

Teams.

The 5 Disciplines of a High-Performing Team

By Bernard Desmidt



The 5 Disciplines of a High-Performing Team

Effective teams consistently outperform effective leaders. However, it takes an understanding of the dynamics of high-performing teams and how to activate them to deliver this superior performance.

A team is more than just the sum of its parts. When teams perform at their best, they transcend the capabilities of each individual member. High-performing, collaborative teams are distinguished by their commitment to five key disciplines:

- **Discover:** Knowing and understanding their stakeholders' mandate.
- **Declare:** Unifying around a shared purpose.
- **Design:** Building quality working relationships.
- **Deliver:** Holding themselves accountable to the team's collective goals.
- **Develop:** Continually learning with and from one another.

These disciplines represent common sense. Building high-performance teams involves transitioning that common sense into common practice.



Discipline #1: Discover Our Mandate

“A team operating without a mandate risks getting better and better at doing what is not wanted by their stakeholders,” leadership coach Peter Hawkins says.

When the discipline to discover is ignored, teams operate in a vacuum of understanding their stakeholders’ expectations.

A mandate clarifies:

- **What this team can achieve that no other group of individuals can.**
- **The scope and range of topics upon which the team will focus.**
- **How the team’s performance will be measured.**

Surprisingly, countless teams *assume* rather than *know* their stakeholders’ mandate—ultimately setting rather than seeking the mandate and defaulting to servicing their own interests, not the stakeholders’.

And the more stakeholders involved—clients, shareholders, management, regulators, etc.—the greater the room for error in those assumptions.

Discipline #2: Declare Our Purpose

“One must be something in order to do something,” notes poet and playwright Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

A team’s purpose represents its reason for being and unifies its members behind a common cause. By ignoring the discipline to declare, team members lack focus and alignment on their objectives.

Furthermore, as author Nikos Mourkogiannis says, “Purpose makes work meaningful. ... [It] enables us to feel proud in what we do and liberates us to do better.”

The value in what teams do is a reflection of their purpose. Competitive teams focus on *what* they do; collaborative teams focus on *why* they do it.

Defining a team’s purpose should explore:

- **What value it adds and what difference it makes to those who follow**
- **What greater cause it serves**
- **Why it was created**

