

The 9 Components of Extraordinary Leadership Teams

Business success or failure depends upon how the leadership teams behave

By Campbell Macpherson

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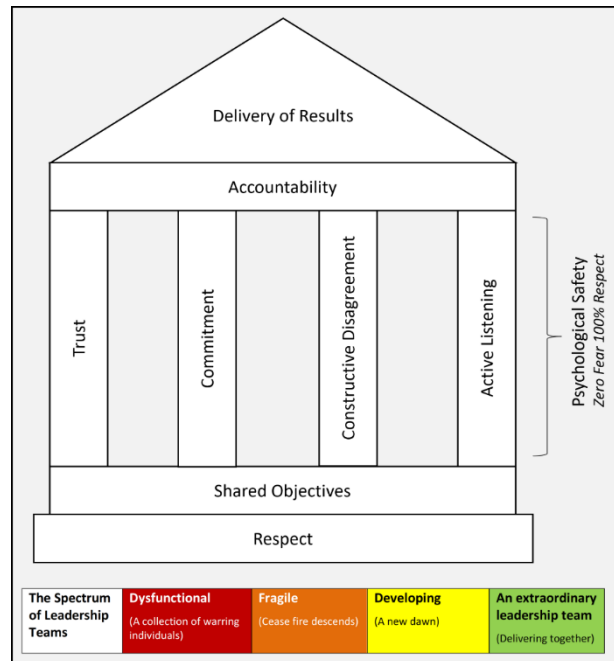
I have used so many development models with leadership teams over the years – and there was always something missing. So I decided to fill the gaps and create the ultimate guide with which to help leaders develop a truly extraordinary leadership team.

Leadership is a team game, not a solo pursuit. Leadership teams are critical to every organisation's success – and they exist at all levels of an organisation.

Leadership teams set the strategy, are responsible for the delivery of the strategy, create the culture, set the tone and the example for how everyone in the organisation behaves. An organisation gets the culture that its leaders create.

Dysfunctional leadership teams can bring an organisation to its knees.

Extraordinary leadership teams can enable organisations to thrive.



In my many years of working with leadership teams at all levels of organisations worldwide, I have determined that there are 9 key traits that successful leadership teams possess and every single trait can be developed.

Where does your team rate against each one of the nine categories?

Where does your team sit on the Spectrum of Leadership Teams?

Building a leadership team is like building a house – or in this case, a temple.

Let's start with the foundations. The foundations of a successful leadership team are two-fold:

1. **Respect**, for without genuine respect for one another, no team can possibly succeed. Not merely respect for one another's title and position but respect for the individual beneath the title. Respect for their values, their expertise, their challenges, their viewpoints.
2. **Shared Objectives** – a clear strategy with clear outcomes that are shared by every single member of the team.

Most teams consist of members who respect one another's title and position, but deeper respect must be developed if the team wishes to succeed. Most teams have a strategy, but often the outcomes are unclear, difficult to measure or how they are to be achieved is uncertain.

There are four pillars to our temple:

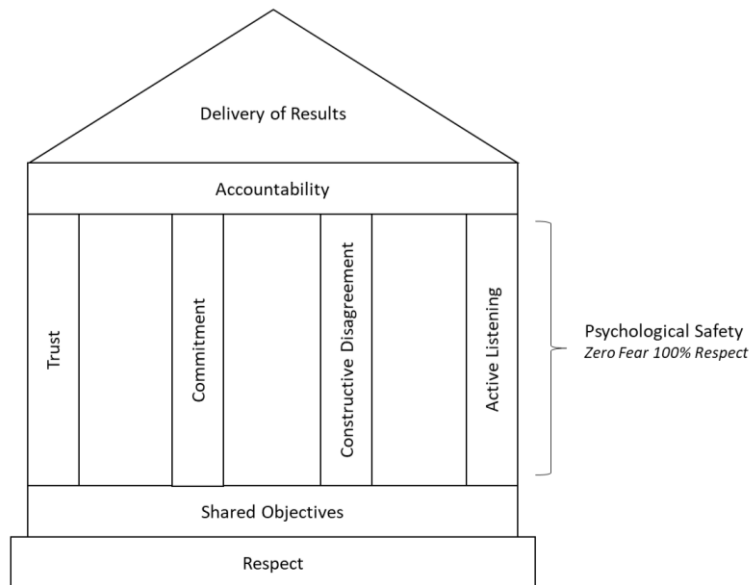
3. **Trust**. Respect enables Trust, the first of the four pillars of our temple, the pillars of an extraordinary leadership team. A team where every member trusts that their colleagues are coming from a good place, that they have the best intentions for the team and the organisation - no matter what they may say or even how they may say it. The members of an extraordinary team trust that their colleagues have their back and that they want them to succeed personally - because the success of the entire team depends upon it.
4. **Commitment** is the second pillar. Genuine commitment to the team and what it is seeking to achieve. In the case of Senior Leadership Teams, an acknowledgment that this team is your 'first team'. Cabinet Responsibility. Plus commitment to helping one another to succeed.
5. **Constructive Disagreement** is the third pillar: the ability to have ego-free, robust debates; discussions that can even get heated and emotional at times. Team members are not afraid to engage and disagree. In fact they are eager to seek out a diverse range of views to arrive at the best result. No-one is afraid to be proven wrong, because being wrong helps the team arrive at the right decision. Their debates, discussions and disagreements are all conducted with respect. In heated discussions, every team member plays the ball and not the person, to use a sporting parlance.
6. **Active listening** is the final pillar: the ability to listen to understand not merely to reply. Highly-effective team members listen closely to the other person and play back what they have heard in a quest to build a deeper appreciation of the other person's perspective and challenges. Enhanced understanding leads to better and shared solutions to critical issues.
7. **Psychological Safety**. These four pillars are the key behaviours of an extraordinary leadership team. When combined, they create an environment of '*Psychological Safety*', otherwise known as "*Zero Fear 100% Respect*"¹, where every single member is sufficiently comfortable and confident enough to air their concerns, point out errors, suggest new ideas and say precisely what they think, in a respectful way, in the full knowledge that they, too,

