelligence, big data, and robotization, our traditional concepts of work are being reshaped in profound ways.

As a response, organizations are transforming — both in the way they operate and, sometimes, by adopting entirely new business models. In most instances, organizations are relying on teams to help envision, plan, and execute critical transformation initiatives.

Although they have always been essential, today teams matter more than ever. Whether it's an executive team, departmental team, cross-functional project team, or even a team established with external partners and suppliers, organizations have higher expectations of teams than ever before. Teams today drive innovation and strategy execution. **The bottom-line:** Team performance is a make-or-break dimension in the future success of organizations today.

Unfortunately, at a time when we are relying more on teams, it's clear they are not stepping up to meet these increasing expectations.

LOW LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH TEAM PERFORMANCE

A few years ago, Lee Hecht Harrison (LHH) partnered with the Human Capital Institute (HCI) to survey more than 250 professionals, ranging from individual contributors to C-level executives of mid-sized to large organizations across North America.

The survey results confirmed that the majority of organizations (92%) believed that high-performing teams were essential to organizational success. However, only 23% were satisfied and thought their teams were delivering on goals and missions.
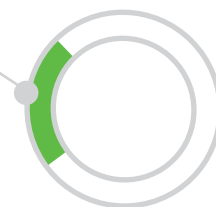
92%
believed that high-performing teams were **essential to organizational success**

23%
thought their teams were **delivering on goals and missions**

Why does this gap exist? A deeper examination of the issues reveals that the very nature of teams has changed dramatically.

TEAMS HAVE DRAMATICALLY CHANGED

Teams have traditionally involved a leader and a group of followers, all co-located to create frequent, face-to-face contact. The team leader would organize the work and assess performance. Team members executed the plan.

Today, the team dynamic is much different.

Workplaces have become global. Matrix-structures now require teams to work across departments, functions, and geographies. Your fellow team members could be located down the hall, or on the other side of the world. Your relationship is largely virtual — a voice during a conference call, or an image from a video link.

Teams today are also more fluid and numerous than in the past. Teams are formed, disbanded, and rebuilt continually. This means that you may be participating on several teams at once, either as the leader or as a team member.

Mastering such emerging team dynamics requires leaders to go beyond the normal terms of their roles to manage and connect with people in entirely new ways.

How do you drive results and boost performance within these emerging team configurations? For starters, we need to abandon the traditional team interventions and motivational strategies of the past.

For many years now, employers have believed that wilderness retreats, rock-climbing, and drumming classes were the key to building better teams. But do these activities help fix poorly performing teams?

Recently, *Newsweek* published an article entitled "Do Team Games For Employees Really Improve Productivity?" The magazine noted that companies spend almost one-third of all training dollars on team-based development activities. Over the years, however, informed observers have come to the conclusion that they have no real impact on performance.

When a team is really struggling — locked in constant conflict, missing its targets, unsure of what to do — training games are completely ineffective because they fail to get at the root issues plaguing an underperforming team.

Through our work with teams globally, we have concluded that the most successful teams are those that understand both individual and collective accountability.

"Great teams need to be crystal clear on the strategy of the organization and priorities of the team."

LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY AND TEAMS

Leadership accountability has long been identified as a key driver of leadership success. If we translate leadership accountability into a team context, it means being fully committed to the success of the team. Our research shows that most organizations are struggling under the weight of an accountability deficit.

In LHH's Leadership Accountability Gap Survey of over 2000 business executives worldwide, we found 73% indicated that leadership accountability is critical to the success of their organizations. Yet, only 31% responded that they were satisfied with the degree of accountability demonstrated by individual leaders.

73%
indicated that leadership accountability **is critical to the success of their organizations**

31%
indicated they were satisfied with the **degree of accountability demonstrated by individual leaders**

If leaders are not accountable at an individual level, then it will require a lot of work, time and energy to cultivate and sustain team accountability. Put another way, if leaders are unwilling to take on all of the hard and complex work required by their roles, then the teams they lead will follow suit.

