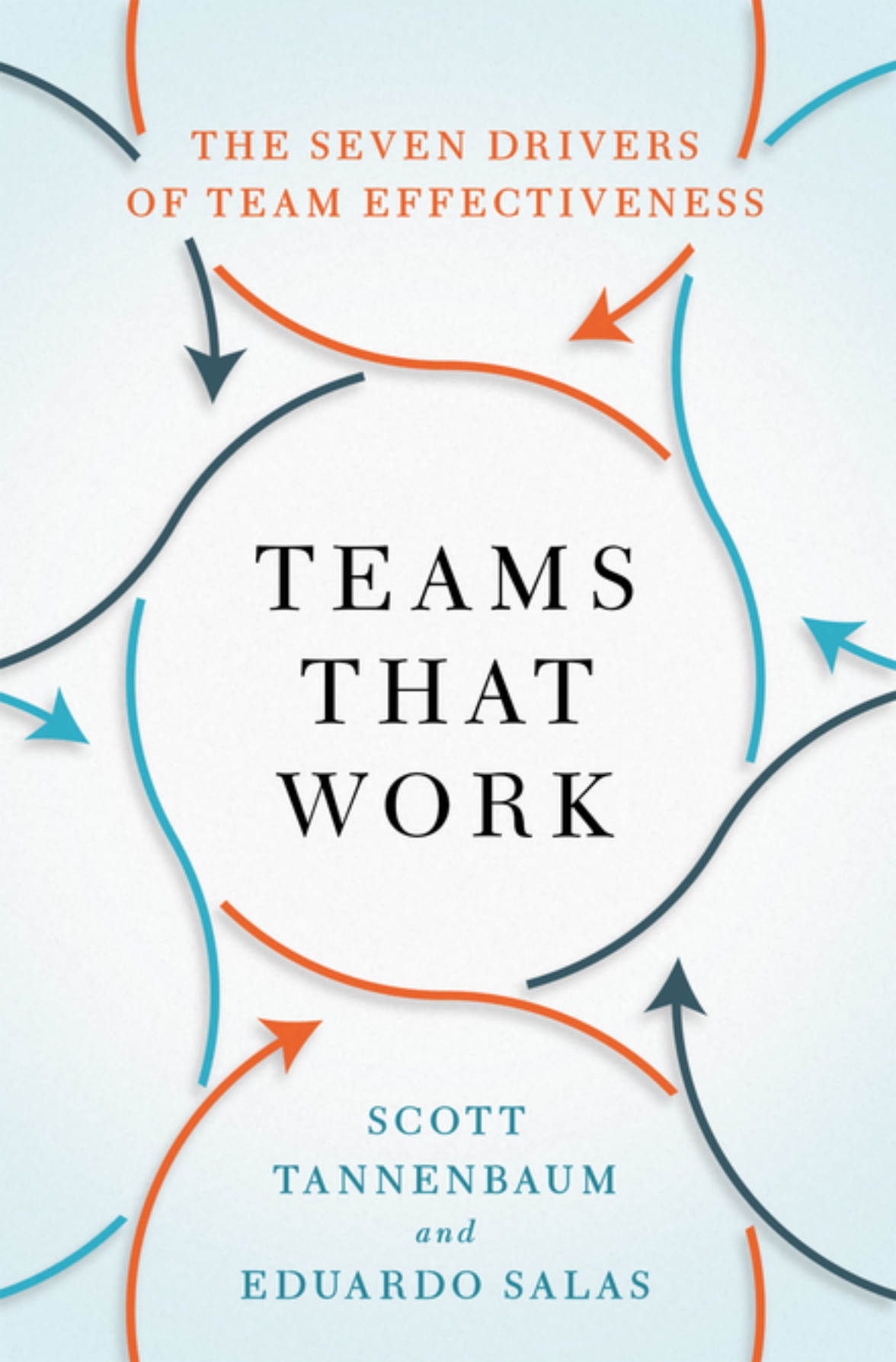
THE SEVEN DRIVERS
OF TEAM EFFECTIVENESS
TEAMS
THAT
WORK
SCOTT
TANNENBAUM
and
EDUARDO SALAS

Teams That Work

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The Seven Drivers of Team Effectiveness

Scott Tannenbaum
and
Eduardo Salas

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Dedicated to Becky and Vicki, our "teammates" for life

CONTENTS

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Throughout our careers we have worked with, led, and advised all sorts of teams. Like most of you, we have experienced the power of high-performing teams and the angst of struggling teams. It made us want to crack the code. How could we help more teams succeed?

