Assessing your team's effectiveness

Background

Here is a process that can help a team structure an assessment of its own performance and then use this assessment as a platform to work towards improvements in effectiveness. The tool rests on the assumption that an accurate self assessment of performance – whether at individual or team level – provides a sturdier foundation for sustained learning than an externally imposed evaluation.

There are four stages to the process:

1 Determining a set of assessment dimensions relevant to the context and purpose of the team.

2 Agreeing the criteria for effectiveness on each dimension. In the example shown a traffic light system was used: the team divided into three subgroups to come up with descriptions that illustrated red, amber and green conditions for each dimension. Rather than collapse these into a single set of criteria all were retained to provide a multi-faceted illustration of differing levels of effectiveness.

3 The evaluation process: depending on the size of the group – and its maturity - this can be done in subgroups (as in the example), or individually. Generally speaking subgroups are the less risky option so this might be the preferred route in the early days of a team's existence. For more mature teams, or if you want to push the boat out, individual assessment provides more data and more scope for interesting conversations at the next stage.

4 Conversations: the team explores the implications of the range of scores on each dimension and agrees what to do next.

Detail on each stage follows…

Completed example from a working project team

	Crap team	OK team	High performing team
Transparency of issues	Surprises left, right and centre	Delay notification of issues	Real time communication
	Issues withheld	Limited/late communications	Little or no surprises, team proactive in looking ahead and reviewing
	Keeping individual problems and issues within individual teams	Issues are raised to all - no help by team	Raise all issues to all parties. Solutions developed between all. Solutions implemented.
Rating		X	X X
Timely resolution	Stalled issues evident - affecting project	Delay in resolution of issues	All issues resolved within appropriate (contract) timescales
	Serious delay	Moderate effect	Minimal effect
	Don't solve issues quickly "On the back burner"	Lots of meetings but slow to resolve problem	Identify and tackle problem quickly and efficiently
Rating		X X X	
Relationships, social	Non communication Closed shop	Some social/tolerance	Friendly, good events
	Friction No social No participation Us and them attitude Trouble causing Self promotion Total breakdown of relationship	People tolerating each other	People happy to go to work on a morning Team socialise
	No social, bad feeling	Go through the motions	Sufficient social mixing Nice mix of people Trust
Rating		X	X X
Give and take	No give and take	Give and take only after issues stalled	Lots of give and take
	No flexibility	Reluctant/inadequate compromise	Reasonable compromise
	No give and take: some always giving, some always taking	Limited give and take, reluctant to do so	Both parties willing to give and take
Rating	X	X X	
Openness to new ideas	Narrow minded Short sighted Not open	Lip service to innovation	Open discussion of any issue No ridicule for **any** new ideas
	No discussion	Unrealistic pursuit of ideas	Appropriate pursuit of new ideas
	Closed minded Too open minded	Limited time to innovate and think Only partial openness to accepting ideas	Time to think and innovate Open to all ideas
Rating:		X	XX

