

Teamwork at a Distance: How the Roles on a team and their intrinsic connections impact virtual team performance

**A briefing on the state of virtual teamwork
in business, and keys to its greater success**



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If business were baseball, 'home teams' would be a thing of the past

It's no secret that the globalization of business has greatly changed how business gets done. The playing field is neither here nor there; it's everywhere. It is also clear that generational change, and the reliance on new technologies that come with it, are forces that must be reckoned with. It would seem that virtual workplaces and virtual teams constitute a natural means of accommodating these new developments.



Unfortunately, for many organizations, the potential benefits in cost, productivity, and competitive advantage of virtual teamwork never fully materialize. Instead, the facts indicate that something quite significant is missing from the equation. Virtual teamwork may be essential, but it is not delivering on its promise.

A recent article in Harvard Business Review¹ cited several common issues experienced by geographically dispersed teams: work product does not align with expectations, there is a failure to develop a common, shared understanding, and team members are plagued by frustration with communication breakdowns. Independent research by Siemens Enterprise Communications² gives additional clarity to the overall scope of the problem:

- 79% of the sample said that they always or frequently work in distributed teams, but only 44% found it to be as productive as face-to-face teamwork;
- 75% reported that teammates were likely to be distracted during virtual meetings;
- 43% felt frustrated by team collaboration and the communication technology they rely on to support it; and
- Only 8% had formal team performance management systems in place.

How should business respond? Are tighter controls needed? Should virtual workplace initiatives be reversed, as a few high-profile companies have recently done? Or could it be that the difficulties of managing virtual teamwork are simply an extension of problems that are commonplace in co-located teams, exacerbated by circumstance?

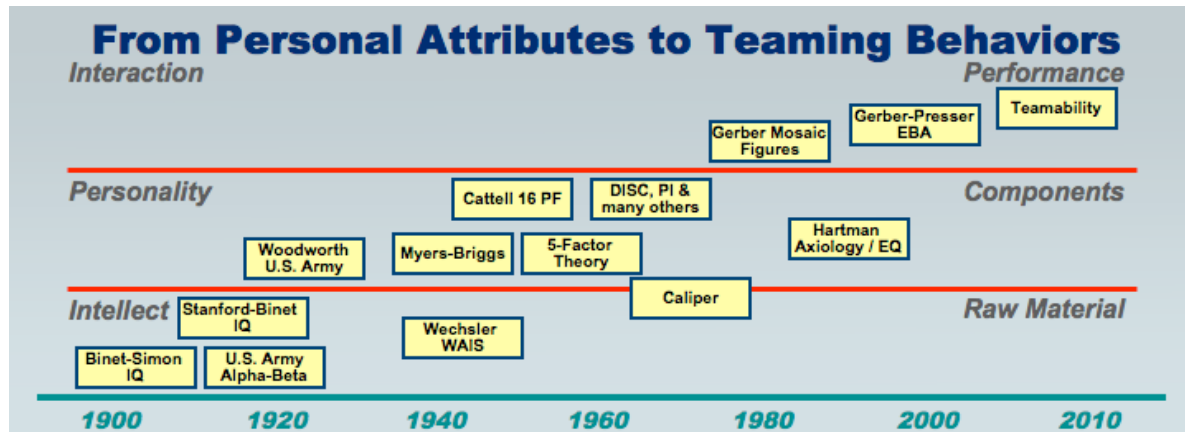
A completely new 'technology of teaming' that only recently became available sheds light on this issue. It is called Teamability®, and it offers new management information relevant to the selection, development, management and motivation of teams in any environment – including a virtual one.

"Teamability provides refreshing, direct and powerful insight into the challenges that leaders and teams face in today's world. The background of theoretical and real life experience of its creator, Dr. Janice Presser, applies an essential cranial defibrillator to anyone serious about creating and leading enabled teams."

Harry Tucker, Fortune 25 Strategy Advisor / Global Technology Architect

On a team, a Role is not a job title

In 1984, two behavioral scientists – Dr. Janice Presser and Dr. Jack Gerber – set out to find an answer to the question, “What really happens when people ‘team’ together?” Twenty-five years of research and testing, including nine years of software development, produced a technology engineered to identify and organize the ways in which people interact in teams.



The quest began with a review of all of the available tools of the time: IQ tests, personality tests, aptitude tests, and their many variations and statistical methods. Traditional psychometric instruments provide lots of valid information, but they were not designed to elicit and measure teaming behavior – the *quality* with which individuals will *apply* their intelligence, traits, skills or experience...in the context of team activity.

