Team Effectiveness

Is your team not a dream? It's not them, it's you

insights®

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Introduction

If you called in sick to work today – would anybody notice?

Of course, you aren't really playing hooky – you're not that type of colleague. But hypothetically, if you hadn't shown up for work today, what would have been missing from your team?

Are you the driving force behind the team's success, a cheerleader encouraging everyone on – but still somewhat on the side-lines – or are you the human equivalent of hay fever, spreading irritation and misery wherever you go?

While you think about that, we're just going to say this: great teams are the building blocks of top class organisations. They're non-negotiable for successful companies. And if even one team in an organisation isn't functioning as well as it could, or should, that has an impact on the overall success of the business.

The late Richard Hackman of Harvard University once argued, "I have no question that when you have a team, the possibility exists that it will generate magic, producing something extraordinary … But don't count on it."*

* http://www.economist.com/news/business-and-finance/21694962-managing-them-hard-businesses-are-embracing-idea-working-teams?frsc=dg%7Cc

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So when we asked you what type of team member you are, that wasn't just some small-talk, getting-to-know-you opener. We really want to know. Because at Insights we believe that every single individual is responsible for the success of the team, even if they're not the leader. Everyone's responsibilities should go much further than 'showed up, completed tasks, left at 5pm sharp'. Every single team member, from the intern to the leader, should also help the team:

- Get focused and aligned on the right tasks and priorities
- Devise processes that just work
- Work in full flow – agile, innovative and in true synergy
- Foster a climate of trust, openness and mutual respect

In this book we'll take a long look at how responsible YOU are for the success of your team, as an individual, as a dedicated team member and as the leader. We'll help you:

- Realise the value you bring to the team
- Take responsibility for team success
- Recognise and prepare for Defining Moments
- Diagnose team imbalances
- Restore the team's balance
- Become a world-beating, gold-standard, high performance team

Sound good? We thought so. Keep reading.

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Chapter 1

Are you living above the line?

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Don’t aspire to be the best on the team. Aspire to be the best for the team.

Chapter 1 - Are you living above the line?

Let's imagine for a minute that you're The Best Team Member In The World™.

You're smart, focused, efficient, skilled at your job, always on time, go where you're told to go, meet your targets, and know how to get the photocopier working when it starts flashing 'Error 565' again.

Sounds like you're doing everything right – almost.

Sure, you're getting the job done. Nobody could claim you're not working hard. But where's the passion, the love, the burning desire to do something exceptional? In his book, Leaders Eat Last, author Simon Sinek acknowledged that "Customers will never love a company until the employees love it first" and while we can see that you're a loyal, hard-working colleague, being a great team member isn't necessarily just about your practical strengths.

Everyone's a leader

So you're a mere mortal, just a worker bee, and you're wondering exactly how you're supposed to be held responsible for your team success? After all, you can hardly be held to account for the team's overall results, or the team climate, or how agile or focused the team is overall. You can only play your part, right? Right. Ish.

At Insights we believe we are all leaders, in one way or another. If you're not a leader in the formal sense, does that mean you can't influence the team? Of course not. You can, for example, find areas in which you're considered the lead; you'll naturally be, or become, the expert in certain processes or pockets of knowledge; newer team members will begin to look to you to set the tone as your experience grows. So while you may not bear overall accountability for the team, the personal responsibility is yours for the taking.

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Being a great team member is also about living above the line. Being above the line means holding your hands up and accepting responsibility for your actions, being accountable and taking ownership. On the other hand, if you're living below the line, you're more likely to blame others, deny responsibility and make excuses when things go wrong.

Accountability
Responsibility
Ownership

Blame
Denial
Excuses

Living above the line is harder than working overtime without thanks, tougher than your fingertips after filing paperwork all day and trickier than explaining to your toughest customer why their order is late. That's because it takes true character.

Below the line living

If you're living below the line you're in the zone of blame, excuses and denial. And we get it – it's not easy to face our mistakes without trying to give them, shall we say, context. For example 'No, I didn't reach my target this quarter, but my biggest client closed down, my target is too high anyway and Steve's annoying ringtone is a serious distraction' instead of 'Yes, it's true I didn't reach my target, however I'm really motivated by the challenge of finding a new client to add to my portfolio and I project I'll do 20% more than target next quarter'.

