

3

THE HIGH-PERFORMANCE TEAM WHEEL

This chapter introduces the wheel model for High-performance Teams and its various components. The discussion includes how the wheel can be introduced to teams and applied in a training or workshop setting. Here, and in Chapter 4, the purpose of the wheel and its specific components are explained in detail. This chapter covers the positive aspects of the wheel and its components. While there are no known downsides to use of the wheel, it is important to emphasize what can happen when teams fail to employ it or neglect any of its components. Chapter 4 explores what happens when teams “drift” away (depart) from the best-practice principles the wheel embodies and their practical applications.

The “wheel” model, depicted in Figure 3-1, essentially consists of eight segments, or spokes, surrounding a central hub. Generating Stands, the hub, is central to high-performance teams. Stands are commitments to objectives, achievements, or performance that transcend “business as usual”. The assumption is that extraordinary performance depends on extraordinary commitments. More about Stands and each supporting segment are covered, in turn, in the following sections.

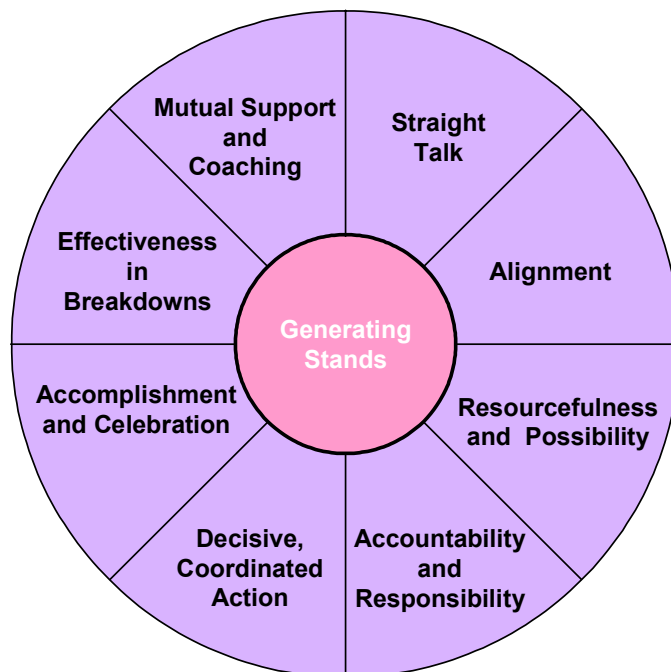


Figure 3-1. The High-performance Team Wheel.

3.1 ASSESSING TEAM[WORK] ORIENTATION—THE TEAM COLLABORATION INVENTORY

Before introducing participants to material on the wheel model, as detailed below, the author sometimes facilitates an additional exercise that has proven repeatedly to be useful in introducing the High-performance Team Wheel. The exercise involves administration and discussion of the Team Collaboration Inventory (TCI). The TCI is an assessment of team behaviours that, in the aggregate, point to the orientation or inclination toward teamwork. The TCI is based on the High-performance Team Wheel and comprises 45 questions and a self-scoring template (see Appendices 1 and 2). Individuals can assess themselves, or their team as a whole, against all nine components of the wheel. The scoring template provides a profile of relative strengths and weaknesses against all nine components.

Twenty to thirty minutes are required to take and self-score the inventory. Subsequent discussion can be minimal or more robust, depending on the group and how much time is available. At least 15 minutes, however, should be reserved for discussion. The questions and scoring guide coincide so clearly with the components of the wheel that participants can learn a lot about the wheel model—and its attributes promoting or inhibiting high-performance. Experience shows that retention of presented material is greater, subsequent to taking the TCI. Presumably, participants are more motivated to learn about the various components in which they “scored” lowest.

The effectiveness of administering the TCI as a reinforcer of learning immediately after training, however, is negligible, as participants would be less likely to respond objectively. (They can deduce the desired response from the previous training.) The TCI, as a refresher, can be useful after a suitable period of time has passed since initial training.

3.2 INTRODUCING THE WHEEL

Each component of the Wheel in Figure 3-1 is briefly explained in Figure 3-2. When introducing teams to the Wheel, facilitators might not need to spend a great deal of time covering the specific components since they might have just completed the Team Collaboration Inventory, and there is a participant handout (reading) covering the Wheel in Appendix 3. Team members hungry for a more-thorough discussion might be prompted to read Chapters 3 and 4.

