

4

COMPETENCIES

Developing Team Skills for High Performance

Once team context and team composition support team effectiveness, the next step is to develop team competencies. Such competencies are not solely the attributes of individual team members but are competencies that are developed and shared by members of the team.

In this chapter, we discuss the competencies of high-performing teams and provide an assessment tool in figure 4.2 to determine to what extent a team has those competencies. Before doing so, however, we discuss how managers can develop important competencies in their teams over time. We have found that most managers, while believing that they and their subordinates function as a team, are really more interested in having their subordinates carry out orders and operate independently under their direct supervision. To move from this type of “staff” relationship to that of a “team” requires a series of developmental steps, and they are largely the focus of this chapter. We conclude the chapter with the team competencies assessment instrument in figure 4.2 and a case study of the Wilson Corporation, which illustrates how one organization created a highly effective team that has made a significant impact on its performance.

Developing the Competencies of High-Performing Teams

Most managers and supervisors have worked with their subordinates primarily in boss–staff (subordinate) relationships. Such relationships typically are based on the assumption that the boss should set the direction and lead, and the subordinates' role is to carry out the directives of the supervisor. However, we have found that to develop effective teams, managers need to think of their subordinates as being members of a team rather than merely seeing them as members of their staff. A staff differs from a team in a number of significant ways. Managers and team leaders who are making the transition from staff to a team must first understand these differences (see table 4.1).

The Shift from Management to Team Leadership

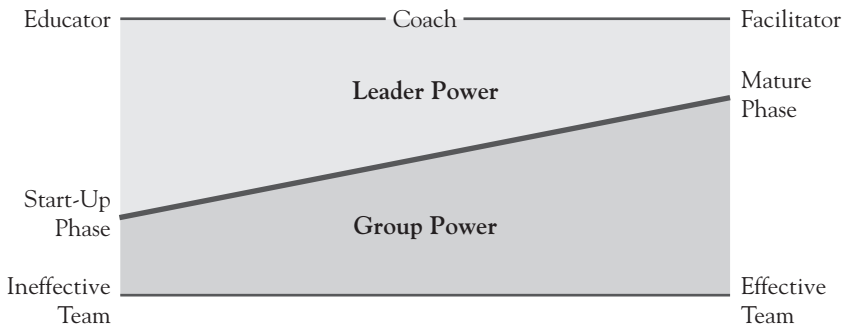
It is clear that a critical difference between a staff and a team resides in the power and role of the “boss.” With a staff, the superior is in charge and staff members are workers who carry out the assignments or actions decreed by the superior. There is little, if any, synergy among team members or empowerment of team members. Effective teams are successful because they take advantage of the complementary knowledge and skills of team members: everyone on the team contributes something different to team performance. The team still has a recognized leader, but that person's use of power and definition of the role are very different. The team's leader tends to give more responsibility to the team, opens up lines of communication, encourages collaboration and mutual helping among members, and allows—even encourages—differences of opinion and helps the team work through those differences. The leader spends time building the team so that team members feel responsible for working together to accomplish common goals.

Table 4.1 Differences Between a Staff and a Team

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>A Staff</i>	<i>A Team</i>
Goals and decisions	Made by the boss	Made jointly by team and boss
Assignments	Made by the boss	Made jointly by the boss and subordinates
Communications	Are primarily between the boss and a subordinate	Are open among all team members
Role of subordinate	Primarily to carry out assignments determined by the boss	Team members initiate action, make suggestions, and help plan work assignments
Primary virtues	Loyalty and being a “good soldier”	Trust, helping, creativity, and giving constructive feedback
Sharing of data	Data shared on the basis of what people feel the boss wants	All relevant data shared in the team
Critical feedback	Rare and anxiety provoking	Regarded as important to improvement
Differences and conflicts	Avoided or smoothed over	Regarded as enriching; worked through by the team
Work	Each staff person is responsible for own, individual work	Team members feel responsible for one another
Goal	Boss’s primary goal is to get the job done	Team leader works to get results and develop the team

To achieve this shift from a staff to a team, managers or team leaders need to move more power and responsibility to team members and redefine their leadership role. Figure 4.1 shows how power and roles need to shift to change a staff, or any immature team, into an effective team.

In the beginning of this change from a staff to a team, the superior is usually in a traditional leadership role. Ultimate

Figure 4.1 Team Development Model

authority resides with “the boss,” and a minimal amount of real power or authority is delegated to subordinates. The boss must be helped (trained, oriented, educated) to see the leadership role in an effective team in a radically new way. The boss who is to become a leader must experience a true paradigm shift in order for the development of the team to take place.