While we were actively trying to help teams become more effective, we were also conducting empirical research and reading studies published by researchers around the globe. We became increasingly excited as we saw the research grow and mature to the point where we felt it could yield practical, evidence-based advice. Teams became our passion, and we developed a conviction that team leaders and members could create better, more successful team experiences, if only they knew about the research. It is that passion and conviction that led us to write this book.

This book is possible because of the efforts of those researchers who have conducted high-quality studies about teams, including members of the industrial/organizational psychology and human factors communities. That research provides the foundation for our framework and advice. Researchers, we alluded to your work throughout the book—we hope we portrayed it accurately and made it accessible to an audience beyond the academic journals. Your work deserves the visibility, and we thank you for what you have done and continue to do to help crack the code.

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your work spaces—they provided an invaluable opportunity to ground us and show us how teams try to address real challenges. Thank you!

To our consulting clients, a big thank you for trusting us to work with and advise your teams; we learned a tremendous amount from those experiences. To our research sponsors, noted in the following text—thank you for your commitment to the science we represent. Your partnership made a difference and your belief in us helped.

Prior to writing the book, we delivered many talks and led discussions about the science of teamwork at various companies, associations, and meetings. Audience members asked us questions about and shared examples of their teamwork challenges, which helped us better understand many of the common pain points we address in the book. To those of you who asked us, "Do you have a book on this?" we want to thank you for the encouragement. We can now answer, "Yes we do!"

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Anyone who has written a book recognizes the importance of having the right publisher. Thank you to our colleagues at Oxford University Press and, in particular, Abby Gross, our editor. We greatly appreciate your guidance, support, deft editorial touch, and encouragement. You made the book better.

Finally, on a personal note, we want to express our love and gratitude to our spouses, Becky Beard and Vicki Salas. As we wrote this book you listened to us talk about teams ad nauseam and helped keep this two-man team of authors from killing one another. On a continual basis, you demonstrate how to be both individually excellent and a great team player. *Muchisimas gracias*!

PART I

All about Teams

CHAPTER 1

What Really Drives Team Effectiveness? (And Getting the Most Out of This Book)

You are a member of small team working on an important, challenging mission. Your assignment is dangerous, and there's a nontrivial chance that you or your team members won't survive. You'll be working and living together in a small, confined space for several years. You'll be isolated from your family and friends, and even from "headquarters" (HQ). When you want to talk with the folks at HQ, it will take 20 minutes for your message to reach them and 20 additional minutes for their response to get back to you, so you won't be able to get any real-time guidance from them. Having a bad day? You can't call in sick or go for a walk. You and your team members will be working and living together shoulder to shoulder, every day, for years. How would you feel about being on this team?

Those are the challenges that a long-duration space exploration crew will face in a future mission. You can readily see the teamwork challenges associated with such a mission, and that's why we and others have been conducting research for NASA that will help them choose astronauts who will be good teammates, form a crew with the right mix of capabilities, and prepare the team to withstand and hopefully thrive in adverse conditions.

A trip to outer space presents an extreme teamwork challenge, perhaps a 98 on a 100-point scale of difficulty. We doubt your team faces such an extreme challenge. Most teams don't. But that doesn't mean

being on a team is easy. All teams face challenges—even a "simple" project team. Teamwork and collaboration are hard.[1] If you've been working for a while, you've almost certainly experienced a struggling team first-hand. Despite what they sing in the *Lego* movie, everything isn't always "cool when you're part of a team." Being on a bad team can be a painful experience.