But, honestly? Nobody loves working with the below-the-line colleague. Quietly criticising from the side-lines, lovingly tending the victim mentality, shunning responsibility and even snarking about colleagues in the kitchen when no-one else is around, are all pretty below-the-line ways to go about your business, and it's doing nobody any favours – least of all you.

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Raise yourself up

To be an excellent team member is definitely a tougher prospect. To live above the line, you're going to have to hold yourself to a higher standard. Being a force for accountability, a paragon of responsibility and taking true ownership of the success of the team is not always going to make for an easy ride.

It's probably going to involve tough conversations, opening yourself up to 'constructive' criticism and not hiding from the truth when you've been, inadvertently and unfortunately, in the wrong. But you know what? It's SO worth it.

For yourself, because you'll get to end each day knowing that, while it may have been tough, you pulled on your big-kid pants and did it anyway. But, more importantly, you'll be incrementally raising the bar for the behaviours in your team, contributing to a team climate that's characterised by respect and candour, and making sure that, when all's said and done, your team is kicking ass in the results department too.

Know your worth

Here's an exercise: take 30 seconds and write down the value that the person sitting next to you brings to the team – both skills they bring and personal attributes. How many did you think of?

Now try the same exercise for yourself; how many this time?

We know that nobody loves a show-off, but on the other hand, you need to be aware of your worth – and that includes practical skills like being a spreadsheet ninja, as well as the personal value, like the positive attitude you bring with you every Monday morning.

You owe it to your team to make sure you know what you're bringing to the table. To know your worth is to own it, to embody it, and to bring its power to bear for the team you're part of. After all, if you can't articulate why you're such an important part of the success of the team, why would anyone else be able to explain it?

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Insights' CEO, Andy, likes to encourage people to 'bring their whole selves to work'. And that means really fully knowing what you're capable of bringing, and doing just that, every day. Showing up fully means strengths, dreams, goals, weaknesses, geeky sense of humour, bright blue hair, soda addiction, ambitions, fears, plans and all – workplace rules notwithstanding of course! Don't leave anything at the door, or you're depriving your team of knowing, and appreciating, the true you.

Making it happen

Imagine a team where every individual has grabbed the opportunity to be a leader in their own way; to be responsible, to hold their hands up when things go wrong, to call out behaviours that don't suit the spirit of the team, to ask tough questions and give even tougher answers. Now that sounds like a world-class team, doesn't it? We think so, and we love nothing more than helping teams hit peak performance.

Now it's your turn

To start your journey towards being a high-performing team member, grab a coffee and spend some time answering these questions:

- What are the top three strengths you bring to your team?
- How do these contribute to the success of your team?
- Can you identify times where you've lived below the line?
- How can you use your strengths to help you live above the line?
- What change can you make today to increase your responsibility for the team's success?