Team Leader as Educator

Assuming that the leader is committed to leading a high-performing team, the first task for the leader in the team development model in figure 4.1 is to understand the competencies needed for this type of team and educate the team regarding those competencies. This model describes how the role of the team leader and team dynamics change as a team matures and develops new competencies. In future chapters, we describe specific team-building activities for helping a team move through various developmental stages to gain new competencies and become high performing.

Although there are several theories about which competencies high-performing teams (see, for example, McGregor) possess,¹ we have found the following five task-related competencies and five relationship- or process-related competencies to be the most important.

Task-Related Competencies

1. The team sets clear, measurable goals and generates the commitment of all members to team goals by all team members.
2. The team knows how to make assignments clear and shows team members how their work contributes to the goals of the entire team.
3. The team has clear processes for making decisions, and team members influence decisions through appropriate participation (typically through a process of consensus).
4. The team knows how to establish high performance standards and hold members mutually accountable for results.
5. The team knows how to run effective meetings so that time spent together is productive.

Relationship- or Process-Related Competencies

1. The team knows how to build trust and support among team members so that they are committed to each other and to the team.
2. The team develops open lines of communication, and members are willing to share information, express feelings, and provide feedback to the others.
3. The team has a process for managing conflicts. Conflicts are recognized and managed, not brushed aside or ignored.
4. Team members show mutual respect and collaborate with one another to accomplish their work.
5. Team members are willing to take risks to bring innovative ideas that will improve the team.

In addition to these ten task and relationship competencies, effective teams have developed an eleventh competency: “team building” (what we refer to as a “meta-competency”). Team

building is critical because it is the competency to systematically evaluate how the team is performing and then identify how to develop or adjust the other ten competencies to solve problems and improve team performance. For example, if the team has a weakness in setting goals (task competency 1) or managing conflict (relationship competency 3), team-building processes help the team to (1) identify the problems they have with setting goals or managing conflict, (2) identify a set of possible solutions to those problems, and (3) implement a solution that helps the team improve its competency at setting goals or managing conflict.

Ideally, the team leader should educate the team members about the key competencies and the important roles of team members and the leader. If the leader feels inadequate to conduct these education sessions, an outside facilitator or consultant might help in the education of the team, though not in running the team meetings—because that’s still the role of the team leader.

In this education phase, the leader:

- Demonstrates a willingness to share power and responsibility with team members
- Encourages team members to become more active in sharing leadership responsibilities
- Develops with team members the basic competencies of an effective team and their acceptance as goals for the team
- Develops team performance metrics and guidelines on how the team will function in the future to achieve those performance goals
- Presents and practices the key competencies that the team needs: being trusting and trustworthy, fostering open communications (sharing all relevant data), giving and receiving feedback, making decisions that have the

commitment of all, and observing and critiquing group processes

We briefly discuss the first four of these in turn and then examine the fifth in more detail.

Sharing Power

The team leader shows commitment to the new paradigm or philosophy of management by sharing power with team members. This can be done in a variety of ways: asking a team member to build a team meeting agenda by contacting all of the other members for agenda items; allowing a member to chair a team meeting; asking members for their ideas, suggestions, or criticisms of proposals on the table; setting goals and making decisions that require full participation; or delegating significant work to team members without continually checking up on them.

Sharing power is the basis of true participative management. Team members must feel that they are partners with the team leader in the work to be done, that their ideas are listened to and respected, and that they can disagree with the team leader without fear of reprisal.

Sharing Leadership

The concept to be taught and practiced is that leadership is not something deposited in a position but is instead a process that can be shared with others. A person who shares in the leadership process sees an action that is needed to move the team ahead and then has the initiative to take the action. Leadership is truly shared when every team member tries as much as possible to initiate an action whenever he or she sees the team struggling or getting bogged down. Team members do not wait and say, "If the leader doesn't do something soon, we are going to waste a

lot of time and make some very poor decisions.” Thus all team members, not just the leader, feel responsible for improving the functioning of the team.

Developing the Competencies of an Effective Team

Although the eleven characteristics of high-performing teams can provide guidance, each team should identify its own set of competencies that it will need to achieve success, since certain competencies are more important than others given a team’s unique mission and task. Using our list of eleven competencies as a guide, team members should meet and generate a list of the competencies they believe are most important to success. The team leader should ask, “If we are to become a truly effective team, what would we look like? Let’s spend some time now identifying what we think are the most important competencies of an effective team.” With the team leader participating but not dominating, the members develop their list. The leader could also ask, “For which of these competencies do we have some strength, and which ones do we need to work on?”