THE SCIENCE OF TEAMWORK: THE SEVEN KEY DRIVERS

We've written this book to help you and your colleagues make informed, evidence-based decisions that enable your teams to work well together and produce great results. You'll learn about the science of teamwork and tangible ways to apply that science to be an effective team leader, a great team member, a supportive senior leader, or an impactful consultant.

We're industrial/organizational psychologists (Eduardo is also a human factors psychologist), and for the last 30 years or so we've worked with, provided advice to, and studied teams in a myriad of settings. Some of these teams operate in dangerous settings, such as astronauts, oil rig crews in the North Sea, smoke jumpers (they parachute into fires), and combat teams. Some perform in settings where mistakes can cost people lives, such as medical teams and teams of military aviators. Others do their work in corporate environments, including boards of directors; leadership teams; and sales, manufacturing, finance, and project teams. You'll read about some of our experiences with these teams.

While we've been working with and studying teams, other researchers have been busy as well. There is now a large, growing body of interesting empirical research, much of it conducted by behavioral scientists. We carefully reviewed the research literature and reflected on our experiences, looking for consistent patterns that reveal what truly drives team effectiveness. We discovered seven consistent drivers of team effectiveness. In this chapter, you'll get a high-level preview of the drivers. Subsequent chapters contain a detailed look at each followed by practical tips and tools. But first, let's clarify what we mean by a "highly effective team."

1. Technically, teamwork is a specific form of collaboration but throughout the book we use the terms "teamwork" and "collaboration" interchangeably.

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEAMS

A highly effective team is, first of all, a "team." We define a team as:

- Two or more people,
- Who interact with one another,
- In situations where at least some members need to rely on other team members at least some of the time,
- Sharing a common (or at least somewhat overlapping) sense of purpose or goals, and
- Are viewed as a unit by others and/or themselves (i.e., some of what they do could be legitimately attributed to them as a unit).

A group of people who work together in the same room is not necessarily a team. Simply sharing workspace or performing similar tasks doesn't constitute being a team. But a team need not be a neatly defined entity with clearly assigned roles, stable membership, and a singular goal fully shared by all team members. Most "teams" in organizational settings are a good bit messier but still meet our definition of a team.

A highly effective team is one that demonstrates sustained performance, team resilience, and ongoing vitality. If a team frivolously expends resources and spends all its "chips" to hit a short-term goal and, in so doing, degrades its future capabilities and performance, we would not consider it highly effective. If a team produces positive results when conditions are favorable but crumbles when things get tough or takes an extremely long time to rebound from negative events, we would not consider it to be highly effective. And, if a team burns out its team members and therefore lacks the vitality needed to adapt, persevere, and innovate going forward, we would not consider it a highly effective team. Short-term results are an imperfect indicator of team effectiveness.

Our focus is on identifying what enables teams to be highly effective and not simply capable of short-term success or performing well only when conditions are favorable.

Team effectiveness, as we define it, has three components:

- **Sustained performance**—Generating positive results over time
- **Team resilience**—Working through challenges and bouncing back from adversity
- **Vitality**—Maintaining energy, vibrancy, and resources needed for future success

Table 1.1. Key Questions about the Seven Drivers

Driver	Fundamental Question
1. Capability	Do we have the right people with the right mix of **knowledge, skills**, and other attributes?
2. Cooperation	Do team members possess the right **beliefs and attitudes** about their team?
3. Coordination	Are team members exhibiting the necessary **teamwork behaviors** for team success?
4. Communication	Do team members **communicate** effectively with each other and with people outside the team?
5. Cognition	Do team members possess a **shared understanding** about key factors such as priorities, roles, and vision?
6. Coaching	Does the leader and/or team members demonstrate the necessary **leadership** behaviors?
7. Conditions	Is the **context** in which the team operates favorable for performing effectively (e.g., ample resources, supportive culture)?

THE SEVEN DRIVERS OF TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

What really creates team effectiveness? Seven drivers consistently make a difference. At times, one may be more important than another, but all play a role in the success of almost any team. Table 1.1 lists these drivers along with a fundamental question for each.

