



RESHAPING THE TEAM YOU INHERIT

FOUR WAYS TO GET A TEAM YOU DON'T CHOOSE ON THE PATH TO
ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT

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Most newly appointed leaders have limited familiarity with their teams at the outset and can't swap in new people to help grow or transform the business.

In this case it is extremely important to figure out how to work effectively with a team you have inherited.

The first step when inheriting a team is to thoroughly assess it by holding a mix of one-on-one and team meetings, supplementing with input from key stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, and colleagues outside the team. You'll also look at team members' individual track records and performance evaluations. After you've interviewed everyone, discuss your findings with the team.

Reshaping the Team

Post-assessment, the next, and arguably most important, task is to reshape the team within the constraints of the organization's culture, the leader's mandate, and the available talent. Ultimately new leaders want their people to exhibit high-performance behaviors such as sharing information freely, identifying and dealing with conflict swiftly, solving problems creatively, supporting one another, and presenting a unified face to the outside world once decisions have been made. Leaders can promote these behaviors by focusing on four factors: the team's composition, its alignment with a shared vision, its operating model, and its integration of new rules and expectations.

Composition.

The most obvious way to reshape a team is to replace underperformers and anyone whose capabilities are not a good match for the situation. But this can be difficult culturally and politically, and in many cases, it's simply not possible—leaders must work with the people they inherit. Even when employees can be let go and newcomers brought in, the process takes time and consumes energy. So doing this in the first few months should be reserved for dire business situations, for employees in critical roles who clearly cannot do the work, or for truly toxic personalities that are undermining the enterprise.

Fortunately, you can reshape team composition in other ways. For instance, you might wait for normal turnover to create space for the types of people you want. This usually takes time, but you may be able to speed up the process by signaling your expectations of higher performance—thus encouraging marginal performers to seek other roles. You can also watch for positions in other areas of the organization that might suit people who are valuable but not a good match for your team.

Another option is to groom high potentials to take on new responsibilities, provided you have enough time and other resources. If not, you may instead choose to alter individuals' roles to better match their capabilities. This powerful, often underappreciated way of reshaping teams may involve adjusting the scope of existing roles, having people swap jobs, or creating new positions by carving up the work differently. Any of these tactics can revitalize people who have become stale in their jobs, but few leaders think of trying alternative ways of allocating work.

Alignment.

You will also need to ensure that everyone has a clear sense of purpose and direction. Sometimes a team's stated direction needs to be changed. In other cases, it's more or less right, but people are just not pulling together.

To get everyone aligned, the team must agree on answers to four basic questions:

What will we accomplish? You spell this out in your mission, goals, and key metrics.

Why should we do it? Here is where your vision statement and incentives come into play.

How will we do it? This includes defining the team's strategy in relation to the organization's, as well as sorting out the plans and activities needed for execution.

Who will do what? People's roles and responsibilities must support all of the above.

Generally leaders are more comfortable with alignment than with other aspects of reshaping, because they have well-established tools and processes for tackling it. But one element in particular tends to trip them up: the "why." If the team lacks a clear and compelling vision that inspires them, and if members lack the proper incentives, they probably won't move energetically in the right direction. Compensation and benefits aren't sufficient motivators on their own. You need to offer a full set of rewards, including interesting work, status, and potential for advancement.

This can be challenging, for a couple of reasons: It's often hard to discern when *hidden* incentives (like competing commitments to other teams) are getting in the way. And you may have limited influence on certain rewards, as is often the case with compensation.

Sometimes a team's stated direction needs to be changed.

Operating model.

Reshaping a team also involves rethinking how and when people come together to do the work. This may include increasing or decreasing the number of "core" members, creating subteams, adjusting the types and frequency of meetings, running meetings differently, and designing new protocols for follow-up.

Such changes can be powerful levers for improving team performance. Unfortunately, many new leaders either continue to operate the way their predecessors did or make only small adjustments. To think more creatively about your team's operating model, identify your real constraints on how the work gets done—such as established business planning and budgeting processes for the entire enterprise—and then ask yourself how the team could operate within them more efficiently and productively. In addition, consider whether it makes sense to create subteams (formal or informal) to improve collaboration among interdependent members. Also think about whether certain activities require more-frequent attention than others. This will help you establish a meeting cadence that works, both for the team as a whole and for any subteams.