Figure 3-2 shows the High-performance Team Wheel along with a few key attributes for each of the nine components. Both Figure 3-2 and Figure 3-3 are helpful presentation diagrams or slides in workshops.

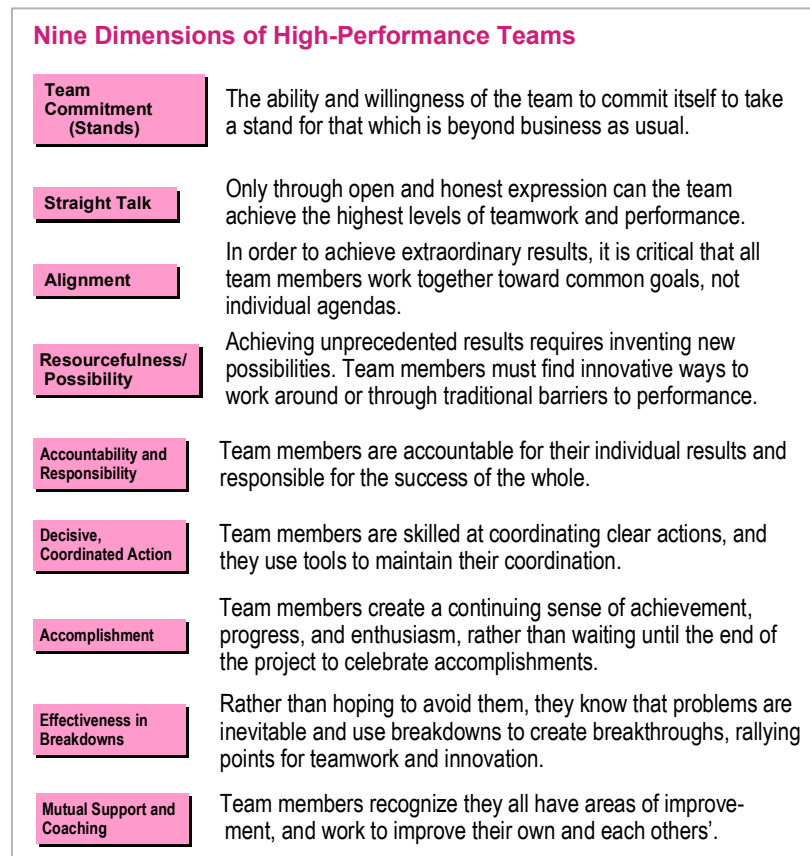


Figure 3-2. The nine dimensions of the High-performance Team Wheel.

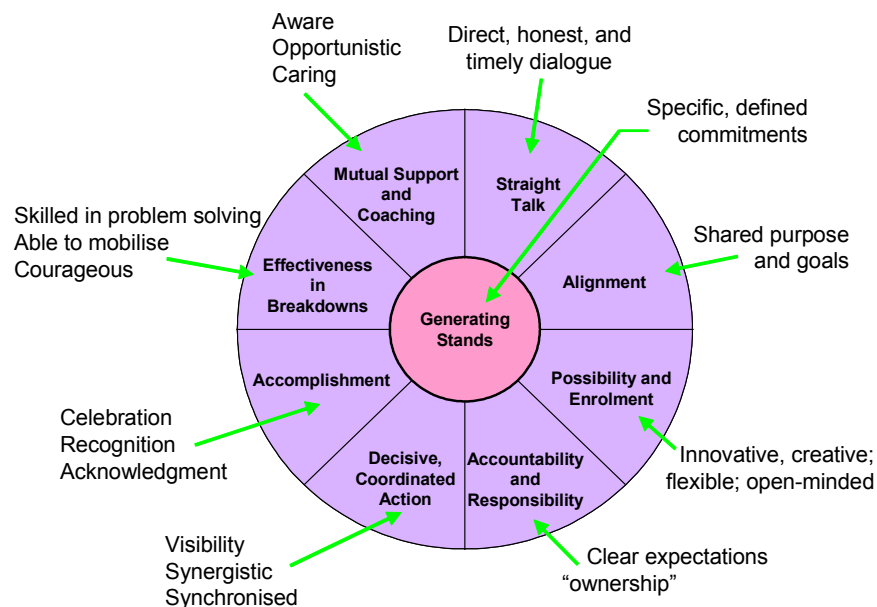


Figure 3-3. Overview of the nine components of the Wheel and their positive aspects.