This is an important first discussion leading to building an effective team. The discussion should lead to some kind of action that both team members and the leader need to be more effective in the areas identified.

Developing Team Guidelines and Metrics

What guidelines does the team need to become effective according to its own criteria and to avoid pitfalls? Again with the leader participating but not dominating, the team develops its own set of guidelines. The leader might say, “We need guidelines that will promote open discussion on how we will make decisions and how we will deal with disagreements among team members. We need guidelines on how to ensure that people follow through on

assignments. We need clear metrics to know if we are meeting our goals.”

These guidelines and metrics should be agreed on by all team members and can be written up and posted for display at all team meetings. Periodically the team should stop and consider whether it is following its own guidelines and whether any guidelines need to be added or changed.

Developing Team Competencies

In this educative phase of team development, team members should discuss and practice competencies that seem to be imperative if the team is to improve. In this section, we briefly discuss some of the important issues surrounding the development of each of the eleven competencies.

Setting Clear, Measurable Goals High-performing teams develop the competency to set clear and measurable goals to which all team members are highly committed. Clear goals are those that are realistic, prioritized, and measurable. As the team discusses its goals, it should always try to make sure that the goals are realistic (even though they may be “stretch” goals) and measurable (otherwise the team has no way of knowing whether it is achieving its goals). The team must be careful not to have too many goals. If it has multiple goals, it should make sure the goals are prioritized so that everyone knows which goals are the most important ones.

A problem that many teams experience is a lack of commitment to the team goals because they are made by the team leader and just handed to the team. When team members participate in setting the team goals, as well as in how they will be measured, their commitment to those goals increases substantially.

Making Assignments Clear and Ensuring Competence Once clear goals are set, the team then must have a process for making

individual assignments so that everyone knows exactly what they are supposed to do and how it contributes to the team goals. This means clearly documenting who is to do what and by when. It also means identifying the skills and resources each team member needs to fulfill his or her assignment.

There is nothing more frustrating than to be given an assignment that you don't have the skills or resources to complete successfully. Sometimes this may require that certain team members get additional training or that someone from another part of the company (or even from outside the company) is brought in to help complete the assignments. But effective teams have developed a process for making clear assignments and then making sure that the team has the skills and resources to complete those tasks.

Using Effective Decision-Making Processes Making effective decisions that have the commitment of all of the team members is another key competency. Teams must make a wide range of decisions—about goals, programs, use of resources, assignments, schedules, and so forth. It should be made clear that in an effective team, not all decisions are made by consensus; moreover, all team members should agree that the decision made is one they understand and can implement, even if it is not necessarily their first choice. As research on decision making shows, sometimes team leaders should make decisions by themselves, sometimes they should consult with team members before making a decision, and sometimes they should let the team make the decision by consensus. The mode of decision making used depends on how critical the decision is, whether the leader has all the data, and whether the team's commitment will be affected if the leader makes the decision alone.

These various decision methods need to be discussed, the key decisions identified, and agreement reached on the decision-making process to be used. A team exercise on decision making

is useful for practicing decision-making skills in this phase of team development.

Establishing Accountability for High Performance High-performance teams encourage high-performance standards, and team members hold each other accountable for performance. Once individual assignments are made, the team needs a process for periodically checking up on team members and holding them accountable for fulfilling their assignments in a way that is acceptable to the team.

Most of us know how frustrating it is to work on a team where people are lazy or shirk their duties. When team members are not held accountable for their work, it demoralizes the entire team. *After all, they may think, why should I work hard to achieve team goals when my efforts are rendered useless due to the poor performance of my teammates?* On effective teams, team members hold each other mutually accountable for team performance—it's not just the team leader's job. This is something we see on successful sports teams: players hold each other mutually accountable for performance and do not expect that to be solely the job of the coach.

Running Effective Meetings The team also needs to be competent in meetings. The general approach to effective meeting management has the following steps:

1. Set out a clear purpose and goal for each meeting.
2. Develop an agenda before the meeting, and send it to team members. Team members can then come to the meeting prepared.
3. Structure the items on the agenda to follow a logical sequence. Given time constraints that are usually present, the team may need to put time limits on certain items to make sure all the important issues are discussed.

