Flourishing Teams for Human Flourishing

Susan Barton
You Who Group and Indiana Wesleyan University

Leigh Cameron
You Who Group
*Roundtable: Organizational Leadership Roundtable*

Abstract

With the volume of time spent in workplace collaboration, can healthy work teams serve as a primary driver of personal well-being and human flourishing? When work teams are healthy, human flourishing is more likely. Much of the New Testament offers a Christian theology and a practical framework for human flourishing. Paul and other authors, inspired by God, knew of the essential role group dynamics played for individual human flourishing. We suggest flourishing teams—successful in fulfilling their purpose in a healthy and vigorous way—consist of five primary ingredients: strong identity, rallying purpose, good people, thoughtful cadence, and effective communication. With these five essential ingredients, teams better understand who they are, why they exist, who should be on them, and how they function—together and as individuals. Experience has shown that by applying these principles, teams are more likely to achieve effective and efficient outcomes while developing healthy interpersonal relationships. As well-being increases, humans flourish.

Keywords: teams, team development, team identity, purpose, people, cadence, communication

As social creatures, teams can help or hinder human flourishing. With the time spent in workplace collaboration, can healthy work teams serve as a primary driver of personal well-being and human flourishing? When work teams are healthy, human flourishing is more likely. To enable a team to flourish (that is, successfully fulfilling their purpose in a healthy and vigorous way), the team must develop and demonstrate key characteristics. As consultants in team and leadership development, we suggest flourishing teams have five primary ingredients: strong identity, rallying purpose, good

people, thoughtful cadence, and effective communication – all illustrated in the flourishing teams model (see Figure 1). Each of the five ingredients is supported with three descriptive elements.

Figure 1: *The Flourishing Teams Model*
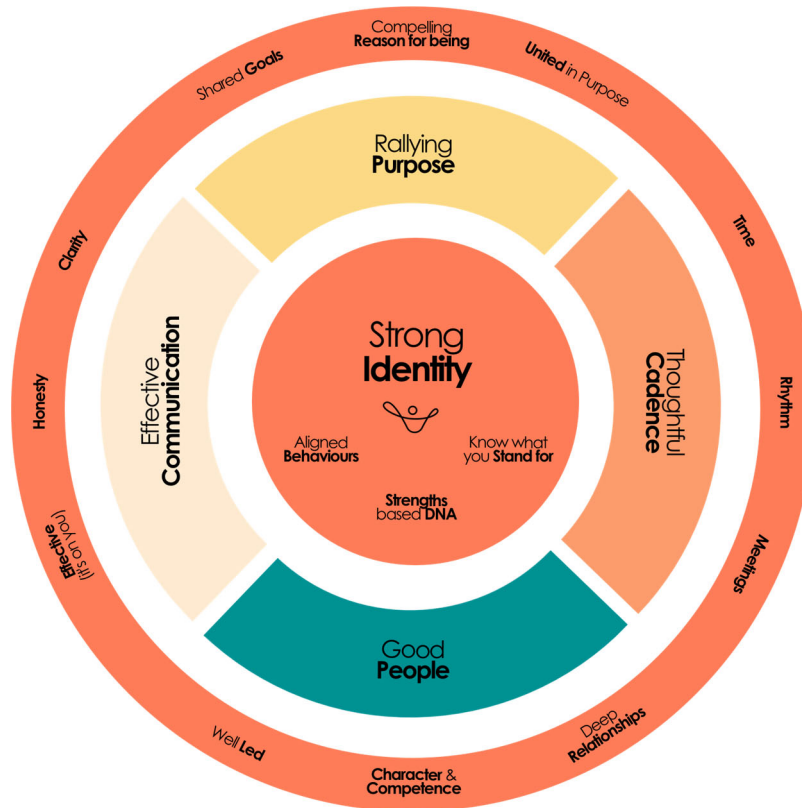
The applied definition of a team is "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable" (Katzenbach & Smith, 2005, p. 4). Using Hackman's (1987) framework, team effectiveness is understood using three components: member need satisfaction, team viability, and group performance.