The good news is that if a team can embrace the principles of leadership accountability, it can quickly enhance its performance.

Through our global work with teams, truly accountable teams almost always exhibit two key, interrelated dimensions. First, they demonstrate a high level of clarity around mission and expectations. At the same time, they also demonstrate a high level of commitment to their collective mandate and to one another.

To help organizations build and sustain truly accountable teams founded upon clarity and commitment, we went to the front lines of business to talk with leaders about their perspectives on accountable teams.

THE DNA OF TRULY ACCOUNTABLE TEAMS: OUR STUDY

We deployed a parallel process in our study that included interviews with several Chief Human Resources Officers (CHROs) of large corporations. At the same time, we launched a survey with executives across a wide range of companies and industries to gauge team performance and identify the hallmarks of successful, accountable teams, and those that were simply not delivering (see the Appendix for a detailed description of our research methodology).

Overall, we wanted to better understand the dynamics of clarity and commitment as cornerstones of truly accountable teams. The results confirmed our point of view, and provided more detailed insights that will be valuable for any team leader and organization needing to drive high performance from their teams.

A VIEW FROM THE TOP: INTERVIEWS WITH CHROs

In general, CHROs made it clear that accountability was a foundational component for success. That means team members working not only for their own personal success, but also for the success of the team.

Many of those we talked to believe that clarity, above all else, was the cornerstone of building a successful, accountable team. "An accountable team starts with leadership," said Kevin Barr, CHRO at Terex Corporation. "The leader needs to drive a clear mandate. It can be collaborative, but in the end, it has to be crystal clear where you're headed and the mission future state."

Margaret Lazo, CHRO at Univision Communications Inc., added that clarity only comes from focused, definitive communication. "There has to be a very consistent, rigorous, and holistic means of communicating expectations," she said. "With effective communication, you can hold people to expectations, measure their performance, and find a way to make it truly meaningful to them. Once everyone is on the same page, it goes from 'Look at how great I am,' to 'Look at how great we are.' That's a big shift."

Clarity on its own, however, will not achieve exceptional team performance. Our interviews revealed that clarity is a building block for another commodity that really drives performance: commitment.

The CHROs believe strongly that the members of a team must be 'all-in' on both their individual work, and the performance of the whole team. "Our new CEO was a West Point grad who went to Harvard, and he's a big believer in discuss, debate, decide, and then do," said Terex's Kevin Barr. "When we agree on a command and an attack plan, and half the team doesn't go up the hill with the others, everybody dies as a result."

Mike Clementi, Vice President (VP) of HR at Unilever, said that commitment is a shared commodity. Individuals can be accountable to themselves, but commitment has to be focused on things larger than self. "We talk about it as shared outcomes," Clementi said. "Shared values around a shared purpose. I think that's an amazing motivator for people. And the more emotionally connected you get, the more accountable you become to the team."

Maryjo Charbonnier, CHRO at Wolters Kluwer, added that teams must be more than a collection of talented, top performers. They must also be people who can learn to collaborate, integrate, and create something larger than themselves. "Teams need to be able to adapt to their changing environments," said Maryjo Charbonnier, CHRO for Wolters Kluwer, a global professional services corporation. "Sometimes, when you're faced with a large need for change, you need teams to be more like marching bands to be successful. Everyone moving in the same direction, at the same time. If rapid change and innovation is in play, then you need to perform more like a jazz band, where people can be more creative and free flowing."

The conflict between individual and team goals was frequently cited as a potentially critical derailer for a team striving to achieve great expectations. This is particularly concerning for the CHROs in situations where teams have been formed with no collective goals, only individual goals.

"When you set individual goals and try to hold teams accountable, there's a disconnect," said Dave Goodes, Senior Vice President (SVP) and CHRO at ABM Industries. "I don't think many organizations are mature enough to set team goals. You have to manage all aspects of the team to encourage better team outcomes."