Discipline #3: Design Our Culture

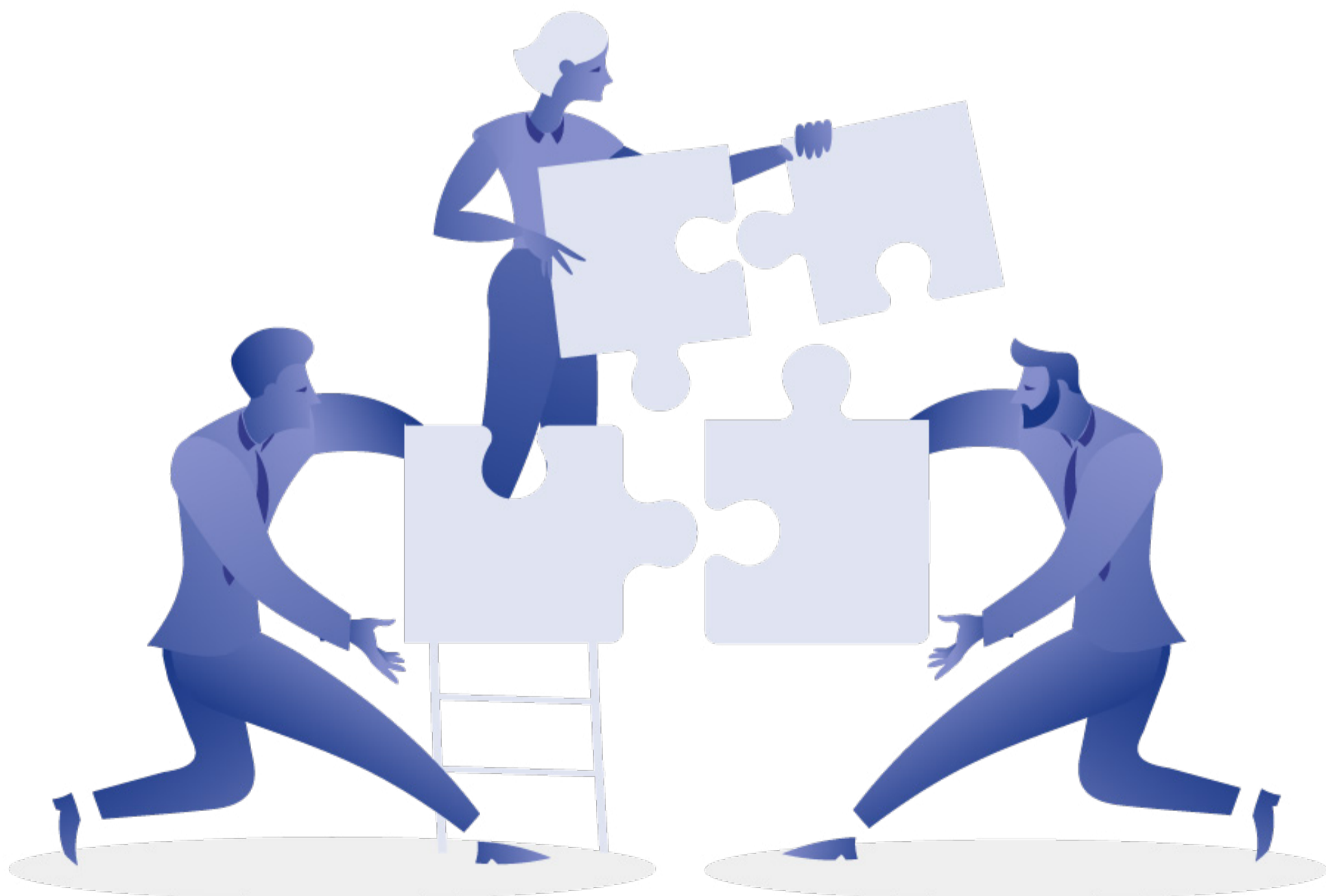
High-performing teams commit to a greater understanding of each other's perspectives in order to make more informed decisions and take wiser actions. This demands a culture built on mutual respect and trust, where everyone feels safe to speak their truth.

One of the biggest downfalls of organizations today is not doing things consistently and effectively.

Discounting the discipline to design is wasting effort because disjointed ways of working and suboptimal cooperation and commitment are applied to the given task. Improved relationships lead to improved results.

Consider:

- How will we engage and relate with each other?
- What do we want others to think and feel after each engagement with our team?
- What ways of working do we commit to— together and apart?



Discipline #4: Deliver Our Results

“You come across teams with an average intelligence of over 120, but the team functions at a collective intelligence of about 60,” systems scientist and senior MIT lecturer Peter Senge says.