4. Identify when the discussion is moving off the subject and into areas unrelated to the goals of the meeting. The team can then bring the discussion back to focus on the important issues.
5. Summarize and record the actions, decisions, and assignments made at the meeting and disseminate them to team members after the meeting, usually by e-mail. The team then can follow up to ensure that the meeting's objectives are achieved and assignments are carried out.
6. Make it clear that all team members have the responsibility (and obligation) to call for a meeting if the meeting will help improve the team's performance. The team leader is not solely responsible for initiating team meetings.

By following these simple steps of effective meeting management, a team is more likely to be productive. To train teams in effective meeting management, we have often shown the training video *Meetings, Bloody Meetings*, produced by the Monty Python comedy group, which illustrates the differences between effective and ineffective meetings.² One might also videotape a team meeting so the team can critique it and see what might be done to improve their meetings.

Building Trust One of the most important team competencies is trust behavior—trusting and being trustworthy. This is sometimes referred to as creating “psychological safety” within the team so that team members are willing to express opinions, acknowledge mistakes, and have confidence that they can engage in risky, learning-related behaviors without punishment. The fundamental emotional condition in a team is not “liking” but “trusting.”

People do not need to like one another as friends to be able to work together, but they do need to trust one another. Thus, each team member must be both trustworthy and trusting of others, assuming that the others are also trustworthy. Being trustworthy means keeping confidences; carrying out assignments and following through on promises and commitments; supporting others when they need support; giving both honest, positive feedback and helpful constructive feedback; being present at team meetings; and being available to help other team members.

If trust among team members has been low, this issue needs to be aired in the team meeting. Trust on the team will increase if specific trustworthy and untrustworthy behaviors are identified and all team members verbally commit themselves to being trustworthy and trusting others. Some teams have developed a guideline for amnesty; team members will grant amnesty for all past behaviors and will respond only to current and future behaviors of others they may have previously distrusted. The amnesty guideline indicates that a team member who feels that another has behaved in an untrustworthy way will go to that person and say, "I could be wrong, but I have felt that you were not as trustworthy as I thought was appropriate. Could we talk about this?" These encounters are sensitive and delicate, and the hope is that the matter can be discussed without either party becoming defensive or belligerent. Sometimes a third party can help to mediate this discussion.

The key to developing trust in a team is to make agreements and then follow through on those agreements. Actions speak louder than words. We often find teams that build trust relatively quickly by making commitments to short-term objectives and following through to meet those commitments. However, we have also found that trust can be lost quickly when the leader or team member fails to meet a commitment. Trust typically takes a long time to build and can be lost quickly. Thus, it is important for the team to ask and discuss the following questions:

- What is the current level of trust in the team?
- What specific actions and commitments need to be made to increase trust?
- How will the team hold its members accountable for their commitments?
- What should we do when someone on the team fails to keep a commitment and trust is undermined?
- What should be our process for regaining trust in the team and the members?

Establishing Open Communication Channels Another needed competency is open communications. This involves some risk if the norm has been to keep quiet and say only what you think the boss wants to hear. It is helpful if the team leader, consistent with the new team philosophy, can say, “I honestly want every person to speak up and share his or her thinking, regardless of whether it is in agreement.” As part of the educative phase, the leader can initiate a team-oriented exercise so that the team has a chance to practice being open, making decisions, testing the trust level, and observing the leader’s behavior.³ The team then has an opportunity to critique its performance after the conclusion of the exercise. In the training, team leaders should be introduced to various exercises to give them some experience in how to administer and use them.

A natural extension of open communications is giving and receiving feedback. Some guidelines of effective feedback should be discussed. For example, feedback is best given if it is asked for rather than unsolicited. Feedback is more easily accepted if given in the form of a suggestion, for example, “I think you would be more effective if you asked a number of people for their ideas rather than just one or two.” This is easier feedback to hear than evaluative feedback, such as, “I think you play favorites and listen only to people you like.” Feedback should also be positive:

people need to hear what they do well just as much as what they need to improve.

Sometimes feedback needs to be shared in the team setting if, for example, a person's behavior is blocking the group. Sometimes, however, it is best if the feedback is solicited and given in a one-on-one situation. If a person giving feedback feels uncertain, it can be useful to express that uncertainty: "John, I have a dilemma. I have some feedback I think would be useful to you, but I am reluctant to share it with you for fear it might disrupt our relationship. I value our relationship, and it is more important than giving the feedback. How do you think I should deal with this dilemma?" Given this context, the person usually will ask for the feedback to be shared.

