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Five factors for discovering your compliance team's effectiveness

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As compliance professionals, we know that we can't accomplish great things alone. We achieve our goals through others, within a team structure. In this way, we scale our influence and have the potential to exponentially increase gains.

But there are many factors that have the potential to negatively affect team performance. Organizational culture, competing initiatives, and intrateam issues may affect your ability to keep projects focused and on track. Compliance teams are often spread across geographies, and now with the pandemic, everyone is likely working apart, interrupting communication and flow even further.

So how do you know when your team is working effectively together? How do you assess its performance based on the goals?

There are numerous models for leadership, but one I have used with great success is from Patrick Lencioni.[1] He breaks teamwork down into five critical competencies, each of which can be measured and improved. Let me take you through those along with some real-world examples to help you understand some of the pitfalls.

1. Building trust

Trust is a critical foundation for working well together. It ensures that all members of a team believe that their peers' intentions are good, and they can be open and honest with each other. However, this does require vulnerability—and unfortunately, along their career advancement path, most people learn to view their colleagues as competitors and therefore become conditioned to defend what they view as their territory.

One team I worked with was wasting excessive amounts of time and energy grappling with their interactions after an external "key talent" hire was brought in to join the team. Perceived as "ambitious and aggressive," the star hire threw off the balance of the team, and the lead executive failed to take quick action to stop the behavior. The team began to dread group meetings, avoided speaking directly, and essentially shut down. When one of her best performers quit, the leader brought me in to facilitate a reset of group norms[2] and reestablish trust.

If you have a team where individuals compete for attention, good intent is questioned, and business information is traded like poker chips, you know you have a problem with trust. There is no quick fix for this, and the solution starts with leadership. Trust (especially where it's been breached) must be built over time, through multiple experiences of commitments combined with follow-through and credibility.

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