Capability refers to the individual and collective competencies that a team possesses. Does the team have the knowledge, skills, personality, and other personal attributes needed to complete assignments, overcome challenges, and adapt as needed to sustain performance? Sometimes we can anticipate how well a team will perform by examining the team's average capability on a key attribute. Other times the best indicator might be the capability of the strongest or weakest team member or if the team has two people with the capability to perform a critical task.

In chapter 4, you'll learn what the research tells us about capabilities, including five fundamental skills and four personal attributes that contribute to teamwork, along with three toxic traits you'll want to avoid.

Capability is about having ample horsepower. If your team lacks critical competencies, it will be difficult to succeed.

Cooperation refers to the attitudes and beliefs that individuals bring to the team each day. What do they think about *this* team and the people on it? Do they think the team can succeed? Do they trust one another? Do they believe they can be "genuine" with other members on the team? Are they committed to the team and the work they do?

People join a team with general beliefs about working on a team, shaped in part by past experiences and in part by their own personalities and propensities. Over time, they learn about their new team and develop attitudes about that team and specific team members. Together these influence their willingness to engage in teamwork behaviors. As we'll see, research shows that mindset matters. For example, when team members collectively believe that their team is likely to succeed, it boosts the team's effectiveness.

In some cases, all that is needed is for team members to be civil with one another and not get in each other's way—yet even that requires a certain mindset. In other instances, far more teamwork is needed, and team members must be willing to step up and work as a team.

In chapter 5, you'll learn what the research tells us about four distinct cooperative beliefs and how you can help them emerge—trust, psychological safety, collective efficacy, and cohesion.

> **Cooperation is about mindset**—beliefs and attitudes about my teammates and my team.

Coordination is at the heart of teamwork; it refers to the teamwork behaviors that a team needs to demonstrate to be highly effective. The exact behaviors can vary from team to team or even across situations, but almost all teams need to maintain situation awareness, back up or fill in for one another, adapt, and manage team emotions.

Some teams struggle because they don't know the teamwork behaviors they need to exhibit. As a simple example, on a senior leadership team, when someone is unable to attend a meeting, who will provide that person with a briefing of what transpired? Is there an awareness that someone needs to fill in for that person and provide a form of backup? Knowing the necessary behaviors is part of the equation, but then the real question is whether team members take those actions on a consistent basis.

In chapter 6, you'll learn what the research tells us about the four most important coordination behaviors and the three things that effective teams tend to monitor.

Coordination is about behavior, teammates demonstrating the right teamwork behaviors. It is about actions not attitudes.

Communication refers to information exchange within a team as well as with individuals and groups outside the team. It is not simply talking to one another; more communication isn't always better. But the way a team communicates drives its effectiveness; poor communications can doom a team. Communications are needed to ensure team members have the information they need and that they maintain proper awareness. Moreover, the way in which a team communicates with outsiders—for example, with its partners, sponsors, and customers—greatly influences relationship quality, so we discuss "boundary spanning" or sustaining relations with key stakeholders in the chapter on communications.

In chapter 7, you'll learn what the research tells us about the importance of communicating unique information, the value of closed-loop communications, and how to be alert for the biggest communication obstacles.

Communication is about information exchange—to accomplish work, maintain awareness, and foster positive relationships both within and outside the team.

Cognition refers to the extent to which team members possess a shared or at least a complementary understanding about key factors. Cognition as described in this book isn't about an individual's attitudes or mindset but instead refers to the overall team. If we were to interview each person on your team separately, what would they say about the team's priorities? About who is responsible for certain tasks or who gets to make certain decisions?

When a team has conflicting or unreconciled points of view on priorities, roles, or how to handle certain situations, it can adversely affect its ability to coordinate and perform effectively. In contrast, when a

team possesses what psychologists call "shared mental models," it often results in better performance. Another way to think about cognition is whether your team members are all "on the same page."

In chapter 8, you'll learn what the research tells us about the eight types of shared cognitions and the questions you should want all your team members to be able to answer in a similar way.

Cognition is about shared awareness and understanding—for example, about priorities, roles, the situation, and expectations.

