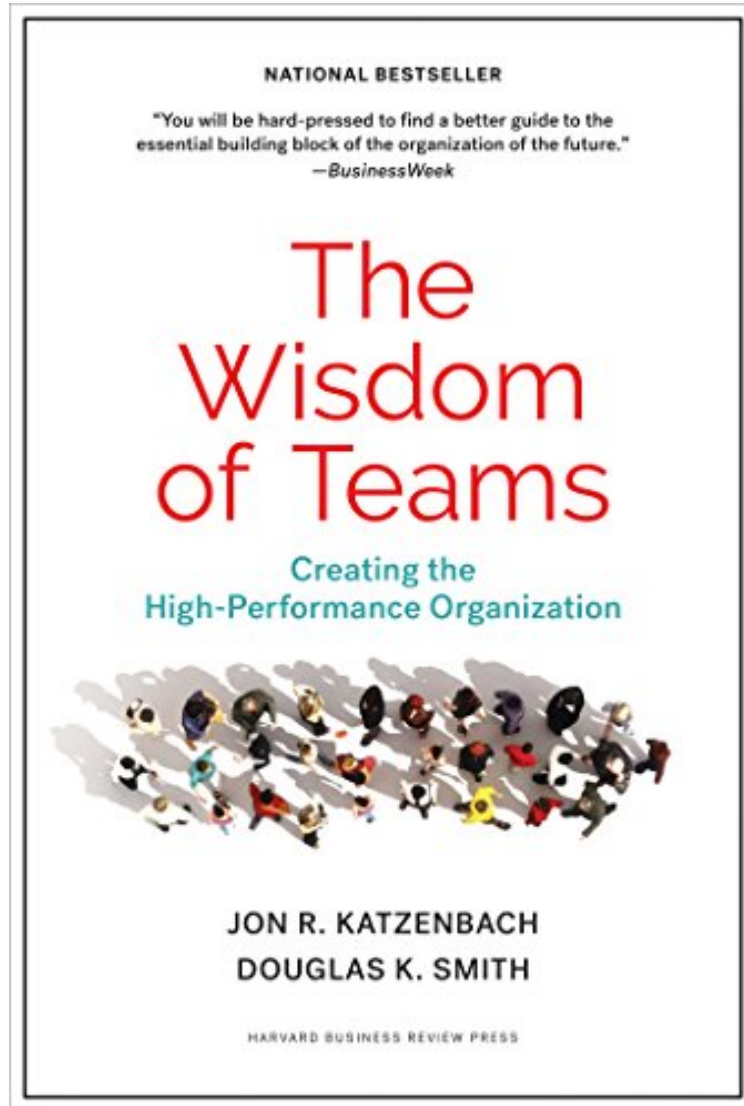


The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization

Douglas Smith, Jon Katzenbach

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Douglas Smith, Jon Katzenbach : The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Invaluable Contribution towards Understanding Team Dynamics By Paul Mathew As a corporate trainer for over 15 years, I have repeatedly experienced the power of teams. This ability to deliver excellence under change, challenge, and pressure, and actually enjoy it, has been behaviourally demonstrated and reinforced consistently by hundreds of teams and thousands of participants spanning a wide range of culture,

industry, and hierarchy. However, all I had with me was behavioural validation till I had the good fortune of discovering this wonderful book. "The Wisdom of Teams" offers rich and invaluable research validation on the critical ingredients of high performance teams. The authors, Jon Katzenbach, and Douglas Smith, have researched teams from a wide range of industry, both high performance teams as well as teams that have failed, and listed very clear parameters that make teams either powerful or ineffective. The findings point to one of the prime responsibilities of leadership as the formation of 'teams'. Once a group of people become a team, they invariably find the competencies, and get the resources needed. Simply because the basic instinct of a 'natural' team is to win. No team is comfortable being second. Integration, collaboration, communication, creativity, managing time, enjoying change, taking on challenge, are attitudinal traits naturally available to a team. This invaluable book defines what converts a group of people into powerful 'natural' teams. This is a must read for all team players, team builders, and leaders of teams and organizations. 26 of 27 people found the following review helpful. Highly detailed framework for team development

By Brian Pruett
Overview: The Wisdom of Teams presents Katzenbach and Smith's contention that real teams are the best approach to building a high-performance organization. The authors blended together their highly detailed framework for team development with examples of how several corporations successfully or unsuccessfully implemented these team principles. While acknowledging that teams may not be the best solution for every organization's problems, the authors unashamedly insisted that businesses do themselves a disservice by not considering the team-based approach. The book's twelve chapters are organized into three parts: Understanding Teams, Becoming a Team, and Exploiting the Potential.