Managing Conflict Effective teams learn how to give and receive constructive feedback (as opposed to "critical" feedback) without becoming defensive or combative. This is an important competency because continuous improvement requires that team members frequently give and receive constructive feedback so that change is possible. However, when team members give feedback to each other, conflict often results.

Every team has conflicts, and unresolved conflict can destroy a team's ability to function. For this reason, managing conflict effectively is a critical competency. In ineffective teams, conflicts are not discussed openly or resolved. As a result, much team effort is expended in having offline conversations about the unresolved conflict, and people don't focus on their tasks. Most conflict is the result of unmet expectations on the part of team members. An exercise in which the team clearly outlines the expectations that each team member has of each other (e.g., the role clarification exercise described in chapter 7) can be a useful tool for managing conflict.

Creating Mutual Respect and Collaboration Another competency of effective teams is that they know how to

collaborate in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. This requires that team members understand the need to collaborate and understand that they are each better off if they all help each other. High-performing teams develop a norm of reciprocity that involves quickly helping each other when asked. This works only when team members develop a healthy mutual respect for each other's skills, learn to care about each other as individuals, and realize that they are truly better off if they collaborate.

Encouraging Risk Taking and Innovation We have found that team members in high-performing teams are willing to take risks and encourage innovation to help make their teams better. Unfortunately, most teams tend to put down or punish team members who come up with new ways of working together or new solutions to old problems. “We have always done it that way. Why change?” is heard too often in those teams that we’ve worked with.

To encourage risk taking, the team leader needs to describe to the team the kinds of behaviors that should be rewarded—for example, sharing with the team new approaches to making decisions, providing the team with information about how to run effective meetings, or identifying for the team roadblocks to the team’s performance. Then the team leader, while encouraging such behaviors, also needs to clearly and explicitly praise and reward team members when they engage in such behaviors to improve the team. Of course, the team leader should help team members recognize when risk taking is appropriate—after careful thought, planning, and collaboration—versus “risks” based on sloppy thinking and poor planning. Team members also should be praised for “thoughtful failures,” since taking risks inevitably leads to some failures. If the team leader rewards only successful risks, little risk taking will take place. (We discuss how to create innovative teams in more detail in chapter 10.)

Engaging in Team Building Most organizational team members are not going to become skilled group observers or facilitators of team-building sessions. But they can become skilled at observing and critiquing group processes. They can build a set of processes that will allow them to deal with most problems that occur as the team works together. These processes should include setting a time for the team to stop and critique how it has been functioning. It is not that difficult to save some time at the end of a team meeting and ask, “What did we do in this meeting that allowed us to be productive? What did we do in this meeting that bogged us down or decreased our effectiveness? What do we need to do to improve our effectiveness in team meetings?”

To be successful at team building, it is useful if the team can understand that all groups function and develop competencies at two levels: (1) a task level, at which people are trying to set goals, make assignments and decisions, and get work done; and (2) a relationship level, at which people are dealing with one another’s feelings and ongoing relationships. At the task level, teams need people to proffer ideas and suggestions, evaluate ideas, make decisions and assignments, and allocate resources. At the relationship level, team members need to support and encourage one another, invite more hesitant members to contribute, ease tension and provide some humor (without disrupting the task), and generally provide group maintenance, just as one would engage in the maintenance of a piece of machinery.

Successful teams show a concern for getting the task done but also a concern for managing relationships and always need to balance these concerns. Sometimes it is easy to become so worried about completing the tasks and getting the work done that relationships are trampled on, and other times it is necessary to get down to work and spend less time being concerned about relationships. Team members should be aware of actions and behaviors that block the team at either of these two levels and at least be able to say, “I think we are getting bogged down

on nonwork activities and need to move ahead on our work,” or, “I think we have lost the participation of two members, and I would like to stop and see how they are feeling about what we are doing.” Such actions could occur during the team meeting or might be shared during the critiquing session at the end.

Helping teams develop these important competencies and creating the opportunity to practice them should be part of team development programs. The goal is to prepare team leaders to conduct the education phase of team development or support a resource person who may be asked to handle this phase in collaboration with the team leader. Team-building competencies are discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

Team Leader as Coach

As the team matures and the leader shifts more power and responsibility for team functioning from his or her shoulders to the team, the leader’s role begins to change from educator to coach. This should not occur until team members understand the team orientation and have developed some competence in the new skills. Team members also should have experienced the willingness of the team leader to share responsibility and authority with them.