Conditions refers to the context in which the team operates. No team operates in a vacuum, and the environment can be an enabler and/or an inhibitor of team effectiveness. Local conditions such as resource availability, degree of autonomy, work environment, and time availability can influence team performance. And broader conditions can help promote and sustain teamwork or they can inhibit and constrain it. For example, organizational policies and practices, including performance management and compensation practices, create expectations about teamwork. The climate in which the team is embedded also matters. Is the organization one where people typically feel safe speaking up? Is the team being supported by the leadership above them?

Sometimes the cues are obvious. For example, insufficient resources is a powerful signal to a project team that their project isn't very important. Other cues are more subtle. Who gets promoted in the organization? Team players? Selfish people, as long as they produce results? Collectively, the conditions surrounding a team send signals about whether coordination is encouraged, accepted, or discouraged in the organization. It is critical to monitor conditions and, where possible, take actions to ensure they support team success—or at least try to remove obvious impediments.

In chapter 9, you'll learn what the research tells us about six key organizational conditions, three key senior leadership conditions, and four team-specific local conditions that greatly influence team effectiveness.

Conditions are about the environment in which the team is embedded—they send signals that either support or inhibit teamwork and performance.

Coaching refers to leadership. Without question, leadership matters. A good leader can help a team be more successful, and as anyone who ever worked for a poor leader can attest, bad leadership can not only create a huge performance obstacle; it can also make being on a team quite unpleasant (which affects future beliefs about working in a team!). So there is value in understanding the behaviors effective leaders exhibit and the functions they perform, for example, how they provide advice and promote ongoing team learning.

But leadership isn't just for leaders. More and more frequently we see the need for team members to step up and perform some leadership functions, what researchers refer to as "shared leadership." Shared leadership doesn't involve appointing an additional leader but is more about informal behaviors. As organizational structures get flatter and managers oversee larger groups of individuals, a leader can't see everything and won't always be available to give feedback or help her team members—that's why some degree of shared leadership is often needed.

In chapter 10, you'll learn what the research tells us about the seven essential leadership functions that must be fulfilled on a team, along with practical insights from three empirically tested leadership approaches (and one derived from our experiences).

> **Coaching is about leadership**—the leader as well as team members demonstrating effective leadership behaviors.

How do the drivers relate to one another? As shown in Figure 1.1, they are not independent. For example, information sharing (communications) facilitates the development of shared understanding (cognitions), which in turn makes it easier to back up one another when needed (coordination). Research shows that all of the drivers can influence team effectiveness.

We want to emphasize three key points. First, cooperation or mindset tends to emerge from the other six drivers. As a team member, do I think my team can succeed? Do I trust my team members? The emergence of those beliefs depends on the talent on the team, the extent to which we coordinate our work and communicate effectively, the degree to which we have a shared understanding of roles and priorities, our access to resources, and various leadership behaviors. Attitudes such as trust and collective efficacy emerge from doing the other things well. And, in

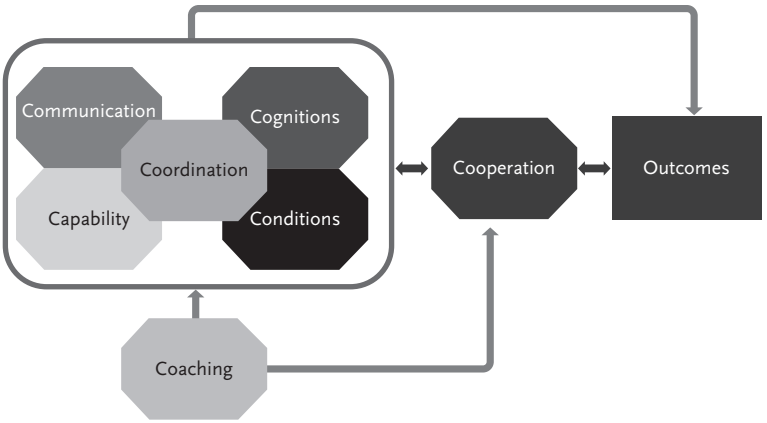

Figure 1.1. How the seven drivers of team effectiveness relate to one another.

turn, those cooperative attitudes can influence the other drivers. For example, when we trust one another, it becomes easier for me to take the time to help you out—and you are more likely to accept my help.

