Improving Team IQ

by George Campbell[1]

"How can a team of committed managers with individual IQs above 120 have a collective IQ of 63?"
  - Peter Senge, The Fifth Discipline

Most leaders are acutely aware that teams are now central to development and execution of corporate strategy. Sustainable, competitive advantage is built on teams being smarter than competitors' teams. Smart teams are said to have 'high Team IQ.' Strange as it may seem, '*Team IQ*' has little connection to the intrinsic IQ of individual team members. Teams composed of highly intelligent individuals can be 'dumb,' while teams composed of average intelligence members can be 'smart.' This tool will provide leaders with guidelines to facilitate members working together in a way that engages the collective mind of the team—where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Where this happens, High Team IQ is produced.

High Team IQ	Low Team IQ
• For an individual, to be a member of a team with High Team IQ is fun, energizing and engaging. • A key component in their organization's competitive advantage, 'High IQ teams' make quality choices, use resources wisely, and produce creative, timely and highly effective results. • Members feel stretched on these teams, as their individual capacity is pushed to the limits. This stretching produces growth for the individuals, for the team and for the organization.	• For an individual, it is frustrating and energy draining to be members of 'Low IQ' teams, where many wish for more time alone in their offices to get some useful work done! • A drag to their organization's competitive advantage, 'Low IQ' teams make poor decisions, absorbing huge amounts of time and energy. For organizations, it is dangerous to have teams that are both inefficient and ineffective.

Team IQ Sources

By identifying the sources of increased or decreased IQ, you can actually choose the High Team IQ route for your teams. Although it is not difficult to produce, High Team IQ does require discipline. Two requisite factors are:
i) getting the team off to a good start, and ii) ensuring that the team is committed to the work.

Review the detailed listing of Team IQ Sources on the next page and ask yourself—is your team tapping into the sources of high team IQ, or low team IQ? What could your team do differently so that it is smarter and more able to best the competition?

Once you complete this, turn to Page 3 and rate your Team's IQ, providing rationale for your rating and suggestions for improving it. Then take action to improve your team's IQ. It is much more interesting and useful to be a member of a team with a High IQ than one with a low IQ.

---

[1] from Hiebert & Klatt, The Encyclopaedia of Leadership. McGraw-Hill, 2001. pp.301-304.

High or Low Team IQ: You Choose

Sources of Decreasing Team IQ	Sources of Increased Team IQ
Dumb Work ☐ Work that could be done by an individual and is too narrow to engage the team's collective brain. Forcing a team into this kind of work leads to low Team IQ.	*Smart Work* ☐ Teams need work that engages the intellectual capacity of members, the kind of work requiring the cumulative brain power of the team.
Focus on Failure ☐ Low IQ teams are generally more focused on error and incomplete tasks than they are on their success. This tends to create a sense of being overwhelmed, decreasing capacity.	*Focus on Success* ☐ From success comes confidence - making more success likely! Set challenging targets, monitor progress, and celebrate success. This builds energy and capacity for more challenging work.
Make Hard Times Worse ☐ When times are tough, things get worse, decreasing Team IQ. Inability to talk through difficulties causes individuals to complain, blame, and attack.	*Learning From Hard Times* ☐ All teams have hard times—where error rate is high, efficiency low; interpersonal stress high, organizational support low. High IQ team members recognize and talk about difficulties, take ownership, and take action to improve their situation.
Break Trust by Missing Deliveries ☐ Failure to deliver reduces trust. In attempting to push their limits, Low IQ teams and members can commit to actions and time lines they cannot possibly deliver.	*Build Trust by Delivering* ☐ High IQ teams build trust by under promising and over delivering; through consistently meeting commitments, especially when under pressure.
Find the Person To Blame ☐ When things go wrong, Low IQ teams tend to identify a person to whom they can attach blame, then blame that person.	*Find the Cause of Problems* ☐ When things go wrong, High IQ teams find the cause of the problem, then fix the cause so that the problem does not recur.
Engage in Personal Conflict ☐ Attacking team members deflects the team from its real work, reducing listening, and producing the kind of emotions that hamper thinking.	*Engage in Conflict—of Ideas* ☐ Team synergy and High Team IQ come from differing ideas being discussed, challenged, combined and transformed into new and improved thinking.
Meet After the Meeting to Discuss the Meeting ☐ Sub groups – often people who did not speak up in the meeting – congregate afterwards to criticize decisions made in the meeting.	*Meet In the Meeting* ☐ High IQ teams get ideas and issues on the table in the meeting. The team is free enough that members can tell the truth in the meeting, about what is going well, problems, and real opinions about its work.
Demonstrate Attention Deficit ☐ Low IQ teams tend to give equal weight to all issues, without prioritizing which issues are most important. These teams can easily distracted by anything new and shiny.	*Focus on High Priorities* ☐ There are always too many things to do. High IQ teams focus team energy and attention on high value issues. They resolve these issues and move on.