¹ A brilliant quote courtesy of David Chiem, CEO Of MindChamps, Asia's Most influential Entrepreneur in 2022

are respected. An atmosphere where they can raise concerns, ask questions and voice opinions without ridicule or punishment.

The last two components sit atop the pillars:

8. **Accountability.** On top of the pillars and enabling the roof to be built is: *Accountability*. Each member must be personally accountable for playing their individual role to the best of their abilities, for delivery of the collective strategy, for the behaviour of the team as a whole and the behaviour of every single one of their fellow team members. The last one can be the toughest challenge of them all.
9. **Delivery of Results.** And finally we have the roof, completing our temple diagram and making it whole. Delivery of Results is the culmination of every single one of the other attributes in the diagram. It is why the team exists. And when it comes to results, there is no individual triumph without a collective triumph. Either the team wins or no-one does.



How does your team fare on each of these critical elements?

The Spectrum of Leadership Teams

Leadership teams exist on a spectrum: from dysfunctional to extraordinary, and they exist at all levels of an organisation. Each team must function as well as they possibly can if the unit, division, department or organisation is to succeed.

Organisations with dysfunctional leadership teams never live up to their full potential; they consistently under-perform. Some are weakened so much by the actions and inactions of their leadership team that they have to be rescued. Some become take-over targets. So many go under.

Dysfunctional leadership teams are eventually and inevitably replaced - starting from the top. But so much damage has been done in the meantime that these organisations can become shadows of their former selves. One reason is that dysfunctional leadership teams create dysfunctional cultures that mirror the tribal, warring behaviour at the top of the organisation. Another is that dysfunctional leadership teams are too busy fighting one another to appreciate what makes their business special or to recognise the opportunities, let alone seize them.

But even dysfunctional teams can be transformed – as long as the team leader is ready, willing and able to do so. They can move across the spectrum – first to ‘Fragile’, then onto ‘Developing’ and finally to ‘Extraordinary’.

The Spectrum of Leadership Teams	Dysfunctional	Fragile	Developing	An extraordinary leadership team
	(A collection of warring individuals)	(Cease fire descends)	(A new dawn)	(Delivering together)

Transforming dysfunctional or fragile leadership teams is challenging, but the alternative is far worse – as so many leaders have discovered. No transformation is easy and there will inevitably be casualties along the way, but it is critical for the success of the organisation or department, the success of every employee and, of course, for the success of the leaders themselves.

While you go through every line of the spectrum on the following page, ask yourself the following:

- Where would you place the team you lead on the spectrum?
- Where would you place the team of which you are a member on the spectrum?
- Where would you place your organisation’s leadership team?
- Why?

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The Spectrum of Leadership Teams		Dysfunctional	Fragile	Developing	Extraordinary Delivering together
Delivery	Delivery of Results	My individual performance is the most important thing	Yes, the team needs to perform – but not at my expense.	Both team and individual performance are important.	Team performance is #1: we all win or no-one wins.
	Accountability	Be accountable for as little as possible. No accountability for team behaviours. No consequences for poor team results.	Clear personal accountabilities and responsibilities.	Clear interdependencies among team members.	Accountable for own and team performance and team behaviour. Genuine cabinet responsibility. Clear decision-making process.
Culture and Behaviours	Psychological Safety <i>Zero Fear 100% Respect.</i>	Every member for themselves. Winners v losers. Focus on weaknesses. Keep concerns to myself. Cover up mistakes or apportion blame elsewhere.	Factions. Some nervousness about airing concerns. When mistakes happen we find out why.	Concerns able to be aired. Still a little nervous to ask the 'dumb question'. We implement learnings without shame.	Strengths offset your weaknesses Diversity of thought, new ideas, challenge. OK to be wrong. Continuous improvement.
	Active Listening	Members tend to opt for silence or talk over one another.	Mainly listen to reply.	Listen to understand.	Listen to understand and actions taken as a result.
	Constructive Disagreement	Discussions are superficial or adversarial. Too many elephants.	Different opinions can be perceived as criticism.	Detailed discussions but careful not to offend.	Constructive discussions and disagreements based on respect
	Commitment	My function's team is more important because I lead it.	Reluctant to commit to this team fully until it improves.	Both teams are important.	Fully committed - this is my 'first team'.
	Trust	Little genuine trust in fellow team members.	Not all team members' motives can be trusted.	Seems like a strong level of trust – but has it been fully tested?	Every member is coming from a good place. Colleagues want you to succeed.
Foundations	Shared Objectives	Every executive with their own objectives.	Team objectives don't affect individual incentives.	Team objectives form a part of each member's incentives.	One set of objectives to deliver together.
	Respect	Little genuine respect for fellow team members.	Respect for some members: those who earn it.	An underlying respect among team members.	Full respect among the team underpins every interaction.

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