For those organizations that can lay the foundation for accountable teams, the results can be impressive. The CHROs interviewed spoke of great teams pushing themselves to become exceptional by adopting the key principles of accountability and putting aside their individual goals in favor of the team.

"I think there is a confidence that comes from being able to take ownership of team results and transcends being primarily concerned about their own outcomes to help others," said Univision's Margaret Lazo. "I think that collaborating or feeling that sense of ownership of a team or group outcome is how teams can contribute to the larger enterprise success."

Our conversations with CHROs helped to reveal some intriguing insights into what works, what doesn't work, and where we can find the leverage to move mediocre teams to good, and good teams to extraordinary.

A VIEW FROM THE FIELD: SURVEY OF BUSINESS EXECUTIVES

To complement the insights we gained from our interviews with CHROs, we reached out to a broad set of business executives with a survey. In total there were 87 respondents from the United States from various sized companies representing more than 20 different industries. We asked the executives to rate their existing teams on a spectrum of 32 behaviors. We also asked survey respondents to answer several open-ended questions to better understand their thinking on team performance. Here's what we found.

1 | The majority of teams are mediocre

Among the more startling results is the fact that most teams are average at best. That is a concern because it suggests that organizations are either satisfied with mediocre performance, or they don't know how to move their teams from average to exceptional.

When we look at the breakdown of responses, only 6% of respondents rated their teams as truly exceptional. A whopping 88% of survey respondents rated their teams as average, below average, or poor.

88%
rated their teams as **average, below average, or poor**

Think about that for a moment. At a time when organizations need their teams to be at their strongest, we find that they are weak, aimless, and underperforming. This is a problem that will be allowed to continue unless the leaders of teams step up and address the scourge of mediocrity head on.

2 | The foundational dimensions of team accountability

As was the case with the CHRO interviews, survey respondents kept returning to two foundational qualities of high-performing, accountable teams: **clarity and commitment.**

At first blush, these may seem like extremely simple concepts. However, our research confirmed that these qualities can be elusive for many teams.

Perhaps it's because so many teams are thrown together quickly, without proper planning and consideration. Or it could be that a particular team includes a collection of driven individuals who are working at cross-purposes with each other, and there are not enough true team players who are focused on the welfare and outcomes of the group.

From the interviews with CHROs and open-ended comments from our respondents, we were able to come up with more robust definitions of both clarity and commitment.

Team Clarity refers to the degree to which all team members are clear on:
- their business context.
- the trends in the external environment and industry dynamics.
- the strategy of the team, and
- the expectations of key stakeholders.

Team Commitment refers to the degree to which team members are fully committed to:
- the mandate of the team.
- executing the team's priorities.
- working with other teams across the organization and
- proactively addressing team issues in a direct and timely manner.

CLARITY

A successful, accountable team must be a clear-thinking team.

After looking at the perspectives of the respondents and CHROs, it was evident that true clarity can only come when every team member has an unambiguous understanding of the business context in which it operates. The team must be clear on its core purpose and strategy as it relates to the overall organization. The team must clearly understand the expectations of key stakeholders, both inside and outside the organization. Finally, the team has absolute clarity about what needs to get done, how it needs to get done, and when.

(The chart below presents the highest to lowest rated items across all survey respondents.)

Team members are clear on the needs of external customers/consumers	3.8
Team members are clear on the collective goals and priorities of the team	3.6
Team members are clear on the primary obligation of the team in driving the success of the organization	3.6
Team members are clear on what matters to their key stakeholders	3.5
Team members are clear on the trends and drivers in their external business environment and industry	3.4
Team members are clear on the kind of leadership culture the team requires to succeed	3.1
Team members regularly communicate and cascade the strategy to others	3.0
Team members are clear on how to influence key stakeholders to drive the strategic priorities of the organization	3.0
Team members are clear on where they stand as a team (current strengths and gap areas)	3.0
Team members are clear on how to align work across the organization	2.8

"High-performing teams need that "one-company" mindset, and be willing to break down silos and colloborate inside and outside their team."