3.2.1 The Hub—Generating Stands

In workshops and training, it is useful—after introducing each segment briefly—to have participants discuss the connections they make to each segment. By connections is meant examples from their own experience. What is their experience with “making stands”, for example? Do people take stands in their organisation? If so, what are some examples of stands that have been taken? Have stands changed things? If so, how have they changed? Do stands really mean anything (do people believe [in] them)? Do people take them seriously?

Of course, if people do not typically “take a stand” in the team’s organisation, or stands are merely rhetoric, you would want to discuss this, as well. We won’t explore the absence or downsides of the respective components of the wheel, here. As alluded to earlier, we refer to lack or negative aspects of the various components as “drifts”. Drifts are discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 4.

The facilitator will need to have (or be able to quickly come up with) questions for each aspect of the wheel, as exemplified with those questions provided for Stands in the previous two paragraphs.

3.2.2 Straight Talk—Direct, Honest, and Timely Dialogue

Also important, will be the ability to generate examples from the practitioner’s own experience set, should participants have trouble coming up with any. An example for Straight Talk might be the case of the team member who, despite agreements to the contrary, continually goes much further on tasks than specified before checking back with her team-mate/partner. If she is supposed to review progress with her partner once a day or after completing a certain piece of the work and keeps working, there is a real risk of her going off in a new direction or spending too much time on a particular aspect of the job. So, despite her diligence and best intentions, problems can ensue. What should be done?

Straight Talk would have the team mate address the issue as directly and immediately as feasible. “You know the expectation is that we’ll review one another’s work as agreed. You continually neglect doing this. What can we do to ensure this no longer happens?”

If the two cannot come up with a resolution strategy, then the would-be reviewer must lay out what she will do next, such as raise the issue to other team members. Straight Talk would not generally encourage team members to discuss such issues behind the individual’s back. While consultation may produce better resolutions, exclusion of the individual in question can produce a climate of distrust and conspiracy. It also abrogates personal responsibility for problem solving, which is contrary to the principles of Straight Talk.

This example might not work for everyone. This is why it is so important to have given thought to real examples of how the components of the wheel apply in teams. Remembering that Straight Talk is direct, honest, and timely dialogue and that high levels of teamwork and performance are only possible through honest and open expression should help the facilitator, Team Leader, and team members come up with examples relevant to that particular team.

3.2.3 Alignment—Shared Purpose and Goals

In order to achieve extraordinary results, it is critical that all team members work together toward common goals. Not only goals, themselves, but the way team members work together to achieve them needs to be aligned as well. Consistent practices are efficient, economical, and practical. It is so much simpler when people know what to expect in terms of work process and working together. Complementary methods promote synergy, creativity, and learning; and minimise the tendency to become “process-bound”. While it may be difficult to achieve, teams must strike a balance between consistency and flexibility. Too much consistency can be monotonous and result in conventional, over-conservative behaviour. Work is bound to be dull; initiatives and solutions equally unexciting. Too much flexibility, on the other hand, promotes chaos. You’ll never get synergies when everybody is doing their own thing.

Alignment concerns attitudes, beliefs, purpose, and expectations, as well as priorities and practices. Important as it is, coming to agreement on such things as principles, values, or approaches can take a lot of time and effort. Many teams never really come to terms with such issues. They may lack process or patience to do so. High-performance Teams do achieve agreement and, while theoretically possible, agreement is not usually something that happens automatically. High-performance Teams don’t waste a lot of time waiting for alignment. They begin fundamentally aligned (or they must stop, at some point, and regroup), and they have continuing dialogue regarding things that matter.

The team chartering process is used to build alignment. Having teams work through the various parts of the Team Charter ensures that they have dealt with core aspects of the team, including its purpose, goals, and measures of success. The dialogue surrounding roles and responsibilities, risks, Critical Success Factors, working together, and so on, and their enumeration in the Team Charter help team members understand one another, build a unique team identity, and forge a team that is aligned in breadth and depth.

