

What's Keeping Your Team from Reaching Its Potential?

Birkman International publishes findings from study on factors most crucial to team success

Insights based on findings from a survey conducted by Birkman International in January 2007. The study was conducted under the direction of Dr. Patrick Wadlington, senior psychometrician for Birkman International's Research and Development Department. Dr. Wadlington received his doctoral degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Before joining Birkman, Dr. Wadlington served as senior psychometrician for Hogan Assessments and conducted research for the Department of Defense and Office of Naval Research.

Gaining the competitive edge in today's global market requires building a team where the strengths of each team member are focused in a collaborative effort. How a team works as a whole is what determines success. In other words, a well-designed and coordinated team that communicates and collaborates well typically achieves better results than individuals working alone or in parallel.

This report is intended to inform current users of personality assessments and trained team-building coaches about the factors that contribute most significantly and most often to team success. The information in this report is based on findings from a survey conducted by Birkman International in January 2007 of more than 160 Birkman Method consultants and clients who regularly work with teams. The respondents were asked about the factors that most affect the teams they work with and rated how often and to what extent the factors influenced the teams. Respondents' answers were based on a one to five scale, with one being least important and five being most important.

Communication within a team is by far the most significant factor in a team's success. The fact that communication is the biggest problem affecting teams can be viewed as evidence of "hidden expertise" within teams. The idea behind "hidden expertise" is that when information needs to be exchanged among team members, a person in the team immediately thinks of certain information that he knows personally but believes is universally known. Therefore, instead of conveying this uniquely personal information, he remains silent because he expects the rest of his team to know about it as well. In the office, this is commonly discovered when someone says "I thought you knew." In knowledge-process literature, this is sometimes known as "assumed" knowledge or "tacit" knowledge. When essential, but tacit, bits of information are not explicitly exchanged among team members, the decision-making quality of the team is degraded.

The problem for many teams may not be that they are not communicating, but that they are not communicating effectively. The method in which the information is conveyed is just as important as the message itself. Individuals perceive communication and messages differently, so in order to communicate effectively, teams need to know how to accurately convey information to other team members so that the message is received in the way it was intended.

The other highly rated team effectiveness factors all ultimately impact communication in some way. The remaining top 10 factors, in order of importance, are:

- Trust among team members
- Cooperation among team members
- Interpersonal conflicts within the team
- Adaptation of the team to a changing environment
- Role clarity within the team
- Feedback from supervisor to the team
- Stress experienced by team members
- Problem solving success of the team
- Interdependence of team task and/or goals

Lower-rated factors, beginning with the lowest-ranked, include:

- Extraversion of team members
- Emotional stability of team members
- Conscientiousness of team members
- Learning orientation of team members
- Self-discipline of team members
- Confidence of team members to attain desired results
- Participation of team members in team activities

It seems that some of these lower-ranked factors, such as participation of team members, would have a much higher impact on a team's success. It may be that these factors are typically considered aspects of the higher-ranked factors like cooperation. Another explanation might be that the lower-ranked items seem more personal than interpersonal so that they naturally affect other, broader factors, which in turn affect the team's success.

Summary:

- *Communication is the most vital factor in a team's success and also the biggest problem affecting teams.*
- *A team can only outperform the quality of the best person on the team when certain standards are met.*

Birkman is currently designing new products and mapping them for the competencies that the study identified as most important to teams.

The Birkman Method puts emphasis on helping teams and individuals recognize multiple delivery styles. The Birkman Method team-building process opens the lines of communication so the team can work on the problem together.

Birkman's current team-building training helps team members and leaders:

- Understand various communication possibilities
- Establish more effective communication practices.
- Assess, assign and accept assignments according to talent base.
- Set appropriate specific short-term challenges and goals for the team.
- Provide teams working on projects with constructive insights and options.
- Add individuals with diverse backgrounds to get the best answers or debates.

In studying groups, there has always been the debate whether if, when it comes to decision quality, the group will outperform the quality of the best person in the group. Birkman's research has demonstrated that in order for the group's work to surpass the quality of the best person in team, the members' information must be pulled, aggregated and re-disseminated appropriately; must be efficient and effective and the decision must be operationalized and executed properly and accurately. For teams to be successful, they must address and master the factors that most significantly impact them.

The typical team applications using the current Birkman Method® reports are:

- Thinking and Decision Making Styles
- Team Management and Dynamics
- Individual Strengths and Talents
- Team Strengths and Talents
- Performance Management
- Relational Competencies
- Individual Development
- Communication Styles
- Conflict Management
- Stress Management
- Management Styles
- Self Management
- Leadership Styles

The Birkman Promise:

Birkman International will continue to research team issues and to monitor the factors that affect team performance. Birkman International will develop new applications that effectively address emerging team issues.

As a result of this promise, Birkman is currently designing new products and mapping them to the competencies that this study identified as most important to teams. Birkman will also develop and conduct team-building training and establish team-building guidelines that emphasize the top ten factors identified in this study. The goal is to have these products available in 2007.

About Birkman

Birkman International, Inc. is an international provider of the industry-leading business tool that facilitates individual growth, corporate change, and organizational effectiveness. For more than 50 years, leading companies around the world have used our proven method of assessing human potential to raise business performance to new levels of excellence and drive the changes needed to compete successfully. Incorporated in 1951, Birkman International is a privately held company based in Houston, Texas U.S.A. The Birkman Method is used on nearly every continent in the world: North and South America, Europe, Asia, Australia and Africa.

Now, we invite you to learn how The Birkman Method can help your organization maximize its human capital and achieve results that are both superior and sustainable. Send any questions or comments about this article to response@birkman.com or info@birkman.com. Visit us on the web at www.birkman.com.

BIRKMAN INTERNATIONAL INC.
3040 Post Oak Blvd. Suite 1425
Houston, Texas 77056
USA Phone: 1+(713) 623.2760
Email: info@birkman.com

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www.birkman.com

3040 Post Oak Blvd. Suite 1425, Houston, Texas 77056

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