Second, coaching plays a central role in team effectiveness. A key focus for any team leader should be to ensure their team has enough of the other six drivers to be able to sustain effective performance.

Third, the research shows that each of the drivers can directly influence important outcomes such as performance, quality, and innovation. And success begets positive attitudes. When a team is performing effectively and accomplishing its goals, it tends to reinforce positive attitudes. We'll allude to these relationships throughout the book.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

The book is divided into three parts. Of course, we'd like you to read the book cover to cover, but you don't have to.

The first part provides the context for the rest of the book. If you read the next two chapters you'll find evidence with which to make a compelling case that teamwork is a business imperative, be better prepared to avoid five common teamwork myths that can lead to bad decisions, learn how teams differ and why that's important, and be better equipped to understand the research described throughout the book.

The middle part of the book, chapters 4 through 10, describes the science of teamwork. Each chapter highlights one of the seven drivers and is full of research findings and insights, along with examples from

teams in action. This section is evidence-based but easy to read—not too geeky but not oversimplified either.

We believe anyone who leads a team, works on a team, or supports a team in any way should know what really drives team performance. That knowledge can keep you from being unduly influenced by what sounds logical (but is wrong), is easy to understand (but is too simplistic), or is consistent with what you have been led to believe (but is actually a myth). So, we hope you'll read the middle part of the book, but if you want to get immediately to the punchline to learn "What I should do?" you can jump directly to the third part of the book. Chapter 11 summarizes key points about the science of teamwork. Chapters 12 through 15 contain role-specific advice for team leaders, team members, internal or external consultants, and senior leaders, respectively. If you choose to jump ahead, we won't judge you! But you'll miss out on learning some really useful things about the nature of teams in Part I and about the science of teamwork in Part II.

If after reading the book you want to share what you've learned with a leader who has a limited amount of time, guide them to read chapter 11 and then either chapter 12 (if they are a team leader) or chapter 14 (if they are a senior leader). At the end of the book you'll also find a set of tools, including a list of desirable team member competencies, tips for conducting a team debrief, questions for reviewing the conditions that foster or inhibit teamwork (e.g., policies, senior leader behaviors, and resources), a quick diagnostic tool, and a matrix with practical ideas for addressing a broad array of teamwork challenges.

One final thought for getting the most out of this book: we encourage you to identify a team you can think about as you read the book. It could be a team you are a member of or one you lead, but having a specific team in mind will be helpful when we guide you to think about key findings throughout the book.

CHAPTER 2

Busting a Few Teamwork Myths

On September 7, 2015 the Boston Red Sox were playing the Philadelphia Phillies on a beautiful sunny afternoon at historic Fenway Park. In the top of the fourth inning, with the Sox leading 6 to 1, rookie Red Sox pitcher Eduardo Rodriguez threw a fastball on the outer half of the plate to Phillies first baseman Darin Ruf. Ruf swung and hit the baseball, hard. The ball launched off Ruf's bat at over 100 mph, headed toward the deepest part of Fenway Park in right center field, a tricky area known as the Triangle, where the bullpen wall juts out precipitously into the field. Five-tenths of a second after the ball left Ruf's bat, Red Sox center fielder Mookie Betts broke into a run, accelerating to a top speed of over 18 miles per hour in 4.3 seconds, and reached up over the edge of the wall, snatching the ball out of the air at the last moment to save a homerun. Red Sox announcers Don Orsillo and Jerry Remy described Betts's basket-style catch as a great individual play, showing "great courage" and "great skill."

Although this appeared to be just a great individual play, a closer look (toward the end of this chapter) reveals how the play was actually the culmination of a series of team-related elements. This is often the case in work settings as well. We should care about teamwork because most business successes involve contributions from various people working together effectively—even when it might first appear that it was simply due to individual excellence.