These results paint a clear picture of what matters most across all teams when it comes to driving high clarity. It also clearly shows where teams struggle the most. The ability to work horizontally appears to be a gap that must be addressed because companies are calling on teams to work across organizational boundaries to collaborate and innovate. If teams cannot align work across the organization or influence key stakeholders in other departments or businesses, then overall company performance is eroded.

Remarkably, we learned through our research that a great many teams simply do not have clarity on any of those points.

They do not have a collective understanding of the team's strategy. They also do not fully appreciate how everyone's work contributes to the execution of the team strategy. Without clarity, leaders and their teams are flying blind, unsure of where they are going, why they are going there, and what is expected of them along the way.

COMMITMENT

A truly accountable team is also a committed team. Commitment ensures every member is 'all in' and fully engaged in the team's mission. Team members show a willingness to work with other people and teams across the organization. They are committed to the idea of collective leadership, both on their team and for others in the organization. In short, team members demonstrate a deep commitment to each other.

(The chart below presents the highest to lowest rated items across all survey respondents.)

Team members are passionate about the future of the organization	3.8
Team members deeply care about each other	3.5
Team members set high standards of performance for the team	3.4
Team members demonstrate strong accountability for executing the organization's strategic priorities	3.3
Team members demonstrate resilience and resolve in the face of adversity	3.3
Team members consistently demonstrate an aligned and united front	3.0
Team members demonstrate the courage to tackle difficult issues with stakeholders	2.9
Team members demonstrate the courage to tackle tough issues and have difficult conversations with each other	2.8
Team members find ways to break down silos and drive collaboration across the organization	2.8
Team members hold each other accountable and call out unproductive leadership behavior	2.7

The most important aspect of commitment is that team members are passionate about the future of the organization. This implies that the executives and others need to paint a positive vision for the future as the critical building block of commitment. Without this key component, it will be difficult to obtain a high degree of commitment from teams.

The next component is that everyone needs to fully commit to executing the organization's strategic priorities. Once a team member is clear on the future vision and the strategy, the team member can commit to executing the strategy to achieve the vision.

These findings suggest strongly that the most important determinants of commitment need to be provided by the organization. With these in place, the team can then drive the other components of commitment including supporting each other's development as leaders, breaking down silos to collaborate across the organization, and holding each other accountable by calling out unproductive leadership behavior.

Again, as is the case with clarity, in our global work we come across far too many cases where it's obvious that a team is not fully committed to its organization, its colleagues, or its purpose.

3 Clarity and commitment are intertwined

A key finding of our study is that clarity and commitment are correlated to a highly significant degree (r = +0.82). In other words, organizations with teams that have a high degree of clarity also demonstrate a high degree of commitment. This finding implies that clarity is the foundation of commitment. The following chart shows the trend line indicating the correlation between clarity and commitment.
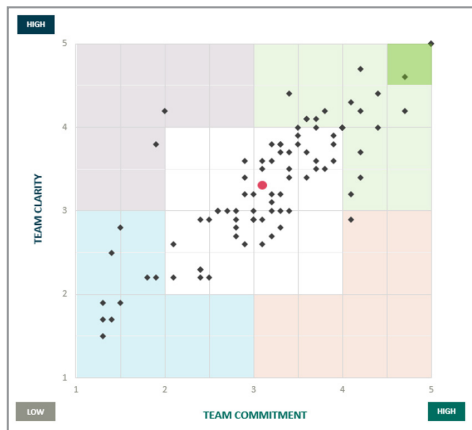
Drilling even deeper, a case could be made that without exceptional clarity, you cannot have exceptional levels of commitment. Most members of a team approach their work with a moderate level of commitment. If there is little or no clarity on the goals, mandate, and leadership culture needed to succeed, then commitment will remain at moderate levels or, in some cases, be eroded to potentially dysfunctional levels. Either way, it leads to underperforming, unremarkable teams.