Strong Identity

At the core of a team is its identity. Who we are shapes what we do and why we do it. Aristotle expands on the Greek philosophical concept of Telos, which primarily means "a completed end, the final result" (Golluber, 1999; Waanders, 1983) driven by its intrinsic purpose. Each person or entity has an ultimate, inherent purpose that, when fulfilled, achieves this desired result (Schnitker et al., 2019). The innate purpose

describes its essence or reason for being. Intrinsic essence is the center of who someone is, which is the driver for why someone behaves as they do.

A connection exists with authentic leadership. Leaders must allow their true selves to shape how they lead and how their followers experience them, and this must be grounded in clarity of identity. One must understand who they are to be a truly authentic leader. To be authentic, one must comprehend what they are revealing to fulfill their leadership function effectively (Banks et al., 2016). A similar hypothesis applies here: teams must understand their identity to effectively fulfill their function or purpose. Moreover, their behaviors must align with this identity, as the reflection of identity is perceived and experienced by how leaders act.

Team identity is compiled of its DNA—its unique combination of the strengths of people's skills and talents (Stewart, 2006), clarity of core beliefs and values (Peter & Waterman, 1982), and behaviors that align with those beliefs and values (Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006). A team's identity is its distinctiveness, influenced by the culture and context within which it operates. This collective identity developed by a team yields increased effectiveness by uniting around common goals and vision (dos Reis & Puente-Palacios, 2019).

Rallying Purpose

Where identity shapes who the team is, purpose describes why they exist and how leaders and followers think about their reason for being (Ready & Truelove, 2011). According to Teh (2009), a bold and common purpose unifies and develops a group into a team. The entire team must share this purpose to ensure developed momentum and focus (Adler & Heckscher, 2018), which can be called collective ambition. The rallying purpose brings everyone together, rising above all other priorities to provide focus and shared energy. It provides a compelling reason for being that ensures intrinsic motivation drives alignment with this purpose (Thomas, 2009). Teams demonstrate rallying purpose through shared goals, which propel collective action and enhance shared identity (Claridge, 2020). The shared goals ensure mutual and collective accountability for outcomes, reinforcing collaboration over competition.

Good People

People are the heart of a team, and they need to be good. Good has a double meaning here: good in who they are (described as character) and good in what they do (described by competence). Character and competence yield increased commitment to their team and its outcomes (Hasan et al., 2023). Character and its implied integrity have an inherent moral component and contribute to the effectiveness of a team; Ogunfowora et al. (2021), showed the converse to be confirmed. Competency is

necessary for effective work, but expertise alone will not ensure a thriving team. In fact, Sturm et al. (2017) asserted that the connection between the two improves both characteristics. The balance of character and competence is about the collective and the individual. Teams, whatever their size, are communities. Communities function best in a balance of diversity and complementarity (Bell & Brown, 2015). Like a body, every part is distinct and valuable but needs to fit and function together to flourish.

Teams with good people are well-led. While the scope of defining good leadership is vast, it is summarized here with three core elements: authentic, allied, and adaptable. Well-led teams have leaders who understand who they are and demonstrate transparency in their authenticity (Avolio et al., 2004). They are allied, meaning they understand and align with their organizational context while partnering with and belonging to their team and peers. In a brittle and anxious world, effective leaders are adaptable to their changing environment (Bushuev et al., 2023). It is transformational and prioritizes relationships between people (Banks et al., 2016). This priority of people is demonstrated through deep relationships principally because people drive teams (Hultman & Hultman, 2008).

Notably, good leadership comes after well-developed followership; one follows more than one leads, so learning to follow well comes before leading well. Moreover, in any team setting, the roles of follower and leader are often interchangeable throughout the team lifespan. One might argue that even within the scope of a single meeting, a robust appreciation for and understanding of good followership is required (Linville & Rennaker, 2022).