Perhaps you like to work in a team. According to a survey of 23,000 employees conducted by CEB, a global research and advisory firm, most people say they want to work collaboratively, although obstacles often

get in the way. But whether you like or dread being on teams, you'll almost certainly be on many teams in your career—perhaps serving as a team leader. There's a good chance you'll be on more than one team at a time; maybe you'll be on a departmental team while also leading a project team. And looking forward, the odds are that you'll be expected to collaborate and work in teams even more frequently.

Organizations are becoming flatter and more matrixed with fewer layers of management. This type of organizational design heightens the need for teamwork. Over two-thirds of the respondents in the CEB survey reported that collaboration requirements are increasing in their organization. And in a widely cited *Harvard Business Review* article, Rob Cross, Reb Rebele, and Adam Grant reported that time spent in collaborative activities has grown by 50%! Looking forward, in a Deloitte study of over 7000 companies from over 130 countries, business leaders said they expect to use team-based structures even more frequently as an organizational design strategy. Simply stated, there will be fewer opportunities to work alone.

Companies form and disband work teams, cross-functional teams, project teams, and even virtual teams with great regularity. Many of these teams struggle.

- Over 90% of employees believe teams are critical to the success of their organization but less than 25% of them consider their own teams to be very effective, according to Liane Davie, author of *You First: Inspire Your Team to Grow Up, Get Along, and Get Stuff Done.*
- Over 60% of software project teams deliver behind schedule, and almost half come in over budget, as reported by journalist Po Bronson.
- Team-related problems contribute to almost 50% of the failures in business start-ups—either due to the composition of the leadership team or how they work together, as revealed in a series of postmortems collected by CB Insights, a business intelligence firm.
- Teamwork breakdowns are one of the three leading causes of safety problems in hospitals according to an Institute of Medicine study.
- Less than 25% of executives feel confident in their ability to build cross-functional teams, as reported by Deloitte.

Working as a team can have great benefits, but it isn't easy.

Each team experience, good or bad, can make a person more or less eager to be on teams in the future. Having a bad teamwork

experience makes you less inclined to take on another team assignment. It starts in school. Remember when the teacher gave you a team assignment? You were told that your team would receive one grade. Freddie, the kid who was loafing and didn't come to any of your team meetings would get the same grade you do. And your teacher probably didn't give your team any advice or training on how to work as a team, although perhaps he told you to "play nice." If your team got a C, you were angry that others who didn't pull their weight hurt your grade. And even if your team received an A+, you might have been resentful that the loafer also received that grade. Bad team experiences can sour you about teams in general. When you subsequently graduate and get a job, your new boss says, "Welcome, here's your desk" and then gives you a team assignment. How enthusiastic are you? You may not be joining that team with the best attitude.

According to a Graduate Management Admission Council survey, less than 15% of US students prefer to learn in team settings (about 20% of Chinese students prefer it, which, while higher, is still a surprisingly low number for a more collectively oriented society). We suspect that team learning may be unpopular because without the right preparation and awareness most student teams don't work well together, so the team experiences aren't positive. Interestingly, when Scott and his colleagues Erik Eddy and John Mathieu helped student teams in the business school at Siena College improve their teamwork, not only did their performance improve, but they were also more interested in being on a team in the future—and they felt more ready to do so. Positive team experiences beget positive attitudes.

Unlike at school, where the worst case is a bad grade, in the workplace a struggling team can cause problems for the business. But in both contexts, it has an adverse effect on individuals. Why is being on a bad team so disconcerting? Psychologists, like Erica Boothby and her colleagues, have shown that sharing an experience with others amplifies the intensity of the experience. Good things seem better and bad things feel worse. The chocolate that you eat in a room with other people tastes better than when you eat it alone. Similarly, failing or succeeding as a team is amplified in comparison with doing so alone. We respond more intensely to team experiences—good and bad.

There are many opinions about what makes teams work. Some are well-grounded; most are pure conjecture. If you've been on a few teams, you almost certainly have developed your own implicit "theory" of teamwork or at least a set of beliefs about teaming. The following are