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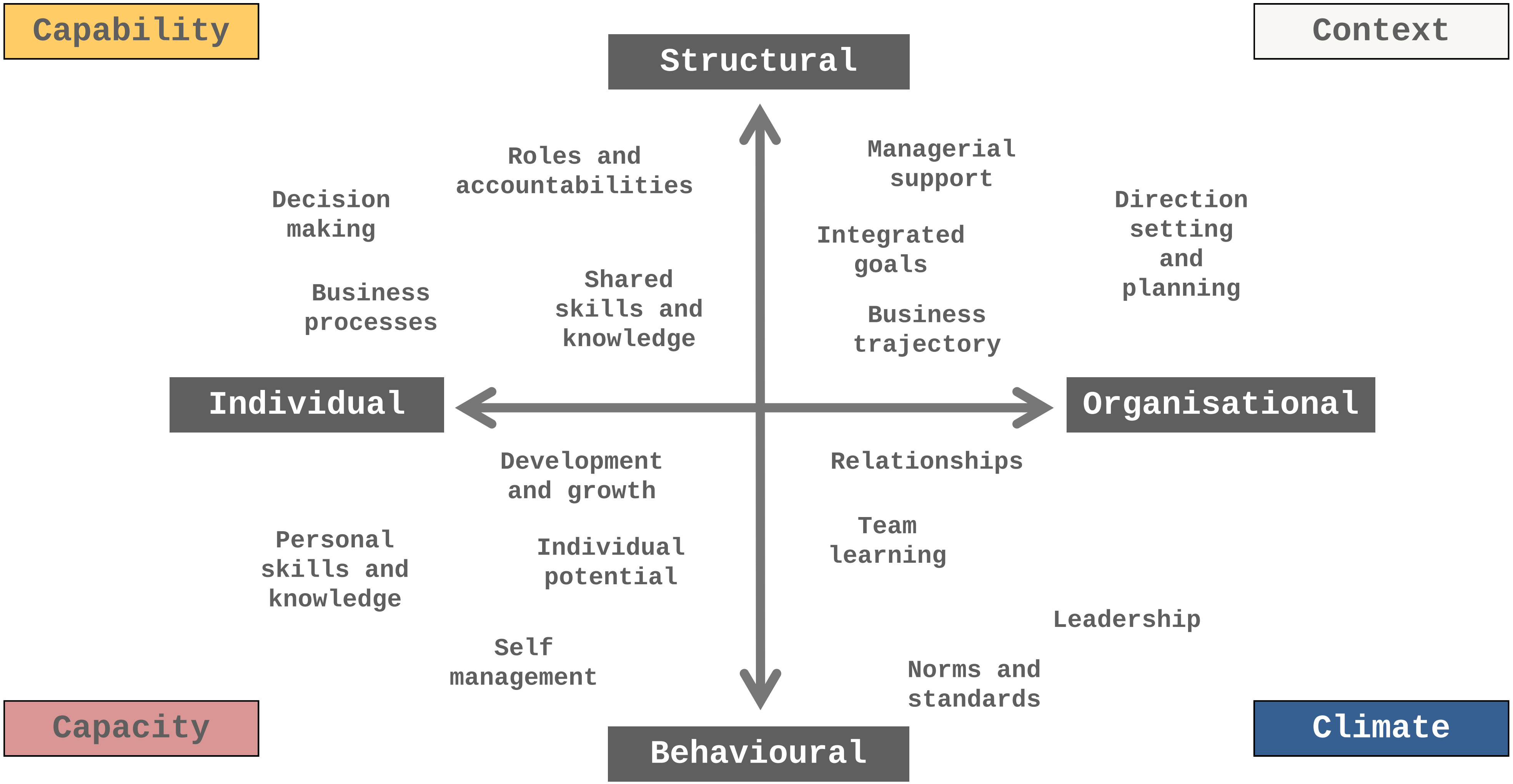
Step 1: Determining a set of assessment dimensions

The most beneficial way do this in the long run is to work as a team to originate set of assessment dimensions that are meaningful and relevant to you as a team. It may be tempting to short circuit this stage and use outputs from other teams but the benefit you gain by way of shared meaning and ownership far outweighs the cost I believe.

Here is a basic recipe, adjustable in endless ways to suit your situation and the time, space and resources available:

- Divide the team into an appropriate number of groups so that you have three or four people working together in each sub group and ask each team to come up with six or seven indicators of team performance that are relevant to the overall goals of the team. You may want to provide a couple of examples to get the thought processes going. Allow 10-15 mins for this part of the task. Ideally use a flipchart or post-its and brown paper to record the outputs.
- Each group pitches its proposals in turn to the rest of the team. Allow 5 mins or so for each team to present.
- Working as a whole team, reach agreement on the five dimensions that paint an appropriately comprehensive picture of team functioning. There are many variations for how you go about this:
  - various voting and ranking systems;
  - if you've used post-its you can organise ideas into themes
  - straightforward exploration and conversation into the meaning behind each proposal
  - if none of the above work on the next slide we show the 4Cs of team effectiveness framework

4Cs team effectiveness framework



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Step 2: Agreeing the criteria for effectiveness on each dimension.

Once you have agreed a set of dimensions to assess yourselves against the task becomes one of scaling: for each dimension of team performance you need to attach meaning to positions along a continuum that ranges from your definition of ineffective (crap team in the example) to highly effective (high performing team in the example). In terms of structure there are two basic options here and, either way, there is a good argument for doing this part of the process in subgroups - allowing you get the benefit of multiple versions of each scale.

- A traffic light system as shown in the example – requires descriptions for three positions along the scale that correspond to red, amber and green – and, of course, your meanings for red, amber and green
- A 1-10 scale with descriptions for the '1' and the '10' extremes

Step 3: The evaluation process

This is where team members do a bit of ranking. The easiest way to structure this is to draw up the completed assessment grid on brown paper or flip chart and simply ask people to mark the place on each scale that they think corresponds with the current level of team performance. You can do this either individually or in small teams, the team option being the less risky and therefore more appropriate for a newly formed team.

When everybody has completed their assessments it might be tempting to assume the job is done; while you might want to report your assessments to others external to the team the main benefit from this sort of process is the conversation it allows you to have…

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Step 4: conversations

There are at least four types of conversation that can emerge from this process – they can be arranged along a risk and opportunity gradient as each one challenges more of the assumptions made by the team. At the pointed end of the triangle we have the least risky conversation: react. The focus of a react conversation is on the action taken by the team and the outcomes resulting from the action. The benefit of this type of conversation is that it enables the team to reflect on their behaviours and reinforce what works and modify what doesn’t.