When rethinking meeting frequency and agendas, it helps to understand the three types of meetings that leadership teams typically have—strategic, operational, and learning—so that you can allocate an appropriate amount of time to each. *Strategic* meetings concern the biggest decisions that need to be made—about business models, vision, strategy, organizational configurations, and so on. Though they tend to be relatively infrequent, they require time for in-depth discussion. *Operational* meetings involve reviewing forecasts and measures of short-term performance, and adjusting activities and plans in light of those results. These are usually shorter and more frequent than strategic meetings. *Learning* meetings are scheduled on an as-needed basis, often after crises or in response to emerging issues. They can also focus on team building.

When teams try to jam all these activities into a single recurring meeting, operational urgencies tend to crowd out strategic and learning discussions. By thinking through the right mix of meeting types and scheduling each kind on its own regular cycle, you can prevent that problem. It's typically best to work out a rhythm for your operational meetings first, deciding how frequent they should be and who should participate. Then you can overlay the less-frequent strategic meetings, allowing plenty of time for discussion. Finally, you should establish what kinds of events will trigger the ad hoc learning meetings. You might, for example, decide to hold them after any major market event, such as the introduction of a competing product, or in the wake of a significant internal failure, such as a product recall.

Integration.

The final element of reshaping is integration. This involves establishing ground rules and processes to feed and sustain desired behaviors and serving as a role model for your team members. Of

course, the team's composition, alignment, and operating model also influence members' behavior. But focusing on those elements isn't sufficient, especially when leaders inherit teams with negative group dynamics. Those situations require remedial work:

Once you've assessed and got started on reshaping your team you should focus on to energize team members with some early wins.

Now you're on your way to having a high performing team which will reach your organizations goals even though you didn't get to hand pick its members. Inheriting a team can be successful if you focus on the right ways to channel its energy.

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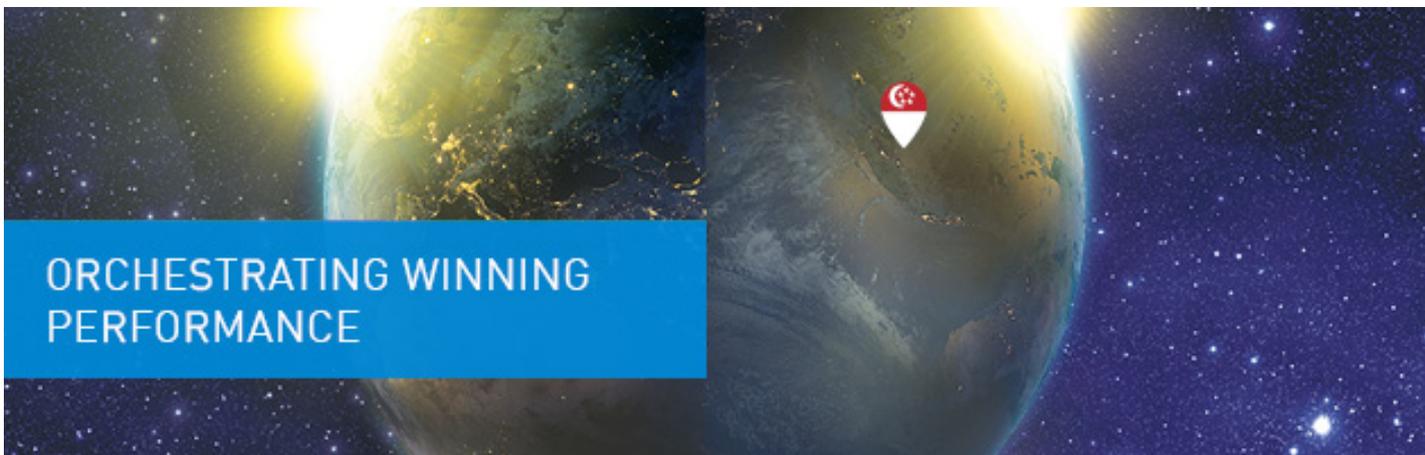


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