Coaching, not a new concept in the field of management, means stopping work at some point as necessary to identify for the team some mistake or disturbance in the way it is functioning. It is also a way to reinforce and encourage positive behaviors that the team exhibits. Coaches must observe and have regular contact with members of their team. Hence, they must be “out with the troops” watching how they perform, critiquing their performance, and providing specific, helpful feedback.

Effective coaches tend to ask questions more than give answers. Certainly coaches may have their own views about what the team should be doing, but they encourage team members to develop their own insights regarding what to do and how to do

it. This Socratic method of asking questions helps team members discover what they need to do to help the team succeed and gain insights about how to improve themselves personally. This coaching process helps team members develop a deeper understanding of the competencies necessary to achieve team excellence. Most important, team members must recognize that the coach's role is to help them succeed—not merely to be a critic or a purveyor of advice. People generally are willing to listen, take advice, and make needed changes if they see the source of such advice as being both authoritative and caring. Thus the team leader needs to be seen as a “knowledgeable helper” in order to function effectively.

One of the mistakes a leader can make is to move too quickly and start to coach when the team has not been adequately educated. If the leader starts to make decisions by consensus and the team members do not understand what consensus is, they could be confused by and suspicious of the leader's behavior. But if they understand what is happening in the team, coaching becomes a natural activity for the leader.

Sometimes coaching is best done for the whole team, reviewing again the guidelines for consensus or for critiquing group processes. But sometimes coaching is most appropriate for a particular team member in a private session. In chapter 5, we discuss the use of the personal management interview as a follow-up to team meetings, and in this private interview coaching can also be done productively.

Team Leader as Facilitator

In this final phase in making the transition to a high-performing team, the leader may function as a facilitator. Here his or her primary role is to intervene in the group's actions only when attention needs to be focused on a matter the team has not dealt with. Like coaches, facilitators often get more mileage out of asking questions than giving answers. Thus, the leader as

facilitator might say, “It seems to me that a vote is being taken before everyone has been able to speak. Do you see the same things I do?” Or the leader might intervene by saying, “If we move ahead in this direction, will this really get us to the overall mission or goals we have set? Have we reached a real or a false consensus? Does everyone feel satisfied with the way we have been functioning at this meeting?”

At this stage in the team’s maturity, the intervention of the leader at certain points is enough to get the team back on track, for members are now used to handling team actions themselves. However, the movement up the power line is never fixed and one-way. It is quite possible that when new ideas, concepts, or skills are identified, the leader may need to shift back to the educator role or perhaps to the coaching role if some reminding or skill rehearsal is needed.

Measurement of Team Competencies

In addition to following a process for turning an immature group or staff into a competent, mature team, an ongoing team can use an assessment tool (see figure 4.2) to examine its processes to see what level of competence it has achieved. Members of the team should fill out the scale, compute an average for the total team, and identify which areas they believe need improvement. One should think of this scale in connection with the model in figure 4.1. Think of the power line in the middle of the model in this figure as representing a scale from 1 (less competent or immature team) to 5 (a mature, competent team), with 3 being the midpoint.

Creating a High-Performing Team at the Wilson Corporation

One company that we have worked with is what we will call the Wilson Corporation (all names disguised). We were asked

Figure 4.2 Team Competencies Scale for Assessment

Instructions: Using your observations of your work unit, evaluate the maturity of your team by answering the following questions on a scale of 1 (a less competent or immature team) to 5 (a mature, competent team).

Team Competency 1: Setting Clear, Measurable Goals

1. Does the team know how to set clear, measurable goals?

1	2	3	4	5
Team goals are unclear, and team performance is not measured.		Team goals are somewhat clear and occasionally measured.		The team effectively sets clear goals and tracks performance.

2. Does the team develop commitment within team members to achieve team goals?

1	2	3	4	5
People demonstrate surface-level commitment to the goals.		People only work at achieving the goals with which they agree.		Everyone is deeply committed to all of the goals.

Team Competency 2: Making Assignments Clear and Ensuring Competence

3. Does the team make assignments that are clearly understood by all team members?

1	2	3	4	5
People are often confused about their assignments and how they relate to others' work.		Team members are occasionally confused about their assignments and how they contribute to team performance.		Each team member clearly understands his or her assignment and how it contributes to team performance.

4. Does the team know how to develop the skills in team members to accomplish their assignments?

1	2	3	4	5
Team members lack skills, and there is no plan to help them develop the skills necessary to complete their assignments.		There is some effort to develop team members' skills.		The team regularly assesses individual skills and develops plans to improve the skills of individual team members.