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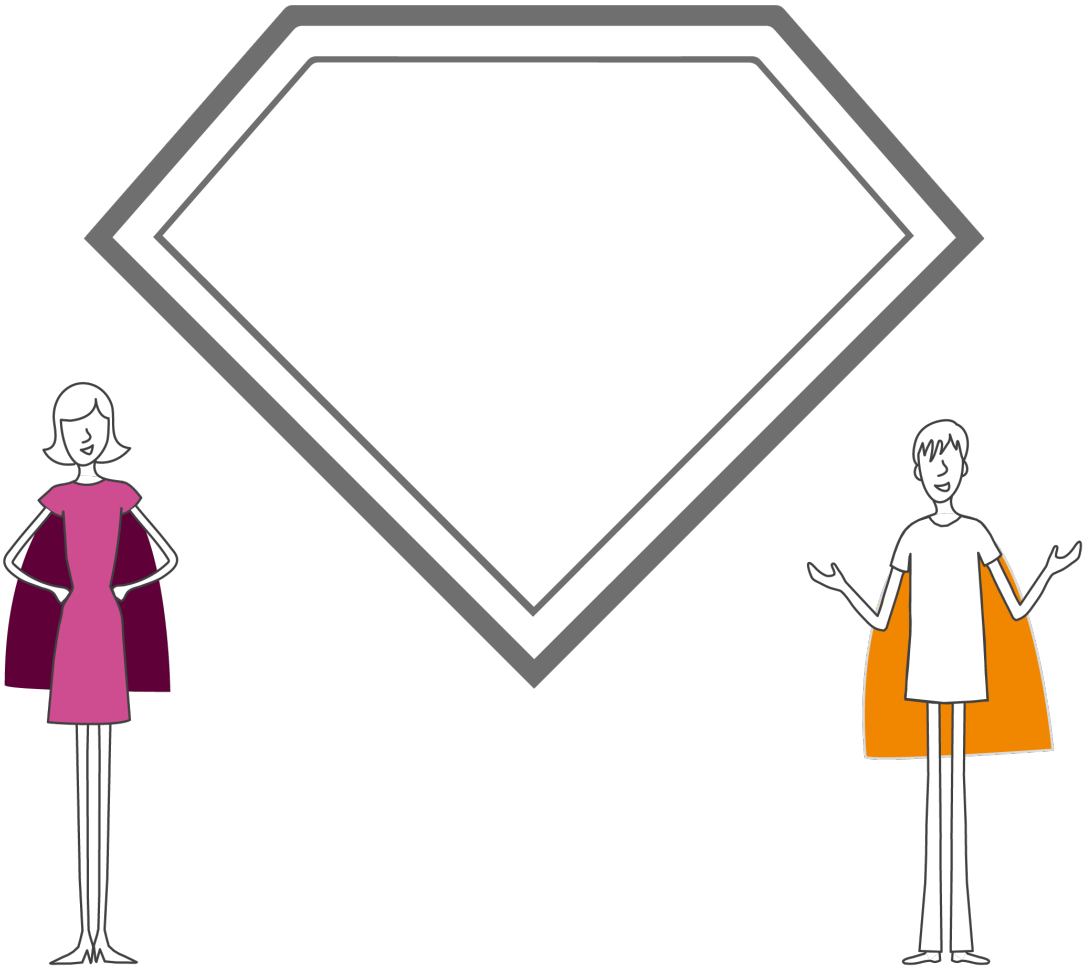
Give a shout out to a colleague's super strength or choose your own superpower.



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Chapter 2

What conversations are your team not having?

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"Bring your whole self to work.
I don't believe we have a professional self
Monday through Friday and a real self
the rest of the time. It is all
professional and it is all personal."

– Sheryl Sandberg, COO, Facebook

Chapter 2 – What conversations are your team not having?

Are you part of a team where everyone takes their turn at making the coffee and bringing Friday doughnuts, where there is rarely any disagreement and everyone is unfailingly polite and friendly?

Sounds nice – but a little safe. Is there any chance that under the veneer of politeness and amiability broods a seething mass of ongoing resentment, unspoken disagreements, territorial disputes and disaffection?

It's all too possible – and what's more, you probably all know it. Pretending that even Taylor Swift would be jealous of your squad is a lovely and well-intentioned way to work together, but it's unsustainable, precarious, and ultimately limiting your chance to become a truly great, high-performing team.

Like Susan Scott warned in her book Fierce Conversations, you should "Never be afraid of the conversations you're having. Be afraid of the conversations you're not having". We couldn't agree more: it's often the unspoken issues which will quietly undermine the strength of your team. And while it's the rare person who doesn't mind getting into an office argument, sometimes it's ok – even necessary - to disagree, if the result is a stronger team bond and a slicker team machine.

How teams are formed

Before you become a team, you're just a group of people with a loosely shared purpose. Lacking in vision, passion and connection, you're a set of lost souls, getting in each other's way as you cross paths in the pursuit of your own personal goals. You probably pretend you don't see each other at Tesco on the weekend, and you come out in a cold sweat at the thought of team bonding.