Alignment suggests that team members will define things similarly. They will talk about themselves and their role in the organisation in similar ways. They will name the same goals; they will have the same priorities. They will share values. They will agree on how things are generally done, and do them that way. The things that are truly important are the things that get done.

3.2.4 Resourcefulness and Possibility—Open-mindedness and Flexibility

Achieving unprecedented results requires breakthrough thinking and dramatically different ways of doing things (*working smarter, not harder*). This may start with encouraging and recognising new possibilities—new definitions, breaking the rules, challenging assumptions. Team members must find innovative and creative ways to work around or through barriers to performance.

This sounds like a contradiction of alignment. But, as in the discussion above, teams do need to strike a balance between alignment, which accords a measure of consistency and predictability, and doing things differently. A resourceful person is he or she who knows when a different approach is required. Creativity implies

uniqueness—doing different things. Innovation suggests doing things differently. Both are important.

Possibility is about “seeing outside the box”. It is easy to remain inside the square, as human beings typically have perceptual blinders that prevent us from seeing beyond what is known and familiar. That is why things truly creative might shock or surprise us: they are just *too* different. History is full of artists and scientists who pushed the boundaries and their work did not find easy acceptance. But the team that fails to recognise it’s time to do things differently and/or lacks the skills or process to do things differently will never achieve extraordinary results.

In covering this theme with teams, the facilitator might ask a range of questions that get participants thinking about how they promote or inhibit resourcefulness and possibility. Questions might include:

- When was the last time your team produced a particularly novel idea or solution? What was it? More importantly, what do you think you did that allowed the creativity to happen?
- Would you describe your team as more, or less, creative? Why?
- What are some of the things you could do as a team to increase your capabilities in resourcefulness and possibility?
- How do you typically respond to new ideas, especially those that might affect the way you work?

For reference, Figure 3-4 provides just a few examples of team behaviours that tend to limit or increase creativity. The Team Collaboration Inventory (Appendices 1 and 2) and other team assessments can point to team behaviours that are more, or less, productive.

Behaviours that Inhibit Creativity	Behaviours that Promote Creativity
Statements like “that’s not the way we do things here”	Creating time for thought and reflection
Statements like “we’ve tried that before” and/or “that’ll never work”	Requiring multiple solutions or strategies before launching ahead
Rushing	Brainstorming; gathering multiple inputs
Criticism and discounting (<i>you’ve got to be kidding!</i>)	Use of metaphor and other creative problem solving techniques
Limiting discussion and debate	Requiring people to take on others’ perspectives and make the case from other points of view
Limiting number or kind of participation	Encouraging, recognising, and rewarding different and new ideas
Argument (as opposed to debate or dialogue) which entrenches opinion and views	Finding merit in “half-baked” ideas and suggestions; building on partial solutions or explanations (springboards)

Figure 3-4. Behaviours that inhibit and promote creativity.

3.2.5 Accountability and Responsibility—Clear Expectations and Ownership

This component of the High-performance Team Wheel suggests that team members are responsible for both their individual results and the success of the team as a whole. They share ownership of both problems and solutions. They refuse to ignore issues and concerns affecting team performance just because they may be in someone else's area of accountability.

The term "accountability" can be problematic for some teams or in some organisations. Accountability appears to have a specific meaning in government agencies, for example. Contrary to the definition that has a particular individual "accountable" for some aspect of the job or budget—in terms of formal authority—accountability in High-performance Teams is to the team, not an individual.

Theoretically, you might have members of a team accountable for different aspects of the job, but then you don't really have a team in the way we use the term here: where the team shares overall responsibility for all aspects of the job. It would be reasonable to assume that in a team whose members have separate accountabilities that the individuals would pull toward their respective accountabilities instead of pulling together.

High-performance Teams can achieve so much because they bring their diversity of talent to bear on common purpose; team members' efforts do not become compromised or diffused by competing agendas. Through experience we know that shared ownership might imply no ownership. (The same can be said of leadership.) This condition can exist, it's true—but not in High-performance Teams where you have Stands, Straight Talk, Alignment, and Decisive, Coordinated Action to ensure everyone is working together and to correct behaviours that begin to drift before the team gets into trouble. You also have Effectiveness in Breakdowns, which we discuss shortly, should the team actually get to a point of stalling.