Thoughtful Cadence

Flourishing teams determine an intentional rhythm designed to ensure robust connection and communication. They regularly use tools such as a team charter to outline agreed ways of working (Mathieu & Rapp, 2009). Cadence needs to involve an annual cycle that reinforces time on essential elements such as strategy, operations, culture, and leadership. The cadence impacts the philosophy of meetings since this is typically the core method of engagement and interaction for teams, which should reflect functional and constructive interaction (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). Teams should know that different rhythms are appropriate for different types of work and prepare to shift accordingly (Oldeweme et al., 2023).

Time is arguably the most fundamental aspect of the cadence for flourishing teams. Time needs to bend to fit a flourishing team, not vice versa. Time is multifaceted: it means enough time for the team to meet and function together (Mcgrath, 1991). It takes time for a flourishing team to form, storm, norm, and perform (Tuckman, 1965), and flourishing teams also need periodic time alone, away from the office, which provides

balance for reflection and growth (Littman-Ovadia, 2019), which together lead to strengthened relationships, increased trust, and psychological safety for high performance.

Effective Communication

Communication is a foundation of team interaction and requires candor (Ware, 2012) and clarity (Gomez, 2008) to ensure mutual understanding internally and externally. Recipient outcomes determine the effectiveness of the communication. Just because one sends the message does not mean it was received as intended. It is on the sender to ensure that the receiver achieves understanding. To ensure knowledge-sharing, it is multichannel (Kotter, 1996), multilateral (Wanberg et al., 2015), and multilayered (Spiliopoulou & Penn, 1999). It uses various mediums, as appropriate, for formal and informal communication with and between team members individually, collectively, and beyond, cascading throughout the team and into the organization. Flourishing teams have also practiced effective conflict communication skills that allow crucial conversations to unearth disagreement and resolve it healthily (Choudrie, 2005; De Dreu & Van Vianen., 2001; Kiernan et al., 2020). The conflict skills include application at teamwide meetings, small group sessions, and one-to-one interactions.

Biblical Worldview

Much of the New Testament offers a Christian theology and a practical framework for human flourishing. It is fascinating how much of it is directed explicitly towards groups of believers. Paul and other authors, inspired by God, knew of the essential role group dynamics played for individual human flourishing. Nowhere is this link between a flourishing team and individual flourishing more evident than in the book of Acts (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2011), where Luke provides glimpses in his commentary into the life of the early church and the teams of workers who were foundational for this community. The selection of the apostolic replacement for Judas in Acts 1:12–26, the setting apart of the seven workers to care for the widows in Acts 6:1–6, and even the beautiful picture provided in Acts 2:42–47 all highlight the inseparable link between healthy relationships and human flourishing. For the early church, these healthy relationships included an intentional and vital effort to establish positive group norms and flourishing teams.

Conclusion

Recognizing there are myriad options to select critical elements of a high-performing team, the centrality of identity resonates as a unique view. With these five essential ingredients, teams better understand who they are, why they exist, who should be on them, and how they function. Personal experience has shown that by applying these

principles, teams are more likely to flourish and achieve effective and efficient outcomes while developing healthy interpersonal relationships. As well-being increases, humans flourish.

About the Authors

Susan Barton works as a consultant in the people side of organizations. Strategy and structure, leadership and organizational development, culture and conflict, and change management are all areas she has addressed with a myriad of clients: non-profits, higher education, local government and for-profit organizations. She also serves as adjunct faculty at Azusa Pacific University. She believes that every person and team has the ability to become a better version of themselves and gets the most satisfaction in playing a part helping others reach this potential.