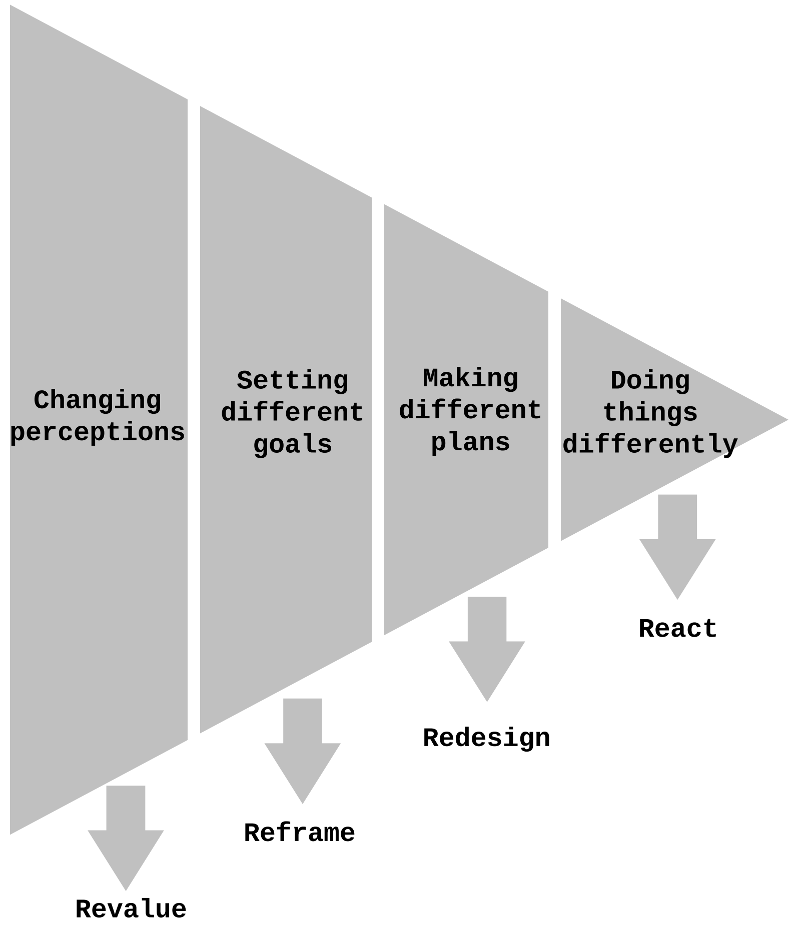
A redesign conversation is slightly riskier: here the focus shifts to the strategy that informed the action: were our predictions made about the situation accurate? To what extent did we take relevant factors into account? What parts of the plan worked? What parts didn’t? Did we select the best option? Did we generate any options?

Moving further back along our risk continuum we have a reframe conversation: this entails looking again at our individual and shared goals and our sense of how to achieve them. Opens the possibility of setting different and potentially more challenging goals.

A revalue conversation ups the ante still further: we focus attention on our perceptions and interpretations of the task and team environment. Fundamental questions are asked and assumptions tested: What do we consider important? What factors get our attention? What is deemed relevant or irrelevant? Provides the potential for reassessing personal and shared values – as well as influencing goals, options and behaviours.

You may be wondering what determines the type of conversation – normally it’s the willingness of the facilitator or team leader to participate in an appropriately forthright manner. For more information on the dynamics of risk in teams read about the Johari Window on the next page.

Different types of team conversation



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The Johari Window offers a way of looking at processes of communication, trust and risk taking between individuals and in teams.

How does it work? Team interactions can be seen as information passing between team members. When I put forward ideas or proposals in response to the comments of others I am increasing the size of the arena by revealing information previously unavailable to the group. If I choose to keep these reactions to myself – lets say to play it safe - I maintain a sort of façade. Disclosure is the process of me taking the risk to move information from the façade to the arena. Similarly, others may experience a reaction to my behaviour or comments but choose to remain silent which creates a blind spot. By making the reaction public however, information is put into the arena and is feedback for me. As I become aware of the impact I have on others I have the option to adjust my behaviour in response to the feedback.

In a team context you can look at disclosure and feedback as mini bargains that contribute to - or detract from – the creation of a climate of trust and confidence. The more I get what I consider to be a favourable reaction to my contributions the more I'll continue to contribute. Focusing attention on this dynamic in team interactions allows judgments to be made about the size of the arena in relation to the task at hand. We can talk partnership and win/win but do we have the willingness and the boldness to make it happen in practice? A degree of effort and risk is required.

A potential irritation with this model is that it can add weight to the tree hugging cliché of openness and honesty as a good thing regardless – so sharing biographical facts and talking about our feelings becomes the recipe for effective relationships without reference to, or coherence with, the achievement of results.

The Johari Window – originated by Joe Luft and Harry Ingham