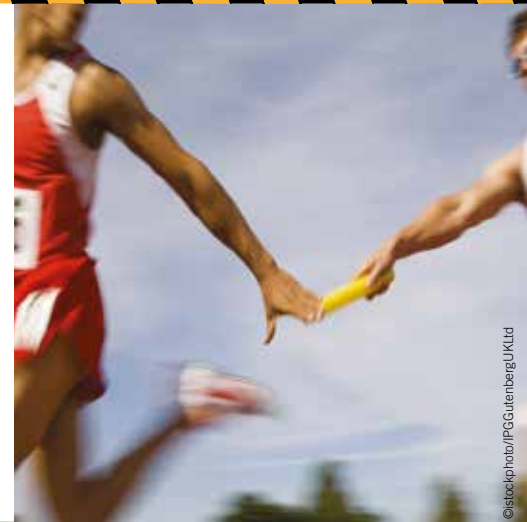


The magic of teams is the adaptability and agility that results from the power of joint cognition. Scaling that up to the level of the organization as a whole — building a “team of teams” — takes trust, shared consciousness, and a new leadership model that empowers teams to devise and execute plans more freely.



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How to unleash a team of teams?

Based on *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* by **Stanley MCCHRYSTAL** with **Tantum COLLINS**, **David SILVERMAN**, and **Chris FUSSELL** (*Portfolio / Penguin*, May 2015) and “Successful teams need two things. One is trust,” by **Karl MOORE** (*The Globe and Mail*, March 2015).

1 / FOSTER TRUST

Trust is the first ingredient of an adaptable and agile team of teams.

Understand what trust means

According to Karl Moore of the Desautels Faculty of Management at McGill University in Montreal, everyone thinks they know what trust is but, when asked, different people usually provide different definitions. The first step to building trust in your organization is developing a clear understanding of what it is.

- Predictability is the first half of the equation: “The more I understand your point of view, and the more I understand your perspective, the more predictable you get. That is a very important piece of the trust-building within any team environment, to be able to predict, so I know when I ask you for something, you are going to behave in a certain way.”
- Shared purpose is the second: If trust is predictability, then what good is it if you can accurately predict that your team members will let you down? “Part of what we also need is shared purpose. A shared sense of purpose and shared sense of understanding, when you marry that with trust, then I know I can rely on the behavior and I know that the behavior is going to be working towards the goal that I am trying to achieve.”

Multiply the connections between individuals

Help team members get to know one another by increasing their opportunities to connect:

- Implement a buddy program. Have team members work in rotating pairs.
- Implement an exchange program. To strengthen the bonds of trust across internal silos, have individuals work in other divisions for months at a time. Ensure teams send out their best and brightest by emphasizing that these individuals are team representatives for the rest of the company. When exchange program participants return to their “home units,” they will take the trust and understanding they have gained of the other division and spread it to their “home” team members.

2 / CREATE SHARED CONSCIOUSNESS

After trust, the second ingredient is a shared understanding of the organization and its environment. ...

Embrace the need to adopt extreme transparency

Even once they trust each other, people tend only to collaborate if they can see “the interdependent reality of their environment.” Within small teams, people generally have a clear view of what everyone is doing and how their work is interdependent. At the level of the organization, however, lack of information sharing makes it harder to see and understand what all the different divisions are doing and how the work of everyone fits together as a cohesive whole. To increase this systemic understanding, embrace the need for “every team to have an unobstructed, constantly up-to-date view of the rest of the organization. It is the type of transparency that those of us raised in the comfort of bureaucratic silos find uncomfortable. But it is absolutely critical to our ability to coalesce and succeed as a team of teams.”

Lead a culture change

Extreme transparency — particularly in older, established organizations — usually requires a significant culture change.

- Communicate the need to connect and share with others: “Too often we view our partners solely in terms of what we could get and give. We began to make progress when we started looking at these relationships as just that: relationships — parts of a network, not cogs in a machine with outputs and inputs. The kinds of relationships we need have roots that go deeper than simply bartering.”
- Set the example: Consistently build strong relationships and share relevant information with others throughout the organization. Regularly and widely communicate your view of what is happening within the organization and its environment; what you and your teams are doing and why; what resources you need; and the problems that you need to solve.
- Design new policies and processes: Reverse former policies and regulations that restrict information sharing across silos.
- Invest in communication technologies: New digital tools make information sharing across the organization possible. Invest in the technologies needed to build organization-wide communication forums. As McChrystal notes, “Technology is both the cause of the challenge and a tool for its success.”

3 / EMBRACE A NEW LEADERSHIP ROLE

A new leadership model that empowers employees is the final key ingredient. As McChrystal writes, “The temptation to lead as a chess master, controlling each move of the organization, must give way to an approach as a gardener, enabling rather than directing.”

Resist pressure to be a “heroic” leader

Given the complexity and speed of today’s environments, no single leader has the diversity of expertise or insight needed to be an “all-knowing decision maker.” Instead, what’s needed is emergent, or collective, intelligence: “Parallel computing, joint cognition, and the oneness of a team all work toward the same goal: building a network that allows you to solve larger, more complex problems.” Traditional authoritative leadership, however, is not designed to unleash this type of collective potential.

- Do not provide detailed plans, because it stifles the ability of teams to identify solutions as they execute.
- Listen to and promote the ideas and solutions that emerge from the bottom-up within the team, which is often where members are closest to problems.

Practice empowered execution

The instantaneous communication that is now available up and down organizational hierarchies has paradoxically “slowed rather than accelerated decision making,” notes McChrystal. It has enabled leaders to be involved in far more processes and discussions than was previously possible. “Communications may be instantaneous but decisions never are,” notes McChrystal. “The aggregate effects are crippling.” Speaking from his own experience on the Task Force, he notes, “Leaders who could be contacted in moments felt compelled to withhold authority on decisions of significant importance (or for which they might ultimately be held responsible)” – and about which, thanks to the complexity and rapid change within today’s environments, they may lack the insight or understanding needed to add value to the decision making process. The solution is to let go and empower team members to make important decisions around the work that they are doing rather than making them wait for your approval:

- Recognize that you may not necessarily know more than those doing the work (and that, thanks to radical transparency, you all now share the same big picture view of the organization and its environment).
- Prioritize the ability to make decisions within a time frame that allows them to be relevant. Understand that you are more likely “better served by accepting the 70 percent solution today, rather than satisfying protocol and getting the 90 percent solution tomorrow.”
- Communicate your thought process on the kinds of decisions that your team members regularly face.
- Empower teams to make their own calls.
- Regardless of who makes the decision, accept that, as leader, ultimately you are always still the one responsible. ■