This last point, by the way, often comes up in discussions regarding the High-performance Team Wheel. The rungs, by nature, reinforce each other. The wheel is complete and rolls along well when all the segments are in place, securely around the hub of purpose. A team might achieve levels of high performance by virtue of emphasising some aspect of teamwork, including "drive", alone. High-levels of performance cannot be sustained for long, however, unless all of the segments are in place and continually attended to. Here, the idea of "preventative maintenance" is useful. Mediocre teams can go on for quite some time without a lot of attention. High-performance can be achieved in sporadic spurts if, by luck or design, complementary or strong team members have been assembled. But excellent performance is only possible with only teams that have been built with performance in mind and then have on-going attention (maintenance) before wear and tear take their toll.

All successful teams require preventative maintenance. Some preventative maintenance comes in the form of reward and recognition, as we discuss shortly in Section 3.2.7 in the context of Accomplishment and Celebration. Rest and recuperation are important, it's true. So are practices that add diversity and stimulation to work, including role exchanges, training, and taking on more sophisticated work. But, back to the topic at hand, the team itself owns at least part of the responsibility for managing (and maintaining) itself. This includes internal

monitoring to ensure team members are capable of sustaining high levels of performance and intervening when they are not. Highly-performing Teams do not wait for management to recognise and fix problems or even to recognise and reward great performance. They do a lot of this themselves.

3.2.6 Decisive, Coordinated Action—Managing the Work

In High-performance Teams, team members are skilled at coordinating clear actions, and they use tools and effective processes to maintain their coordination. Everyone knows what he or she is supposed to be doing and how it fits with what others are doing. Very little time is wasted in moving from problem solving and decision making to action. This segment sounds similar to Alignment, in that there is agreement regarding what needs to be done and how. Decisive, Coordinated Action might be thought of as the “mechanics” that enable quick and coordinated action. These are the tools and practices that turn intellectual Alignment into physical feats.

There are all kinds of tools available for teams to help them manage their work. Some are more manual; some quite automated. You can be certain that teams require current information on a number of facets of their work. The more self-managing a team is, the more team members need to be in control of and using tools at all times. Some of the shared tools and processes that teams often require are listed in Figure 3-5.

As facilitator, you might ask some of the questions in Figure 3-6 to get team members to think about or discover how adept they are at decision making and coordinating their work.

3.2.7 Accomplishment and Celebration—Maintaining Enthusiasm

Team members in High-performance Teams create a sense of excitement, motivation, and accomplishment throughout projects, rather than waiting until the job is done to recognise achievements and celebrate. Team members reward one another for their efforts, good ideas, and accomplishments. They maintain high levels of enthusiasm and motivation through encouraging one another, fostering team spirit, and by being generous with positive feedback. Team members go out of their way to find accomplishments to recognise and celebrate.

You might be able to tell from the behaviour of participants in your workshops whether or not they tend to be dynamic, enthusiastic, encouraging of one another, and so on. Of course, a training or workshop setting is different than the actual work setting, but some behaviours would have become ingrained in groups that have worked together for a while. Of course, any generalisations you might draw cannot apply to new teams or groups comprising individuals assembled for common training. In those cases, other dynamics apply.

To check your assumptions, you might just facilitate a discussion around team climate and spirit. You could get them talking about reward, recognition, accomplishment. Do they get much? Where does it come from?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calendar • Deadlines / due dates • Milestones • Performance scorecards • Operating norms • Checklists • Emergency procedures • Standard agendas • Project plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priorities • Task tracking and assignments • Risk tracking • Learning plans • Team charter • Special assignments • Vacation / holiday schedule • Meeting forums and procedures • Performance plans and appraisals
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Figure 3-5. Shared tools and processes of a team.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of decisions do you make on a day-to-day basis? • Would you say you can make decisions reasonably quickly, or does it seem to take an inordinate amount of time? • Do decisions ever get lost? • Are decisions generally clear, understood and accepted by people? How do you know? • If you agree to a plan, do people generally follow through on it? What ways do you have to monitor progress or quality of the follow-through? Do they work? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you make many decisions as a group, that is, consensually? • Once decisions are taken and plans committed to, do most people follow through most of the time? • Do you have any way to track, that is, follow-up on decisions? If so, how do you go about it? • Do people generally know what to do and how to go about it after a group decision is made? • What are some examples of good decisions and decisions that flopped? To what do you attribute the success or failure of a particular decision?
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Figure 3-6. Questions to ask teams about their decision making and coordination.