Eventually Drs. Presser and Gerber concluded that since ‘teamwork’ happens **BETWEEN** people – not **INSIDE** of them – a new theory and new methods were required. The next phase of their collaboration produced some very useful – and practical – metrics of teaming. These include:

- **Role:** a person’s affinity for specific modes of service to the needs of a team
- **Coherence:** expressed as positive, flexible, constructive teaming behaviors
- **Teaming Characteristics:** individual styles of responding and relating to others, subject to situational context
- **Role-respect:** the unique manner in which different Roles experience appreciation and respect
- **Role-pairing:** known, replicable synergies between specific Roles
- **Role-fit:** an appropriate match between a person's Role and their assigned set of job responsibilities
- **Team-fit:** structuring a team to include the Roles that are best-fit to the team’s mission

This new way to understand teaming behavior was initially called Role-Based Assessment (RBA). Formal research was conducted over a period of ten years, through three separate iterations of design, development and field validation studies. With each iteration, a successively higher level of correlation was found between the content of the reports and the observed workplace behavior of participants.

As it became increasingly clear that a person’s ‘Role’ was a crucial factor in the quality of team interaction and job performance, teaming technology and the Role-based approach gradually merged into the single, simple concept of Teamability.

“Teamability is like seeing yourself, and your creativity, leadership and communication skills, in an ‘insight mirror of truth.’ When Dr. Janice’s customized analysis of your operating style, motivational drivers, and abilities to connect with others is layered onto the predictive metrics, the result is an honest, straightforward, and highly actionable behavioral portrait.”

Michael W. Lowenstein, Ph.D., CMC, Chief Research Officer, The Relational Capital Group

The new metrics of teaming

A most important aspect of Teamability is the fact that it produces measurable business value. One compelling example is the SuperNova® prize for emerging technology, awarded by Constellation Research in 2011 to Preferred Sands – a \$1 billion multinational firm based near Philadelphia, PA. There, the use of Teamability resulted in rapid resolution of team performance problems, and an extraordinary improvement in quality-of-hire. The business benefits of Teamability have been further verified by the experiences and testimonials of managers, executives, and business owners in numerous market segments and functional areas of business, from startups to giant corporations and institutions.

What is it about Teamability that enables organizations to realize, right from the start, operational and economic benefits? The answer lies in the relevance of Teamability, and its associated management methods, to the daily interactions between individuals and the organizational needs they serve.

Role, with a capital 'R':

The word 'role' is commonly used to indicate a person's area of functional responsibility, and sometimes simply to denote a job title. But in this new context, Role has a very different meaning. As the first key metric of teaming, a person's capital-R Role tells us the manner or mode in which he or she seeks to serve a specific area of organizational need. A person in a project management job may perform well in its execution, but if his/her Role (in Teamability) is actually that of an Explorer, there will be a price to be paid for the lack of Role-fit to job responsibilities. Typically, this will emerge in the form of elevated job stress, a low level of job satisfaction, reduced productivity, and/or undesired turnover.

Different Roles Serve Different Organizational Needs

Founder: Envisioning the future

Vision Mover: From vision to strategy

Action Mover: Getting it done

Explorer: Searching for 'treasure'

Conductor: Solving tough problems

Communicator: Creating 'community'

Vision Former: Big-picture guiding

Action Former: Managing the details

Watchdog: Tending to resource needs

Curator: Preserving knowledge

Match Roles to Job Responsibilities; Match the Roles on a Team to the Mission of the Team

Coherence:

Teamwork can be stressful, even when things are going well, and that's where the next Teaming Metric comes in. Coherent team members can handle more stress, more ambiguity, and more pressure to deliver. A team with comparatively low Coherence can perform perfectly well, but under pressure there is a greater risk of breakdowns in safety, quality, or other mission-critical areas.

The understanding of Role and Coherence gives managers reliable guidance for putting people into situations that will enable and support their optimal performance.

Teaming Characteristics:

Through this third metric, tens of thousands of unique Teaming Characteristics can be identified and reported. These provide specific information used to fine-tune the alignment between people, situations, and the needs of the business.

Unlike other ways of measuring people, this model is not focused on the attributes of the individual. It was designed from inception to reveal and explain the inner workings of team collaboration. The reports enable managers to know, in advance, *what to expect* from a given person in a given teaming situation, and are thus invaluable for planning team structure and assigning tasks and responsibilities.

"The focus of Project Management has changed from commanding & controlling to a more collaborative model. Teamability illuminates the dynamics of team relationships, and focuses on Business Leadership Excellence that brings out the best in Project Managers and their team members."

Martin Chernenkoff, Senior Editor, pduOTD.com (PDU Of The Day)

Virtual team performance

"Teamability is like having the answer key to a million-piece organizational puzzle."