Summary: Part One, Understanding Teams, introduces the reader to the authors' thesis that teams present the best approach to creating a high-performance organization. Teams are defined as a "small group of people with complementary skills committed to a common purpose and set of specific performance goals" (21). Teams are not the same as work groups, committees, councils or task forces where the emphasis is on individual performance and accountability; that is, the sum of individual bests. Neither is every group that calls itself a team a true team. They may exhibit team-like characteristics or share team-like values, but those in and of themselves do not make a team. The distinguishing characteristic of teams is the synergistic effect created when individual accountability is exchanged for mutual group accountability and shared group responsibility. Additionally, teams need to do real work in order to be characterized as a real team. They must produce a specific work product that contributes to the organization's mission and success. However, achieving real team status is often difficult. In order to become successful, potential teams must overcome bureaucratic inertia, managerial biases, confusion about what makes a true team, negative past experiences with pseudo teams, fear of failure, and individual resistance to shared accountability. These embody a daunting array of factors to overcome, but the authors insisted that a top-level commitment to team-based solutions could lead to building a successful team. In Part Two, Becoming a Team, the authors used their "team performance curve" to graphically illustrate the process necessary to create winning teams. A group does not become a team when initially formed. They may be a working group committed to better coordinating individual efforts toward individual goals benefiting the company, but they produce no joint work product. While this may be the best solution to a company's problem, the decision to become a team requires the conscious decision to assume the risk of mutual accountability and joint responsibility. If provided the right catalyst, a working group can transition to either a pseudo team or a potential team. The pseudo team fails to implement the basics of team building. They call themselves a team but are still focused on individual performance and not group results. Potential teams show an enhanced desire to formulate a group mission but have not adopted mutual accountability. They demonstrate improved team effectiveness, but their impact on the corporate problem is no greater than the working group. Real teams have a clearly defined mission for which they hold themselves mutually accountable and produce a joint work product. High performance teams are real teams that develop a deep personal commitment among the members of the team for one another's personal growth and wellbeing. These teams are both highly effective in their team effort and produce high quality results for the organization. However, to rise to that level, team members must make the critical choice to invest themselves in the team and its mission while overcoming obstacles that threaten to cause the team to regress to one of its lesser effective counterparts. Successful teams need quality leaders who help focus the group on the mission, endorse a team-based philosophy of shared accountability, and foster a climate of courage and success. In Part Three, the authors forcefully championed their assertion that teams are the building blocks of successful organizations. Teams, they insisted, are the best organizational tool to deliver the results necessary to build customer loyalty, shareholder value, and employee satisfaction. Provided a company has a strong performance ethic and vision-driven leadership, teams can contribute the necessary skills, energy, and performance values that drive successful businesses. The ultimate decision to incorporate functional team rests with executive leadership and its willingness to transform bloated hierarchical structures, managerial parochialism, and individual-based incentives.

Review and Reaction: Brevity and succinctness are not the strengths of this book. Once one is able to navigate the business techno babble, the mind numbing repetitiousness, and awkward sentence structures, the authors' point becomes clear: Teams are good for business. The genuine strength of the book is in the examples. The authors' ethereally academic presentation of team concepts finds a clearer voice in their reflections on how these concepts were applied in "real world" corporate environments. While not every example speaks with equal adequacy to its point, the reader can gain an understanding of what factors help

build or break teams. Many of these factors, as the authors' asserted, are common sense. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Guide for enterprise communicators, alongside 'Team of Teams' By E. Bruce Harrison The Wisdom of Teams, Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, from McKinsey Co., was given to me by Marilyn Laurie, CCO of ATT, in 1993, when I went onto the Board of the Arthur W. Page Society which she then chaired. Katzenbach had been with McKinsey more than 30 years then, he was a friend and consultant who helped big companies like ATT and little PR entrepreneur guys like me understand what "high-performance organization" meant. Marilyn and the Page board, determined to put communication counsel at the top of such companies, locked onto the "teams" approach—an orientation that today is absolutely vital in enterprise leadership. (See now, two decades later, the brilliant Katzenbach-Smith practicality in Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World by Gen. Stanley McChrystal, US Army, retired, and his team of co-authors.) For C-suite communicators, Wisdom of Teams definition that distinguishes an enterprise team from "employees" rings solidly true: "A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable." If you're driving with management toward delivering value to individuals, think team-work, starting at C-level, where you can serve as the connector among the enterprise's significantly accountable individuals.