Do people feel comfortable giving and receiving feedback (at least positive)? How often do they celebrate? What do they celebrate—and how? What’s the last thing they celebrated in a big way? If no one else “pounds their drum”, do they themselves? What could they do to create more opportunities to recognise one another’s and the team’s achievements? Now, using recent learnings about Decisive, Coordinated Action, what will they do specifically, when, and how? Who will do what? How are they going to track their progress and measure their success?

Some individuals and teams may be reluctant to sing their own praises. Some individuals may find it difficult or awkward to praise one another or recognise their achievements. The organisation’s culture or individuals’ backgrounds may influence how comfortable team members feel doing this. They will find it hard if the rest of the organisation does not mirror the tendency to highlight success. Some people are just shy and/or become embarrassed when publicly praised.

It is unfortunate that many people only value feedback and recognition from managers and others in positions of authority, especially because so many individuals in so many organisations provide so little! (Maybe that is why attention and recognition from superiors are perceived to be so important.) Nevertheless,

teams who depend on outside recognition and reward are limiting themselves. Those whose members recognise, encourage, and motivate one another find that they can sustain high levels of energy and enthusiasm for protracted periods.

3.2.8 Effectiveness in Breakdowns—Mobilising for Action

Rather than avoiding problems, members of High-performance Teams know they are inevitable, and use breakdowns to create breakthroughs, rallying points for teamwork and innovation. Conflicts, mistakes, and unanticipated consequences are food for exploring and learning, team building, and improving performance. The team seldom avoids or hides problems. Team members accept that many decisions need to be made by the team, and they do not abrogate this responsibility. They turn to “management” for problem resolution or intervention only after they have exhausted their own ability to solve a problem or influence an outcome, or if they need help implementing their solutions.

In High-performance Teams, individuals act quickly to surface issues and feelings and deal with them constructively. They do not seek harmony and good feelings at the expense of honesty and ownership of problems and problem solution. They address conflict openly and objectively, using Straight Talk and appeals to Stands, Alignment, Resourcefulness and Possibility, and Accountability and Responsibility and, perhaps, employing Mutual Support and Coaching, as we discuss next.

If team members cannot solve a problem or resolve an internal conflict themselves, they recognise that outside facilitation can help. They use facilitators, mediators, or outside experts to assist and coach them through an effective process.

To find out more and to help the team understand its own tendencies in breakdowns, you might start a conversation with a question like, “*What was the last major problem or stumbling block you all experienced as a team?*”. After a couple breakdowns are generated, you can follow-up one or more with a series of questions such as:

- Why do you think this was such a breakdown for your team?
- Did anyone analyse what was happening at the time (or subsequently) that made it so difficult for you as a team?
- Did you take away any learnings as a group from the event? If so, what were they?
- How was the problem ultimately solved? Are you happy with the process? Are you happy with the result? If not, what would you do differently next time?

A suggested format for running a breakdown-analysis session is included in Figure 3-7.

FORMAT FOR ANALYSING A BREAKDOWN

1. Describe the breakdown as objectively and concretely as possible in words all participants can agree to. *Just a sentence or two. No details. Just what happened as if through the eyes of an outside observer. Try to capture the views from (and of) all persons involved.*
2. Explore how this breakdown relates (or not) to the purpose and objectives for the meeting or session.
3. Describe the breakdown in more detail. Be as behaviourally specific as possible. *Describe what was happening. Who was talking to whom? How were people behaving? Don't guess at or even include feelings and emotions.*
4. Discuss how this breakdown could have been better handled. *If people were repeating themselves, how could we have shown them they were being heard? If there was an impasse, where/how could we have compromised? What could we have done to effectively intercede?*
5. What can we take away as important learnings?

Some groups may want to or benefit from delving more deeply into the underlying causes and dynamics of the breakdown. In this case, questions like the following may be relevant and useful.