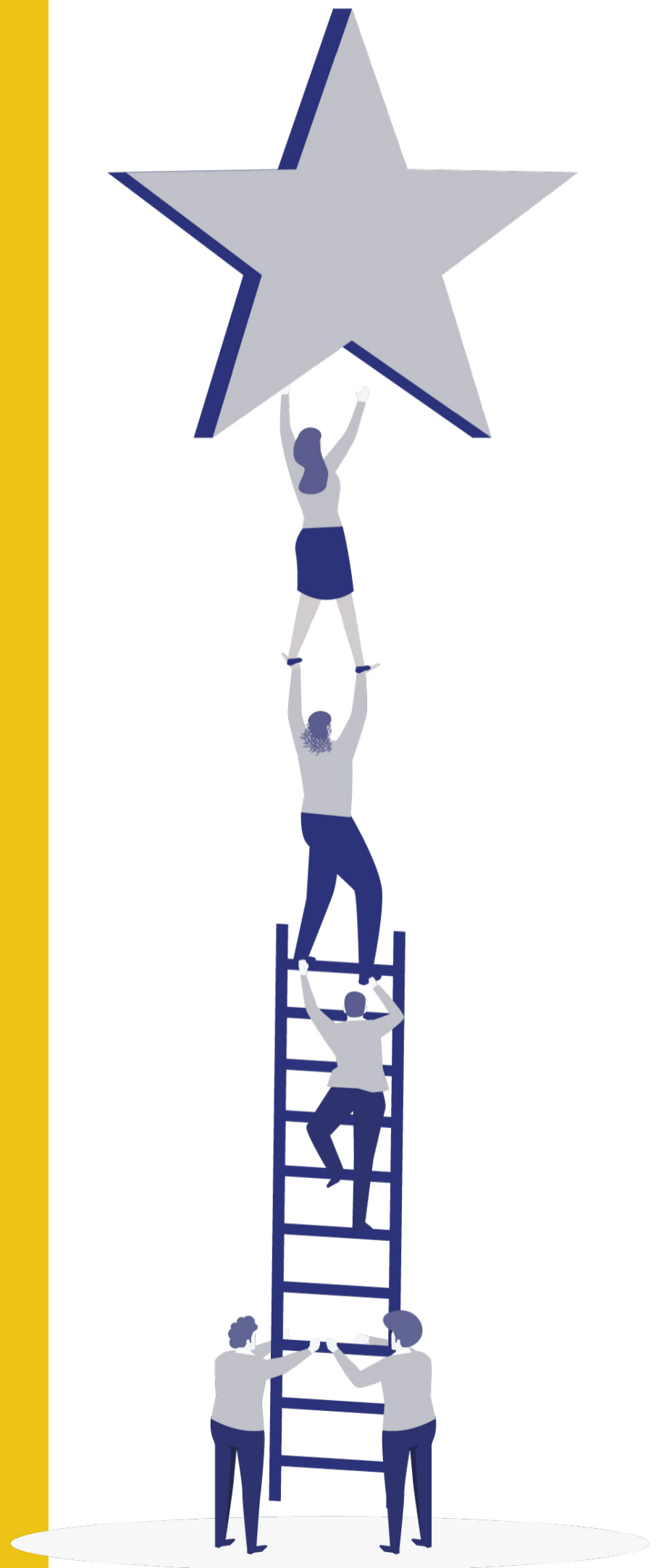
Research demonstrates that teams unclear on their mandate and lacking a unifying purpose or ways of working consistently operate below the sum of their parts.

When the discipline to deliver is overlooked, team members inevitably direct their individual attention to tasks over which they feel most confident and have the greatest control.

Unproductive meetings exacerbate the problem. Harvard Business School research showed that 71 percent of leaders believe meetings are unproductive and inefficient. Given meetings typically occupy 50 to 60 percent of leaders' working time, that is a lot of hours used unproductively.

Teams should know and agree on:

- What they were commissioned to accomplish
- Their collective performance goals and which ones are only achievable by working interdependently
- What actions they will commit to
- How their success for each goal is measured



Discipline #5: Develop Our Learning

High-performing teams are differentiated by their uncompromising commitment to building collective wisdom. They seek to learn with and from each other to enhance their combined capability.

Team learning involves sharing insights into:

- Contributions to past successes
- Patterns of thinking and behavior that are roadblocks to optimal performance
- What we commit to learning more about
- Changes we can make to work more effectively and perform better

As humans, our very survival depends upon our ability to adapt and grow. When we adapt our thinking, we access new possibilities.

Existing skills, knowledge, and experience will help overcome a particular challenge. However, given the increasing uncertainties and complexities of the world in which we live and work, they may not be sufficient alone. In such cases, we need to access different domains of learning.

Ignoring the discipline to develop restricts opportunities to learn, adapt, and improve—the very antithesis of a high-performing team.



Author: Bernard Desmidt, author of *Team Better Together*, is a renowned leadership coach, facilitator, and trainer. As a team coach, his expertise is in helping teams transition to become more collaborative, high-performing teams so they can access more of their collective capacity and capability to achieve the greatest things possible. Discover more at www.bernarddesmidt.com.