

THE
ALIGNMENT
COMPANY

ALIGNED TEAM ASSESSMENT

A Foundation for High Performance

INTRODUCTION

Plutarch tells us that Athenians honored Theseus' victory by keeping his ship seaworthy for generations. Over the centuries they replaced each worn-out plank one at a time, leading philosophers to ask whether it was still the Ship of Theseus at all, given that no splinter of the original remained.

We believe that ships and teams are defined by their capability, not their individual components. Over time the people, tools, and processes that make up your team will change — but it will maintain the distinctive qualities that make it a high- or low-performing team.

Great teams don't depend on single individuals, tools, or processes. They adapt to new information and a changing environment but retain the essential qualities that create high performance.

Team members — and their skills, perspectives, and capabilities — are important, of course. But team performance depends on how these individuals align with each other. It is teamwork, not team members, that make the difference.

Alignment is easy when your team is homogenous and works on simple problems in a stable environment. But if you face volatility and [complexity](#), you need diverse skills and perspectives and need to consciously work on aligning your team on all levels.

We say “all levels” because great teamwork requires good operations (processes, tools, and skills) and a great culture (relationships, emotions, and habits). And there is often a dynamic interplay between the two — poor culture can be the result of shoddy operations and vice versa. It is essential that you get a holistic picture of your team.

Culture can be hard to see and work on, but it is every bit as essential — if not more so — as operations. In our experience a team with great culture and so-so operations will always outperform a team with efficient operations but poor culture.

This Aligned Team Assessment will help you pinpoint both cultural and operational issues and help you create a plan to get your team more aligned and performing at its best.

CONTENTS

1. Team Evaluation Questionnaire:

Get clear about how your team is doing.
(page 3)

2. Alignment Journal:

Uncover the specific issues your team is having.
(page 5)

3. Next Steps:

Turn your discoveries into a plan of action.
(page 7)

1. TEAM EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

In this section we will help you get a sharper sense of how your team is performing and why, so you can understand what you should stop, start, or continue doing.

This is the first step. The intent is to give you a place to start, not to provide a definitive, comprehensive evaluation. A team is a shared phenomenon that cannot be thoroughly evaluated by one person working alone.

Answer the following questions about these three essential aspects of teamwork:

- 1. Performance:** How the team does in achieving its mission.
- 2. Operations:** The more visible aspects of the team, like team membership, skills, practices, and tools.
- 3. Culture:** The interpersonal landscape of the team — which is often the deciding factor but also hard to see since each person has a unique experience.

For this exercise your job is to step outside and look at the team as objectively as you can. Full objectivity is impossible, of course, but just do the best you can.

Notice how often you answer “no” to a question — this is an indicator that there are things to work on. You can write out your answers or just read the questions as you think about your teams.

Performance

- Do team members agree on how “success” is defined for this team?
- Are there objective measures that track how well the team is performing?
- Are these measures regularly updated and reviewed?
- Are these measures used when prioritizing work and making decisions?
- Is this team currently performing well (based on these measures)?

Operations

- Is team membership clear and agreed on (e.g., does everyone who you think is on the team also think they are on the team)?
- Does the team have all the skills needed to do a good job?
- Does the team have all the resources, tools, and information needed to do a good job?
- Is each team member clear about their role and accountabilities?

- Is each team member clear about each other's roles and accountabilities?
- Does each team member commit enough time to the team?
- Does the team have a regular and predictable meeting schedule?
- Is the purpose of each meeting clear?
- Does the team continuously evaluate, and attempt to improve, its performance?
- Are there clear agreements about:
 - Tool usage (communication, planning, tracking, work creation)?
 - Information transparency?
 - Interpersonal communication?
 - Decision-making (who makes them and how they are made)?
 - Standards of acceptable behavior?

Culture

- Does everyone contribute in full-team conversations?
- Do team members talk about their concerns openly and honestly during meetings?
- Does the team disagree thoughtfully and powerfully?
- Is the team able to take decisive and effective action (even when they disagree)?
- Is the team open and honest with each other (e.g., not passive-aggressive)?
- If you make a mistake on the team, is it often held against you?
- Are members of the team able to bring up tough issues?
- Does it feel safe to take a risk (offer suggestions, disagree, point out possible errors) on the team?
- Is it easy to ask other members of this team for help?
- Are your unique skills and talents valued and utilized on this team?

Want to understand more about what makes a great team? Bob shares a change that can make all the difference [here](#).

2. ALIGNMENT JOURNAL

Now that you've gone through the questionnaire you may see some patterns and some areas of need. Let's take some time to make sense of what you learned.

This is a journaling exercise — it is best to write out your answers and take your time. Some of the questions are different ways of asking the same thing and are meant to uncover important missing pieces. We suggest answering all questions since the slight variation can reveal some essential nuance you would otherwise miss.

Intentions

- Why does this team exist?
- What does it do for the company?
- Who are the customers/stakeholders of this team?
- What value does it deliver to those customers/stakeholders?
- Why do you want to be part of this team (get paid, learn new things, work with colleagues you enjoy, work on problems you find meaningful, etc.)?

Concerns

- Given this team's mission, and its current state, what worries you about its ability to perform well?
- Where do you think this team will get into trouble? (Is it there already?)
- If this team underperforms what will be the impact on customers, stakeholders, and team members?
- What worries do you have for yourself about being part of this team? (Stress, overwhelm, sap energy from other teams, etc.)

Boundaries

- Where does this team have authority and where does it not? (Budget, decision-making, directing other teams, etc.)
- What is within its sphere of control?
- What are your personal boundaries in relation to this team? (Time, tasks, self-care needs, etc.)
- What rules or conditions would help you do your best work on this team?
- What does this team need to do its best work?
- What must this team not do or experience in order to do its best work?

Dreams

- If this team were to be the best it could possibly be, what would be true:
 - For the team?
 - For the organization?
 - For the world?
 - For you and your career?*

**Spend time on this last question and dig deep. It's helpful to get in touch with our personal connection to the team and how it helps (or hinders) us in achieving our personal goals.*

Want to dig deeper into team dynamics? Bob shares his [theory of everything](#) here.

3. NEXT STEPS

When it comes to team improvement, we go from “What?” to “So What?” and conclude with “Now What?”

You’ve just gone through by yourself the What and So What steps, but it’s not yet time to make changes. The best changes will come from the team itself, and you’ll need to bring them along with you.

Your next step is to ask each team member to go through this Aligned Team Assessment — individually — and then come together and share their answers with each other. It’s best not to slip into problem-solving mode during this conversation. Just share your thoughts and try to really listen to each other.

Next ask everyone to answer the question: What might we do differently? This discussion might lead to making some quick and easy small changes and/or could lead to a team overhaul. Often some simple and easy solutions will be obvious.

If you want to bring in some outside help to evaluate the team more fully and facilitate any needed change, we’re happy to help. [Set up a call with us](#) or visit alignmentco.com to learn more about what we can do for you.