- Why did we act as if this were an either-or situation?
- What were the possible win-wins in the situation?
- Was what was happening similar to other situations we have had? —In what ways?
- When I was talking, what was I really thinking about? What did I not say publicly?
- Why did I express my point so strongly?
- In the heat of the argument (if relevant):
 - *What was I feeling?*
 - *What was I wishing?*
 - *What would I have liked to do most?*
- How did I react to... ?
- How did I contribute to the breakdown?
- What could I have done differently?
- What value does this breakdown have for us? What did we learn about ourselves as a result of the breakdown (and its analysis)?
- Are we likely to experience other breakdowns of this sort? Why?
- What were people doing that surprised me or that I did not expect?

Figure 3-7. Suggested format for analysing a breakdown.

3.2.9 Mutual Support and Coaching—Learning and Improving Together

Team members recognise they all have areas needing improvement, and they help each other learn and improve. Individuals' learning tasks and progress are very visible to team mates, and part of the team's overall learning plan. Since high-

performance is linked so closely with skills and knowledge, building capability of the team is a formal and continual objective. Everyone is concerned about the individual development of all members of the team.

Support and coaching extend beyond learning and development to actual performance. In High-performance Teams all team members must be attentive to performance issues. Since performance and improvement are continually monitored, it is easy to notice when an individual team member is having trouble. Recognising someone is struggling is not cause to judge or criticise, but to intervene—as everyone shares responsibility for the overall performance of the team.

Individuals and sub-teams can waver for any number of reasons, from overwork to inadequate process, from skills shortage to vague or competing priorities, from problems at home to conflicts in the team. The point is that High-performance Teams must be willing and able to step in and resolve problems before they get out of hand. But they intervene in ways that are respectful and caring of the individual, for the sake of the person and of the team. Teams that work through and solve problems on their own exhibit high degrees of loyalty and trust.

Many high-performance, self-directed teams also have at least partial responsibility for assessing individual performance. This makes individual performance a matter of team concern, rather than a private contract between manager and employee. Team members are willing and able to provide feedback and coaching, and take responsibility for improving in their ability to do this. The ideal principle *is everyone a learner; everyone a coach*.

Teams comprise diverse individuals with a range of skills and knowledge. Members of High-performance Teams acknowledge this and accept that sometimes they will be in a role to mentor and coach others, and sometimes they will be in positions where they learn from and are coached or guided by others. Not everyone feels comfortable in these roles; both roles required some measure of skill. These skills grow over time and coaching becomes the natural way things are done in teams that have been together for a while. Some skills building around providing feedback and coaching might be necessary, especially in newer teams.

Finally, it is important to remember that High-performance Teams have two main areas of focus for performance and learning and development. The first area consists of the skills and knowledge required to actually *do* the work. These might entail programming skills, switchboard operation, drilling holes, or dissecting frogs. The second area—and the one we cover broadly in this book—is teaming skills: how work is organised to best utilise teams and the process of working together. High-performance Teams must be constantly working to improve in both areas, and a balance must be struck between the two. At some points in time, the team may be able to focus more on team development. At other points, they must concentrate on productivity. Members of High-performance Teams never forget, however, that productivity and quality will suffer when the team fails to work together effectively.

As an outside facilitator, it would be useful to find out how the team thinks about learning and development. Whose responsibility is it? What does it consist of? Are they concentrating on learning and development that benefits the team?

Managing learning and development, and performance improvement, as a team, requires a new way of thinking and working for team members. It also hinges on the effective use of tools and processes that enable monitoring, goal-setting, and

assessment. We talk about the Skills Matrix, which is essential to team management of learning and development, in Chapter 7. We also briefly discuss individual and Team Learning Plans, and learning and development Scorecards.

You might ask the team what tools or measures they have in place to tell them how they are doing and in what areas improvement is needed. You might also ask:

- Does every member of the team have an Individual Learning Plan?
- Do others on the team know what areas of learning and development an individual needs to concentrate on?
- Is there an overall Team Learning Plan? If so, how was it developed? How current is it (how [often] is it updated)?
- How does the team track achievements in learning and development?
- How does the team typically deal with performance issues amongst team members?

This chapter has introduced the High-performance Team Wheel and explained its nine components. Chapter 4 describes the dangers for teams of “drifts” or departing from the best-practice principles and behaviours in each of the nine corresponding areas.