This is a positive and important insight for team leaders. This significant finding suggests that team leaders must work both on clarity and commitment at the same time. If you increase one, you'll increase the other.

Looking at the findings overall, we see some patterns as they relate to team clarity and commitment.

4 Successful companies are more likely to have accountable teams

The survey uncovered a direct relationship between companies that scored high on team accountability precursors and overall company performance.

In our survey, we asked respondents to self-identify whether their companies were industry leading, average, or poor performing relative to competitors in their industries.

The findings revealed that industry-leading organizations scored much higher than average to poor-performing organizations on both clarity and commitment. Furthermore, respondents in average performing companies were also consistently higher than the respondents in poor performing ones.

We then analyzed the areas in which the teams in industry-leading companies outpaced the others. The top five clarity characteristics where the net difference between industry leaders and average and poor performing companies was the greatest is shown below.

KEY BUILDING BLOCKS OF CLARITY THAT SEPARATE THE MOST ACCOUNTABLE TEAMS

1. Clear on the collective goals and priorities of the team.

2. Understand how the team's mandate aligns to organizational strategic priorities.

3. Clear on changes and issues impacting their organization.

4. Clear on the kind of leadership culture the team requires to succeed.

5. Clear on how to align work across the organization.

This next chart below shows the findings for the top five commitment characteristics where we saw the net difference between the industry leading and average and poor performing companies were the greatest.

KEY BUILDING BLOCKS OF COMMITMENT THAT SHAPE THE MOST ACCOUNTABLE TEAMS

1. Clear on the collective goals and priorities of the team.

2. Understand how the team's mandate aligns to organizational strategic priorities.

3. Clear on changes and issues impacting their organization.

4. Clear on the kind of leadership culture the team requires to succeed.

5. Clear on how to align work across the organization.

Even though industry-leading companies consistently rated the dimensions of clarity and commitment higher than average and below-average companies, we feel strongly that there is room for improvement in every organization.

In short, even strong teams can get stronger. In our experience, when you help make a strong team even stronger, the payback in terms of outcomes and strategy execution is considerable.

BUILDING TRULY ACCOUNTABLE TEAMS: THE WAY FORWARD

The purpose of this eBook was to examine the state of teams in organizations today. The overall findings suggest that teams are mediocre and must develop clarity and commitment to become moe accountable.

The good news is that the findings confirm exactly what an accountable team is, and the dimensions that matter most to building them.

Accountable teams demonstrate both clarity and commitment. Both dimensions are positively correlated, and suggest that team leaders must work on both to accelerate their teams' success.

How can team leaders start making progress immediately? Below we provide a way forward.

"To be successful, team members must be willing to hold each other accountable and call out unproductive leadership."

1   Set the tone as a truly accountable leader

You must serve as an example of real leadership accountability to get your team to embrace accountability. The Leadership Contract presents four terms that every leader must embrace and demonstrate in order to be truly accountable at an individual level. You can't expect a team to be truly accountable if the team leader is not setting the right tone.

Leadership is a Decision – Make it!
As a leader, you must make the deliberate decision to lead. You must consciously commit to being truly accountable. Real accountability never happens by accident. You must set high expectations for yourself and your team.

Leadership is an Obligation – Step Up!
You need to be clear on your obligation as a leader and that of your team. You need to bring a "one-company" perspective for your role and put what's best for the organization ahead of your own self-interest.
You must commit every day to making a meaningful and impactful difference to your customers, stakeholders, and employees.

Leadership is Hard Work – Get Tough!
Leadership is not for the faint of heart. As a leader, you must have the courage to tackle the difficult issues within your team and your work across your organization. You need to demonstrate resilience, resolve, and determination to drive your personal and team success.