R "Ray" Wang, Principal Analyst & CEO, Constellation Research

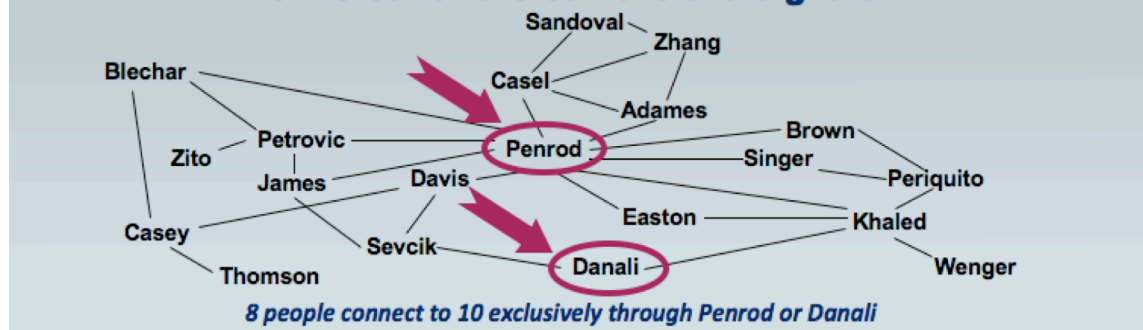
In his classic business book *Leadership is an Art*, Max DePree observed that most people *want* to do a good job, and it is thus the obligation of leadership to keep them informed of what 'doing a good job' means. To this, we would add that when management has a clear picture of a *specific organizational need* that a given person seeks to fulfill, it becomes possible to reliably align people with job responsibilities that are intrinsically meaningful and satisfying.

Optimizing Team Structure and Performance

- **Role-fit:** match a person's job responsibilities to their Role; improve job satisfaction & engagement
- **Team-fit:** for peak team performance, match the Roles on a team to the mission of the team
- **Role-pairing:** each Role has a complementary Role Partner, with which there is natural balance and positive synergy
- **Role-respect:** people of different Roles experience respect and appreciation differently; 'thank you' is polite, but not always effective

Teaming metrics and their related management methods provide workable solutions for the core challenges of geographically distributed teamwork. For instance, the key junctures in a social network can be selected for Role and Coherence. But there is another key factor impinging on virtual team interaction, and that is communications quality. Even a team that has been ideally structured through Teamability will be subject to the frictional loss inherent in virtual teamwork: diminished availability of non-verbal communication cues, lack of in-person social interaction and bonding, and other barriers to the development of positive team synergy.

How Clear and Clean are the Signals?



During the late 1990s, when a clamor arose around the demand for real-time data in manufacturing and e-commerce, some pundits theorized that capturing data in real time would only increase the likelihood of bigger problems happening faster. But in the end, cleaner and quicker data flows simply enabled more accurate and more efficient business processes. The same will be true for the implementation of Unified Communications. And since all indicators point to a continuing and accelerating expansion of virtual team activity, every organization with multi-site operations should have a plan to optimize virtual team performance.

High-quality virtual team interaction, operating on a high-integrity communications platform, forms the ideal infrastructure for high-performance in globally distributed teams.

"Here's what I recommend: whether you have hiring quality problems, or team performance problems, or any other people-related issues or challenges, stop paying so much attention to 'talent,' and focus on finding the right team-players."^A

Mike O'Neill, Chief Executive Officer, Preferred Sands

We're making the virtual workplace a better place to work

The Gabriel Institute was founded in 2001 to complete the development and launch of the unique 'technology of teaming' created by Dr. Janice Presser and Dr. Jack Gerber. Late in 2009, Teamability® became generally available as an online experience. By mid-2013, Teamability and its Role-based approach to the measurement of team dynamics had matured into a comprehensive suite of teaming metrics and management methods, used by 200+ corporate, institutional, and non-profit organizations worldwide.



www.thegabrielinstitute.com • +1.215.825.2500

The Teamability experience takes most people about an hour online in a standard browser environment, and it is software-as-a-service. Users buy single or multiple reports as needed.

Teamability:

- the ability to connect with others to form a productive team
- the ability to communicate in a coherent manner with the intent to enhance team spirit
- the most prominent characteristic of a team member
- a set of predictive metrics encompassing one's Role, Coherence, and Teaming Characteristics as defined by TGI's Role-based approach
- a portfolio of new methods for selecting, developing, managing, and motivating both individuals and teams

Teamability® is a registered trademark of The Gabriel Institute, LLC.

¹*Managing a Virtual Team; Mark Mortenson and Michael O'Leary, HBR Blog Network, April 2012*

²*Siemens Enterprise Communications original global research, October 2012, n=320*

³*Leadership is an Art, Max DePree, 1989, Doubleday*

⁴*Excerpt from the 2011 SuperNova Award (Emerging Technology category), citing positive business results achieved with Teamability. Constellation Research*