Susan holds a bachelor's degree in public relations from Pepperdine University, a master's degree in leadership development from Azusa Pacific University and is pursuing her Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership from Indiana Wesleyan University. She is a certified facilitator of LEGO Serious Play and the Connective Leadership Institute's Achieving Styles Index. Contact: susan.barton@youwho.com.au

Leigh Cameron, founder of You Who, is an experienced NFP leader with a history of consulting across a broad range of industries Australia-wide and beyond. Leigh is passionate about partnering with organizations to create great leaders, great teams, great culture, and great strategy. The You Who team has a proven track record of building cohesion and clarity among the leadership teams and organization they work with. As someone who understands the primacy and power of healthy relationships, Leigh brings a distinctly personable and relational flavour in his approach to his coaching and facilitation work. Leigh is especially passionate about strengthening the performance of boards and leadership teams, having seen the results that are possible when a team is nurturing the strategy and culture of the organization they lead. Contact: Leigh.cameron@youwho.com.au

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Susan Barton. Email: susan.barton@youwho.com.au

References

Adler, P. S., & Heckscher, C. (2018). Collaboration as an organization design for shared purpose. In L. Ringel, P. Hiller, & C. Zietsma (Eds.), *Toward permeable boundaries of organizations?* (Vol. 57, pp. 81–111). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Avolio, B., Gardner, W., Walumbwa, F., & May, D. (2004). Unlocking the mask: A look at the process by which authentic leaders impact follower attitudes and behaviors. *Leadership Quarterly*, *15*(6), 801–823. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2004.09.003

Banks, G. C., Davis McCauley, K., Gardner, W., & Guler, C. E. (2016). A meta-analytic review of authentic and transformational leadership: A test for redundancy. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *27*(4), 634–652. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.02.006

Bell, S. T., & Brown, S. G. (2015). Selecting and composing cohesive teams. In E. Salas, W. B. Vessey, & A. X. Estrada (Eds.), *Team cohesion: Advances in psychological theory, methods and practice* (pp. 181–209). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1534-085620150000017008

Bushuev, S., Ivko, A., Mudra, M., Murovansky, G., & Pillyukhina, K. (2023). Adaptability in managing innovative projects within the BANI environment. *Managing Development of Complex Systems*, (54), 5–11. https://doi.org/10.32347/2412-9933.2023.54.5-11

Choudrie, J. (2005). Understanding the role of communication and conflict on reengineering team development. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, *18*(1), 64–78. https://doi.org/10.1108/17410390510571493

Claridge, T. (2020). Shared goals, shared purpose, shared vision. *Academy of Management Review*, *23*(2), 242. https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Shared-goals-shared-purpose-shared-vision.pdf

De Dreu, C., & Van Vianen, A. (2001). Managing relationship conflict and the effectiveness oforganizational teams. Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior, 22(3), 309–328. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.71

dos Reis, D. P., & Puente-Palacios, K. (2019). Team effectiveness: The predictive role of team identity. *Rausp Management Journal*, *54*(2), 141–153. https://doi.org/10.1108/RAUSP-07-2018-0046

Golluber, M. (1999). Aristotle on how one becomes what one is. *The Review of Metaphysics*, 363–382. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20131357

Gomez, E. A. (2008, May). Crisis response communication management: increasing message clarity with training over time. *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management ISCRAM2008*, 368–375.

Hackman, J. R. (1987). The design of work teams. In J. W. Lorsch, (Ed.), *Handbook of organizational behavior* (pp. 315–342). Prentice-Hall.

Hasan, I. A., Basalamah, S., Amang, B., & Bijang, J. (2023). The influence of leadership, work environment, competence, and character development on organizational commitment and employee performance in banking in Sinjai Regency. *International Journal of Professional Business Review*, *8*(5), 1–34. https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2023.v8i5.2176

Hultman, K., & Hultman, J. (2008). Deep teams: Leveraging the implicit organization. *Organization Development Journal*, *26*(3), 11.

Katzenbach, J. R., & Smith, D. K. (2005). The discipline of teams. *Harvard Business Review*, *83*(7), 162.