Leadership is a Community – Connect!
Leaders today need to connect to build relationships and a sense of community within their teams and across their organizations. You must focus on the quality of the relationships you have with others. You need to regularly network internally to foster connections that result in high levels of trust and mutual support. This, in turn, drives greater collaboration, innovation, and speed of execution.

2   Conduct a team accountability assessment

Conduct an assessment of your team's level of accountability. The questions below are taken from our survey. Take time first on your own to complete your evaluation of your team. You might find it valuable to conduct an evaluation with your entire team as well. Identifying your strengths and areas for development can prove to be highly valuable in setting your team down the road to becoming truly accountable.

"You have to be excited about your work as a team. You need passion, and you can't be afraid to celebrate successes and key milestones."

Clarity of the Business Context
The team takes accountability for anticipating external trends and understanding their business context
(1 = weak, 5 = strong)

My team is clear on the trends and drivers in their external business environment and industry
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

My team is clear on the needs of external customers/consumers
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

My team is clear on changes and issues impacting our organization
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

My team is able to provide clarity on the business context to others on our team
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Clarity of Stakeholder Expectations
The team takes accountability to understand the interdependencies that exist with other parts of the organization
(1 = weak, 5 = strong)

My team is clear on what matters to our key stakeholders
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

My team is clear on the stakeholder relationships needed to drive success at the organizational level
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

My team is clear on how to influence key stakeholders to drive the strategic priorities of the organization
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

My team is clear on how to align work across the organization
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Clarity of the Strategy
The team takes accountability for understanding the purpose and strategy of their organization
(1 = weak, 5 = strong)

My team is clear on the links between the strategy and external market trends and customer expectations
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

My team understands how the team's mandate aligns to organizational strategic priorities
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

My team is clear on the primary obligation of the team in driving the success of the organization
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

My team regularly communicates and cascades the strategy to others
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Clarity within the Team
The team takes accountability to understand its priorities, plans and efforts needed to ensure the successful attainment of business results
(1 = weak, 5 = strong)

My team is clear on our collective goals and priorities
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

My team is clear on how to execute the team's strategy and priorities
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

My team is clear on where we stand as a team (current strengths and gap areas)
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

My team is clear on the kind of leadership culture we need to succeed
① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Commitment to Team's Mandate
The team demonstrates an accountability to build a deep sense of commitment to driving its success
(1 = weak, 5 = strong)

My team is passionate about the future of the organization

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

My team demonstrates strong accountability for executing the organization's strategic priorities

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

My team sets high standards of performance for the team

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

My team consistently demonstrates an aligned and united front

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

Commitment to Leading the Team
The team demonstrates an accountability to work together and is committed to making the team as strong as it can possibly be
(1 = weak, 5 = strong)

My team shares high aspirations to be truly accountable leaders

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

My team supports each other's development as leaders

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

My team demonstrates the courage to tackle tough issues and have difficult conversations with each other

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

My team demonstrates resilience and resolve in the face of adversity

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

Commitment to Working Across the Organization
The team demonstrates the accountability to effectively work with key stakeholders across the organization to drive positive business outcomes
(1 = weak, 5 = strong)

My team finds ways to break down silos and drive collaboration across the organization

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

My team demonstrates the courage to tackle difficult issues with stakeholders

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

My team invests time to build productive relationships with key stakeholders

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

My team minimizes unhealthy politics and works with stakeholders in the interest of the whole organization

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

Commitment to Each Other
The team demonstrates a deep commitment to each other
(1 = weak, 5 = strong)

My team holds each other accountable and calls out unproductive leadership behavior

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

My team deeply cares about each other

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

My team demonstrates high trust and have each other's backs

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

My team regularly commits to spending time to get to know each other on a personal level

(1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)

"Great teams have the resolve to band together in the face of adversity and demonstrate resilience."