(Continued)

Figure 4.2 (Continued)

Team Competency 3: Using Effective Decision-Making Processes

5. Does the team know how to effectively make decisions effectively?

1	2	3	4	5
The team has no processes for making decisions. The boss tells us what the decisions are.		The team has some processes for decision making, but there is often confusion as to how decisions are made.		The team has clear processes for making decisions, and the team knows how and when to use consensus decision making.

6. To what extent do people appropriately participate in, accept, and implement decisions with commitment?

1	2	3	4	5
There is often a failure to involve people in decision making. There is little personal commitment to decisions.		At times, there is some involvement and commitment to decisions; at other times, there is not.		There is appropriate participation and full commitment by everyone to all decisions.

Team Competency 4: Establishing Accountability for High Performance

7. Does the team encourage high-performance standards and hold team members accountable?

1	2	3	4	5
There is little encouragement of high performance. Team members are not held accountable.		There is some accountability and encouragement of high performance.		Team members set high performance standards and hold each other accountable.

Team Competency 5: Running Effective Meetings

8. Does the team run effective meetings?

1	2	3	4	5
Meetings are ineffective; there is little preparation, no clear agenda, and little follow-through on decisions made.		Meetings are somewhat effective.		Meetings are very effective. There is significant preparation; agendas are well organized, and the team follows through on decisions made at the meeting.

Figure 4.2 (Continued)

Team Competency 6: Building Trust

9. Does the team know how to build trust among team members?

1	2	3	4	5
There is almost no trust. Team members don't follow through on promises and commitments.		Some trust exists, but it is not widespread.		There is high trust among all team members. Everyone follows through on promises and commitments.

Team Competency 7: Establishing Open Communication Channels

10. How would you describe the team leader's management style?

1	2	3	4	5
She or he is authoritarian and runs things her or his way without listening to others.		She or he is somewhat consultative; consults with us but has final decision.		She or he is participative; is part of the team and willing to listen and be influenced.

11. Does the team know how to foster open and free communications?

1	2	3	4	5
Communication is very closed, guarded, and careful; information is not shared.		Communication is somewhat open; people will talk only about matters that are safe.		Communication is very open and information is shared; everyone feels free to say what he or she wants.

Team Competency 8: Managing Conflict

12. Does the team know how to manage conflict effectively?

1	2	3	4	5
Conflicts are ignored, or people are told not to worry about them.		Conflicts are sometimes looked at but are usually left hanging.		Conflicts are discussed openly and resolved.

(Continued)

Figure 4.2 (Continued)

13. Does the team know how to give and receive feedback without becoming defensive or combative?

1	2	3	4	5
No, information and feedback are not shared. If given, the feedback is not constructive or makes people defensive.		Yes, some information is shared, and constructive feedback is given without people becoming too defensive.		Yes, information is shared, and feedback is clear, timely, and helpful. Team members welcome feedback without becoming defensive.

Team Competency 9: Creating Mutual Respect and Collaboration

14. How well do team members collaborate with others?

1	2	3	4	5
Each person works independently of others without recognizing the need to collaborate.		There is some collaboration when people are pushed to it.		People quickly offer to help each other on assignments; they easily work with others as needed.

15. How supportive and helpful are the team leaders and members toward one another?

1	2	3	4	5
There is little cooperation and support; team members don't help each other.		There is some cooperation and support; team members help each other some of the time.		There is a high degree of cooperation and support; team members always help each other.

Team Competency 10: Engaging in Risk Taking and Innovation

16. Are people willing to take a risk and try out new actions to make the team better?

1	2	3	4	5
No one is willing to take risks or bring new ideas to the team. Risk takers are often punished.		There is some willingness to take risks and bring new ideas to the team.		There is a high willingness to take risks and bring new ideas to the team.

Figure 4.2 (Continued)

Team Competency 11: Engaging in Team Building

17. Do your team members ever stop and critique how well they are working together?

1	2	3	4	5
We never stop to critique how well we are doing or discuss ways to improve team competencies.		We occasionally take time to critique how well we are doing.		We regularly take time to critique team performance and discuss how to improve team competencies.

18. Does your team have the necessary team-building skills to identify its problems and take corrective action?

1	2	3	4	5
No, the team lacks the ability to identify its problems and take corrective action.		The team has some skills at identifying problems and taking corrective action.		Yes, the team is skilled at identifying its problems and selecting and implementing those team-building activities that can improve its performance.