Kauffeld, S., & Lehmann-Willenbrock, N. (2012). Meetings matter: Effects of team meetings on team and organizational success. *Small Group Research*, *43*(2), 130–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496411429599

Kiernan, L., Ledwith, A., & Lynch, R. (2020). Design teams management of conflict in reaching consensus. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, *31*(2), 263–285. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCMA-06-2019-0097

Kotter, J. (1996). *Leading change*. Harvard Business Review Press.

Linville, M., & Rennaker, M. (2022). Essentials of followership: Rethinking the leadership paradigm with purpose. Kendall Hunt.

Littman-Ovadia, H. (2019). Doing–being and relationship–solitude: A proposed model for a balanced life. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *20*, 1953–1971. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-018-0018-8

Mathieu, J. E., & Rapp, T. L. (2009). Laying the foundation for successful team performance trajectories: The roles of team charters and performance strategies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *94*(1), 90. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013257

Mcgrath, J. E. (1991). Time, interaction, and performance (TIP): A theory of groups. *Small Group Research*, *22*(2), 147–174. https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496491222001

Melewar, T. C., & Karaosmanoglu, E. (2006). Seven dimensions of corporate identity. *European Journal of Marketing*, *40*(7–8), 846–869. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560610670025

New International Version Bible. (2011). Thomas Nelson Publishers (Original publication 1978)

Ogunfowora, B., Stackhouse, M., Maerz, A., Varty, C., Hwang, C., & Choi, J. (2021). The impact of team moral disengagement composition on team performance: The roles of team cooperation, team interpersonal deviance, and collective extraversion. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 36, 479–494. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-020-09688-2

Oldeweme, M., Konradt, U., & Brede, M. (2023). The rhythm of teamwork: Discovering a complex temporal pattern of team processes. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, *27*(1), 50. https://doi.org/10.1037/gdn0000175

Peter, T. J., & Waterman, R. H. (1982). *In search of excellence: Lessons from America's best-run companies*. Harper and Row Publications, New York, NY.

Ready, D. A., & Truelove, E. (2011). The power of collective ambition. *Harvard Business Review*, *89*(12), 94.

Schnitker, S. A., King, P. E., & Houltberg, B. (2019). Religion, spirituality, and thriving: Transcendent narrative, virtue, and telos. *Journal of Research on Adolescence: The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, *29*(2), 276–290. https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12443

Spiliopoulou, G., & Penn, A. (1999). Organisations as multi-layered networks. *Proceedings, 2nd Intl. Space Syntax Symposium*, pp. 1–24.

Stewart, G. L. (2006). A meta-analytic review of relationships between team design features and team performance. *Journal of Management*, *32*(1), 29–55. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305277792

Sturm, R. E., Vera, D., & Crossan, M. (2017). The entanglement of leader character and leader competence and its impact on performance. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *28*(3), 349–366. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.11.007

Teh, A. (2009). Common purpose. In S. R. Komives & W. Wagner (Eds.), Leadership for a better world: Understanding the social change model of leadership development (1st ed., pp. 237–262). Jossey-Bass.

Thomas, K. W. (2009). Intrinsic motivation at work: What really drives employee engagement. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Tuckman, B. W. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. Psychological
    Bulletin, 63(6), 384.

Waanders, F. M. J. (1983). The history of telos and teleō in Ancient Greek. Grüner.
    http://site.ebrary.com/id/10603428

Wanberg, J., Javernick-Will, A., Taylor, J. E., & Chinowsky, P. (2015). The effects of
    organizational divisions on knowledge-sharing networks in multi-lateral
    communities of practice. *Engineering Project Organization Journal*, *5*(2–3), 118–132.
    https://doi.org/10.1080/21573727.2015.1059823

Ware, J. (2012). Candor: Revealing, not concealing. In J. Ware, J. Dethmer, J. Ziegler, & F.
    Skinner (Eds.), *High performing investment teams: How to achieve best practices of top
    firms* (pp. 93–103). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
    https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119204817.ch5