The definitive classic on high-performance teams The Wisdom of Teams is the definitive work on how to create high-performance teams in any organization. Having sold nearly a half million copies and been translated into more than fifteen languages, the authors' clarion call that teams should be the basic unit of organization for most businesses has permanently shaped the way companies reach the highest levels of performance. Using engaging case studies and testimonials from both successful and failed teams ranging from Fortune 500 companies to the U.S. Army to high school sports the authors explain the dynamics of teams both in great detail and with a broad view. Their conclusions and prescriptions span the familiar to the counterintuitive: Commitment to performance goals and common purpose is more important to team success than team building. Opportunities for teams exist in all parts of the organization. Real teams are the most successful spearheads of change at all levels. Working in teams naturally integrates performance and learning. Team endings can be as important to manage as team beginnings. Wisdom lies in recognizing a team's unique potential to deliver results and in understanding its many benefits: development of individual members, team accomplishments, and stronger companywide performance. Katzenbach and Smith's comprehensive classic is the essential guide to unlocking the potential of teams in your organization.

From Publishers Weekly The importance of teams has become a cliché of modern business theory, but few have a clear idea of what it means. In this new edition of their best-selling primer, Katzenbach and Smith try to impart some analytical rigor to the concept. Drawing on their experience as management consultants and a plethora of case studies at companies like Burlington Northern and Motorola, they cover such topics as the optimal size of teams, coping with turnover in team personnel and nurturing "extraordinary teams" rather than "pseudo-teams." Reacting against the touchy-feely interpersonal bent of discourse on teams, they emphasize hard-nosed principles of "performance, focus, and discipline," over the softer concerns of "communication, openness and 'chemistry.'" Teams, they argue, gel and achieve not by developing "togetherness," but by tackling and surmounting specific "outcome-based" challenges ("eliminate all late deliveries...within 90 days" rather than the vaguer "develop a plan for improving customer satisfaction."). Some of the authors' recommendations are reasonably precise and practical, but too many are nebulous truisms ("keep the purpose, goals, and approach relevant and meaningful") or weighed down by turgid consultant-ese ("integrating the performance goals of formal, structural units as well as special ad hoc group efforts becomes a significant process design challenge"). The case studies are better written, but it's not clear that these inspiring anecdotes of team triumph add up to a systematic doctrine. The book leaves the impression that teams ultimately just have to learn by doing. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal The authors, who are both consultants, conducted extensive interviews with companies to discover how successful teams are created and sustained. The result is not a research report but a collection of minicase histories and commentary. Some of the findings: Teams respond to performance challenges and not to managers' exhortations for more "teamwork." Organizations committed to high-performance standards and willing to modify individual accountability requirements experience the greatest success with teams. Successful team leaders are not necessarily those with remarkable leadership qualities. Instead, they "simply need to believe in their purpose and their people." Team leaders do real work, remove obstacles, and build trust and confidence. Recommended for larger public libraries and special business collections.- Andrea C. Dragon, Coll. of St. Elizabeth, Convent Station, N.J. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. "The Wisdom of Teams captures the power and vision of what great business teams can accomplish. Its stories and lessons should be read and learned." -- Senator Bill Bradley "A thoughtful and well-written book filled with fascinating examples. . . . You will be hard-pressed to find a better guide to the essential building block of the organization of the future." -- John Byrne Business Week "An unusually thorough study of teams...As well as challenging much conventional wisdom about teams, the book is full of advice about how to organize proper--and

properly effective--teams." -- -- Financial Times"Teams at any level in the organization make all the difference to performance. This book describes, with inescapable clarity, the discipline necessary for both teams and performance." -- -- Harvey Golub, CEO, American Express Company"This book offers valuable advice in the fine art of building teams for high performance results...The authors provide real and disguised examples...along with specific recommendations...and offer useful ideas for balancing work responsibilities, executive egos, communications, and skills." -- -- Industry Week