Scoring: Each person should add up his or her score for the eighteen items and divide that total by 18. This will give the competency score of the team as perceived by that member. If you add up all of the individual scores and divide by the number of members of the team, you will find the team's rating of its competence. If the ratings are 3.75 or higher, there is evidence that there is an appropriate level of competence. If the scores are between 2.50 and 3.75, competency is at a midlevel, with still work to be done by the team and team leader. If the score is between 1.00 and 2.50, the team is at an immature or low competency level, and a great deal of team building is needed.

An item analysis, that is, looking at the individual and team scores for each item, will help the team see the areas that need the most work to move the team to a higher level of competence.

initially to serve as consultants to the company's president, Rod Wilson, his son, Jim, and his daughter, Lisa. Rod had founded Wilson Corporation and had developed it to be a rather successful business. However, Jim and Lisa felt that the company could do better and needed to employ more effective methods of marketing and production.

As a result of the consulting engagement, they decided to create a new team: an "outside" board of directors that would help the company develop a growth strategy and improve its operations. Although Rod was somewhat hesitant to create a board with outside members (the previous board was just himself, his wife, and Jim), he was willing to experiment with this new team to see if it would make a difference.

Once the decision was made to create a board, the question became: Who should serve on the board? After discussing this issue for quite some time, they decided that Rod, Jim, and Lisa would sit on the board along with three company outsiders—Tim and Rick, who were CEOs of family businesses in a related industry, and a consultant, Gibb Dyer. The two CEOs would bring strategic and operational expertise to the business, and Gibb would provide expertise regarding how to run an effective family business (he is the coauthor of *Consulting to Family Businesses* with Jane Hilburt-Davis).⁴ Although the outside board members knew that we served at the pleasure of the family—they could fire us at any time—we also knew that the family members were paying us to be there and that acceptance of our advice would be important to the success of the business.

Rod was somewhat reluctant to participate actively in the initial board meetings, but over time (the board met quarterly) he became more willing to engage in the discussions. Moreover, the board members insisted on having all the financial information about the company each quarter, and this led to useful discussions about the company's strengths and weaknesses. Other members of the management team and consultants as well were asked to come periodically to the board meetings to share their

insights and expertise. Thus, the board was not insulated from differing views.

As the team set goals, it became clear that the company was not organized properly to encourage growth. Jim, who was appointed president of the company soon after the board was created, was invited by the CEOs to visit their companies and see how they had dealt with growth (their companies were about twice the size of the Wilson Corporation). In particular, Jim was interested in implementing a “lean” manufacturing system in the company. Tim and Rick were able to show him how they had implemented lean in their organizations. As a result of these visits and discussions with the board, the Wilson Corporation developed a new strategic focus and reorganized its operations to foster growth. Over three years, the company almost doubled in size.

As we examined the functioning of the board of directors at Wilson Corporation, a number of things become clear:

- The context supported an effective team inasmuch as regular meetings were scheduled, company reports—such as income statements and balance sheets—were circulated before the meeting, and participation on the team was linked with financial rewards.
- The team included individuals who had the expertise and motivation to help the organization increase revenues and improve overall performance. When more information and expertise were needed, individuals not on the board were invited to share their ideas at a board meeting.
- The team had the competencies it needed to succeed: there were clear goals; assignments were made and accountability established during the board meeting; meetings were well organized, with an agenda describing the issues and minutes outlining what was decided at the previous meeting; and the team encouraged open communication and risk taking

and created a collaborative problem-solving style. Since the Wilson family had already established relationships with the two CEOs and had developed a relationship with Gibb in his consulting role, a climate of trust and mutual respect was part of the team dynamics.

The board of directors of the Wilson Corporation is another example of a team that was successful because it paid attention to context and composition and, more important, developed the competencies it needed to make important strategic and operational decisions to foster growth.

In Summary

To develop the competencies of a high-performing team generally requires the team to go through a developmental process in which the team leader's role changes from one that is highly directive to one that facilitates effective team processes. To become a high-performing team, the team must be competent at goal setting, making assignments and ensuring that team members have the skills to complete them, consensus decision making, setting high standards and holding people accountable, and running effective meetings. Simultaneously, the team must be adept at managing team relationships through high trust, clear communications and feedback, effective conflict management, mutual respect and collaboration among team members, and a willingness to take risks and innovate to improve the team. And as we have seen in the case of the Wilson Corporation and many other teams that we have consulted with over the years, the key to developing such competencies is the commitment of the team to develop the competencies needed for success and then managing the developmental processes that we have outlined in this chapter. The "Team Competencies Scale" in figure 4.2 is one assessment tool that team leaders can use to help their teams understand where they are and where they need to go to improve their performance.