Any half-decent leader can form a team, but it takes something more than that – a shared set of experiences – to forge the true nature of the team. At Insights we call these shared experiences Defining Moments.

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Defining moments

A Defining Moment is a watershed moment in the life of any team, whether positive, negative, or a little bit of both. For example, it might be a seized or missed opportunity, a change of leader, a new direction, meeting or missing a target or deadline, merging with another team, a new team structure, a new member joining the team or an old team member leaving – the list is almost endless.

The nature of the team is truly forged in how it responds to the defining moments that it meets. Think of a defining moment like a certain amount of pressure that's applied to a team – when the moment of truth comes, what's revealed can be either a lump of coal or a shimmering diamond.

When a group of people come through a series of shared experiences, they begin to build a collective history, a shared view of the world, a sense of who they've got in their corner and hopefully some funny anecdotes to take back to basecamp. Take a look at what happens when a defining moment turns a group of people into a team.

	Group	Defining Moment	Team
Focus	I focus on my own personal goals		We're focused on the team goals
Ownership	I'm accountable for my own 'bit'		We're all equally accountable
Connection	I don't feel connected to others		We're all in this together
Communication	I don't share what I'm working on		We discuss issues and conflicts openly
Commitment	I'm committed to my own work		We're committed to team success

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You can see that once there's a shared history to draw on, there's a shift from 'I' to 'we' type thinking. And once that shift occurs, you're working towards becoming a team that's not only effective, but high-performing. Now that you're a team with shared accountability, it's up to each of you to stand up and be counted – and that means having tough conversations.

Have the tough conversations

Nobody likes conflict – ok, most people don't like conflict. But when you're invested in something, like you should be in the success of your team, you owe it to your colleagues to speak your truth – even if it makes your voice shake and your knees feel like jelly. Yes, it's nice to be nice – but it's better to be a grown-up. So it's time to stop smiling sweetly while you swallow your real feelings.

For example, if you don't like the process you've been stuck with, come up with an alternative then talk it over with your team. If you know someone's been calling you out behind your back, it's in both of your interests to talk that out in a professional way, before it gets nasty. And if you feel like there's something – anything – that you could be doing better as a team, then do the right and brave thing, and say so. And if you find it impossible to open up these tough conversations, give us a call. We're the experts when it comes to helping teams bring the hard truths out into the daylight.

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No question – it's hard to challenge, question and provoke – but that's what living above the line is. Being a good colleague doesn't always mean being in agreement; often it means fighting tooth and nail for something you truly believe in. It can mean asking hard questions of your leader, it can mean putting people in awkward situations, it can even mean being a little less popular.

But if you're going to be part of a high-performing team you can't succumb to groupthink or keep your opinions to yourself so as not to offend. To raise the game of the team, you first need to raise your own. Even when it gets tough.

Now it's your turn

In your quest for team excellence, take time out and think about your answers to these questions:

- What conversations are your team not having?
- How could you broach this topic respectfully?
- What's been your team's Defining Moment?
- How can you be ready for the next big moment?
- If your team could pick one thing to stop, start and continue doing, what would those be?

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Taking the team temperature

Use this team exercise to have an open, honest conversation about your team, why it works, why it doesn't, and how it could work better.

What our team should do more of is:

What our team should do less of is:

What our team should keep doing is:

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Chapter 3

Leaders, diagnose your team's imbalance

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"Extremes are easy.
Strive for balance."

– Colin Wright, author and entrepreneur

Chapter 3 – Leaders, diagnose your team's imbalance

As the leader of a team, how easy is it to clearly recognise where your team excels, where there are challenges, and what to do about it? It can be really tough when you're stuck deep in the everyday, to give yourself permission to take time out, sit back, and really map what happens in your team when a piece of work lands on the desk.

But don't be too hard on yourself – perhaps you're the lucky leader of a team which excels at planning, or is the envy of Apple with its lust for innovation, or whose ability to execute is second to none?

That's great, but – stop thinking for a moment about what individual areas your team is great at and consider instead how balanced they are. After all, being great at planning is all well and good, but if you don't ever commit to action, that's a lot of wasted paper. And while coming up with wild solutions can be fun, if they're too hard to implement, they'll never see the light of day. Likewise, execution is important, but if you're missing out on critical analysis you could be executing all the wrong things.