Once you have completed the assessment, it will be possible to identify the elements that you can leverage to drive overall improvements in team performance. Meet with your team to share the assessment results and put a plan in place. Consider conducting this assessment two times per year to make sure your team has strong clarity and commitment.

③ Address the mediocre and unaccountable leaders on your team

We find, too often, that attempts to build accountability at a team level are undermined by team leaders who fail to address the unaccountable or weaker team members. This failure to take action sends the message to other leaders and employees that you are prepared to tolerate mediocrity. It also disengages your high performers, many of whom are truly accountable. These people will feel strongly that their contributions are minimized or undermined by weak leadership. As you sit down with these individuals, explore whether they are struggling because of a lack of clarity or commitment. If it's about clarity, then provide it. If it is commitment, explore the reasons why it's not strong. Create a plan of action with clear timelines to see improved behavior. Check in regularly to see if progress takes hold.

④ Reach out to teams across your organization

As already explored above, your team needs to work with other functions and departments across your organization. Assess regularly the relationship between your team and the others you work with the most. Discuss with your counterparts the degree of team accountability and where you can both become stronger and, in turn, help each other be more successful. Don't wait or avoid having the challenging conversations if a relationship with another team is strained. Real accountability means taking on those tough challenges head on.

CONCLUSION

Considering the current state of teams, it could be easy to fall into a state of despair. How are companies supposed to rely heavily on teams to help drive performance and transformation if the problems seem to outweigh the solutions?

Although it is the unvarnished truth about the state of teams today — confirmed by our interviews, research, and consulting experience working with teams globally — there is another truth that must be acknowledged: team performance can be improved.

With proper attention to the core principles of leadership accountability and the foundational building blocks of clarity and commitment, almost any team can improve its overall performance.

The poorest performing teams obviously have the largest opportunity for improvement. But even average and strong teams can reach extraordinary performance levels with careful attention to the principles of accountability, clarity, and commitment.

Not all teams can be saved. But the good news is that the vast majority of teams cannot only be saved, they can be improved to an exceptional degree.

"There needs to be trust. You have to keep personal politics on the sidelines and show your team that you have their backs."

APPENDIX I - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

ONLINE SURVEY

PURPOSE:
To explore the foundations of leadership accountability, clarity and commitment, as it currently exists in teams.

The study deployed a two-fold data collection strategy that included an online survey and a set of semi-structured interviews with a select group of CHROs.

Teams rated in their organizations along 32 described behaviors:
16 statements assessed the clarity dimension
16 statements assessed the commitment dimension

87 respondents:

18% C-Suite executive leaders

24% Vice President level leaders

34% Director Level/Senior Managers

23% Middle Managers

12 industries (of various sizes in the U.S.) were represented: manufacturing, financial services, healthcare, professional services, and education

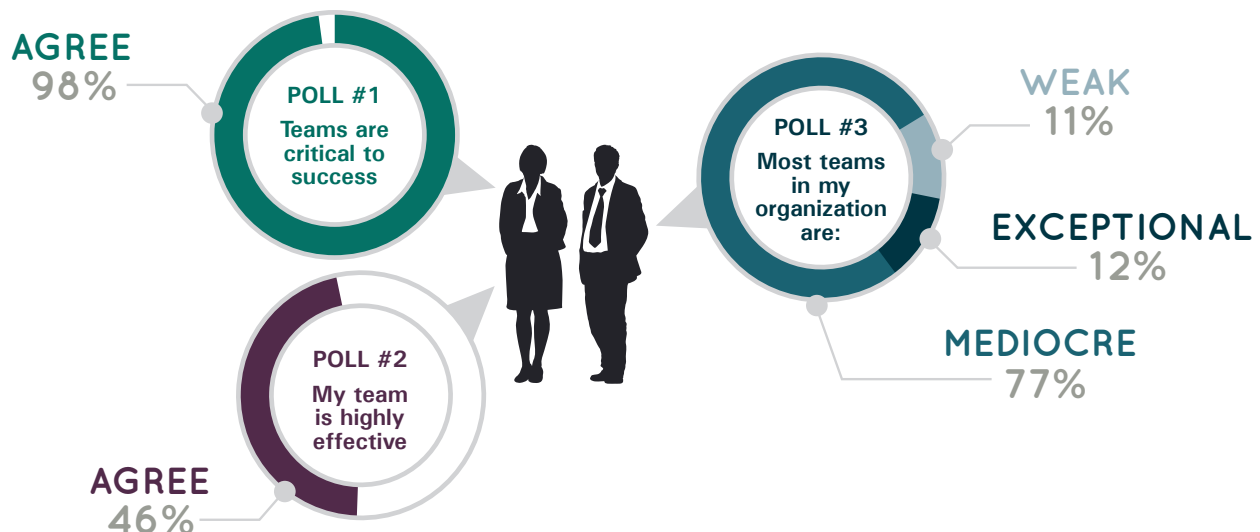Reflected a cross-section of company sizes:

48% < 1,000 employees

29% have between 1,000 and 5,000 employees

6% > 5,000 employees

16% > 15,000 employees

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

A total of seven interviews were conducted with CHROs from leading organizations. In each interview, respondents were asked to provide their perspectives on the nature of truly accountable teams, the state of teams in their organizations, the factors that help teams become truly accountable, and those that act as barriers to true team accountability. The output from the interviews was analyzed to identify key themes and insights.

POLL RESULTS

Approximately 550 HR leaders/practitioners were polled during an HR.com event.

AGREE 98%
POLL #1 Teams are critical to success

POLL #2 My team is highly effective
AGREE 46%

POLL #3 Most teams in my organization are:
WEAK 11%
EXCEPTIONAL 12%
MEDIOCRE 77%

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alex Vincent, Ph.D.

As LHH's Senior Vice President of Leadership Transformation, Alex Vincent has spent his career focused on the ways to maximize individual, team and leadership performance. Employing an array of ground-breaking research, compelling keynotes and dynamic workshops, Alex has travelled the globe to help leaders and teams from a wide array of industries and sectors – including engineering, healthcare, financial and professional services and the public sector – find the path from good to exceptional.

Alex is an acknowledged subject matter expert in many of LHH's premiere offerings, including The Leadership Contract, The Leadership Contract for Teams, Leading Innovation, and Strategic Leadership.

Alex completed his Ph.D. in Psychology at the University of Toronto and went on to complete post-doctoral studies in the Human Performance Laboratory at York University. He is a Professional Certified Coach with the International Coaching Federation, as well as a previous faculty member in the department of Psychology and the John Molson School of Business, at Concordia University in Montreal.

Vince Molinaro, Ph.D.

Vince Molinaro, Ph.D., has dedicated his life to promoting both personal and organizational accountability in leadership cultures around the world. He experienced a defining moment early in his career when he saw a respected colleague and mentor succumb to a cancer she believed was the byproduct of a stressful, toxic work environment. As a result, Vince vowed to teach business leaders how to build successful organizations by increasing the accountability of their leaders.

The author of *The Leadership Contract (Wiley)*, a New York Times and USA Today bestseller now in its third edition, and The Leadership Contract Field Guide, published in January 2018, Vince has spent more than 20 years as an adviser to boards and senior executives looking to improve leadership in their organizations.

Vince knows that leadership accountability is the key ingredient in building a strong, vibrant organizational culture. As a successful senior executive in one of the world's top leadership development firms, Vince has made it his calling to confront weak and lame leadership. He shows leaders at all levels in organizations worldwide how to step up and fulfill their obligations and responsibilities as real leaders.

What sets Vince apart is that he's no ivory-tower academic. As a forceful keynote speaker at conferences and corporate retreats around the world, he translates first-hand experiences from the leadership trenches into practical advice on how leaders can confront and overcome their challenges and build strong leadership cultures.