You see, having a team who excels in one area could mean that it's lacking in other areas. And to be truly high-performing, the trick is not just to lean into the area you're already great at, but to work the other areas to make sure you're high-flying in all the right ways.

Like most other things at Insights, we like to look at team effectiveness through the lens of colour.

There are four pillars of team effectiveness, and we call these Process, Climate, Flow and Focus.

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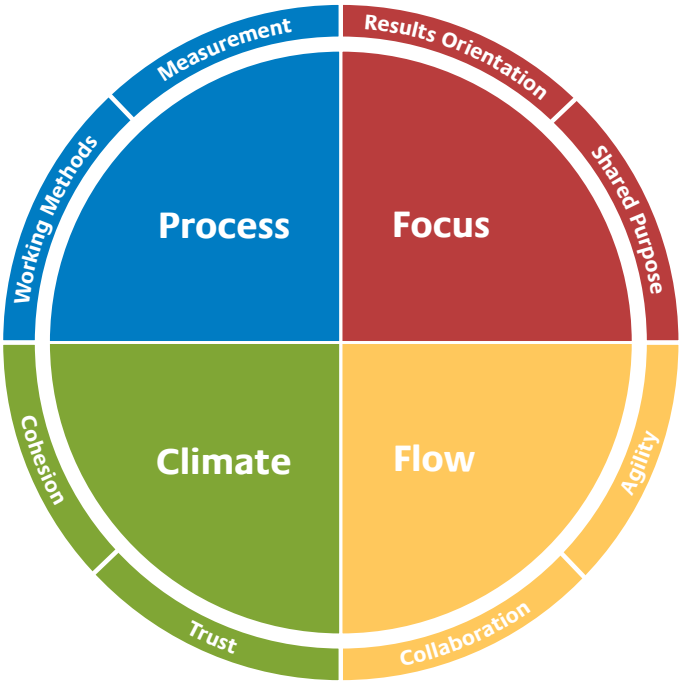
Process – Teams who have strong processes are like well-oiled machines: they know how to get things done, they know how to measure success, they're clear on who does what, and they value consistency and quality highly.

Climate – Teams with strong climate are ones where there is positive mutual regard, everyone feels included and heard, and the team are bonded by external pressure, not divided.

Flow – Teams in flow are agile and in the zone, full of energy and ideas, and ready to re-focus at the drop of a hat. They work in synergy to get things done – in a new and innovative way, if at all possible.

Focus – Focused teams are hot on the collective purpose: they like to dive into action, making quick decisions because everyone's hooked into the same shared vision. They're results driven, and have no doubt that they'll get there – fast.



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It's the teams who are really crushing it in all four of these pillars which are most likely to be high-performing. After all, a team which has a climate of trust, is agile and innovative, gets stuff done, and which measures success is likely to attract top talent and attain top results. This team is all over everything, and they're probably the envy of every other team in the business.

But what if your team is seriously lacking in one of these pillars? Well, you know what happens to something when one pillar begins to crumble; it's unstable, unreliable and likely to collapse at any moment.

So how do you figure out where the weaknesses are, and what do you do about it?

The model on the previous page is a great way to begin thinking and talking about the effectiveness of your team. It's a simple and memorable common language that lets everyone share their thoughts on the nature of the team, without judgment or blame. So step one would be to sit back, get a little distance and look at your team through the lens of Process, Climate, Flow and Focus.

Where do you see great strength, and where are the gaps? Do you have a team that loves each other like family, but lacks that innovative spark that delivers new solutions to old problems? Or perhaps a team which is ready to jump in with both feet at a moment's notice, but lacks the patience to do the due diligence first?

Ask yourself these tough questions, and take a cool, dispassionate look at what's happening – and more importantly, what's not. Then work out what it'll take to restore balance.

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Regaining your balance

There's no one way to restore balance to a team – if it was that simple, organisations would be overflowing with high-performing teams! Undeniably it's your role – the leadership role – that's one of the biggest influencers on the team style and team success. When it comes to how the team makes decisions, how they communicate, how creative they are and how much they value each other, you are the best example they have. Let's take a look at how your own leadership style trickles down into each of the four pillars.

Process – If your team is lacking in process, they're not working as methodically and logically as they could - and that's where you, the leader, come in. Are you the type of leader who doesn't get too excited about a great process, and that sentiment has now disseminated throughout the whole team? Perhaps a new-found respect for not just getting things done, but getting them done right, is in order. Could you take time out of the day to day for some process mapping, to work out what's falling down, where and why?

Climate – A team with a poor climate is a team without a heart. Without a shared commitment to each other - there's little to encourage them to go into battle with- and for - each other. They need their leader to bring them together again, remind them of the strengths that each of them bring to each other, and give them an opportunity to trust, and feel trusted. Some simple exercises, such as sharing the 'Value to the Team' sections from your Insights Discovery Personal Profiles can be a great way to remember exactly what it is you appreciate about your colleagues.

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Flow – A team with no flow just isn't feeling it; they're plodding along, crying out for inspiration, forgetting to raise their eyes from their screens and really connect with each other. If you're not the kind of leader who puts a high price on team collaboration, that may show itself in the siloed nature of your team, or in the territorial disputes that seem to bubble up regularly. Consider how you as the leader might start to instill a culture of facing issues together; perhaps something as simple as dedicated team time just to brainstorm the craziest of ideas (judgment-free) might bring them back from the brink?

Focus – If your team isn't focused they're not all aligned with the grander vision you hold for the team. If it's a lack of belief holding the team back, it's your job to instill the confidence in them that will drive them on. Similarly, if you're a leader with a passion for action, that's great – but it's possible your team may not feel the impetus to meet deadlines or focus on the deliverables. What actions can you take now to make sure they're all aligned and poised to put the vision into pure action?

A little help from your friends

Of course, none of this is easy, and absolutely none of it can be considered a quick fix. If you are unclear about where the gaps are, or how to tackle what the team is lacking, talk to Insights. We're a company who really knows how to create world-class high-performing teams.

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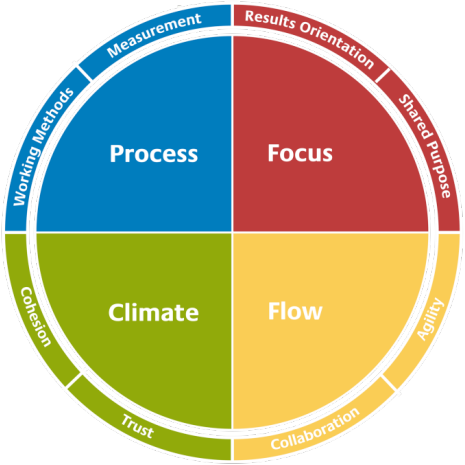
Now it's your turn

Take time out from being the boss and think these over:

- Are you leading by example in Process, Climate, Flow and Focus?
- What impact does your leadership style have on the team?
- Can you see where your team excels and where it is challenged?
- What opportunities are there for you to redress the balance?
- If your team was effective in all four pillars, what could it achieve?



What are some of the positive examples of the team working in each pillar?

What are the low points in each pillar, where the team is least effective?

What conclusions can you draw? Which pillar should the team most develop?

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Conclusion

Thanks for spending a little time with Insights. We hope you've learned a little (or even better – a lot) about what makes for a successful team that's hitting peak performance in all the right places. If we've made you think about the potential that isn't being fulfilled in your team right now, don't be scared – you're only at the beginning of a journey that's got the potential to supercharge your team performance.

About Insights

We're experts in taking so-so teams and turning them into super teams.

We provide people development programmes that help companies all over the world get the very best from their people at work.

Our solutions are influenced by Jungian psychology and use a broad range of psychometric models of increasing depth, which are used to help people communicate more effectively, understand themselves and others and tackle your most pressing business challenges.

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"Be brave enough
to start a conversation
that matters."

– Margaret Wheatley, American writer