

PROGRAM SUCCESS

TEAM CHARACTERISTICS

TEAM FOCUS

TEAM PURPOSE

PERFORMANCE

TEAMWORK

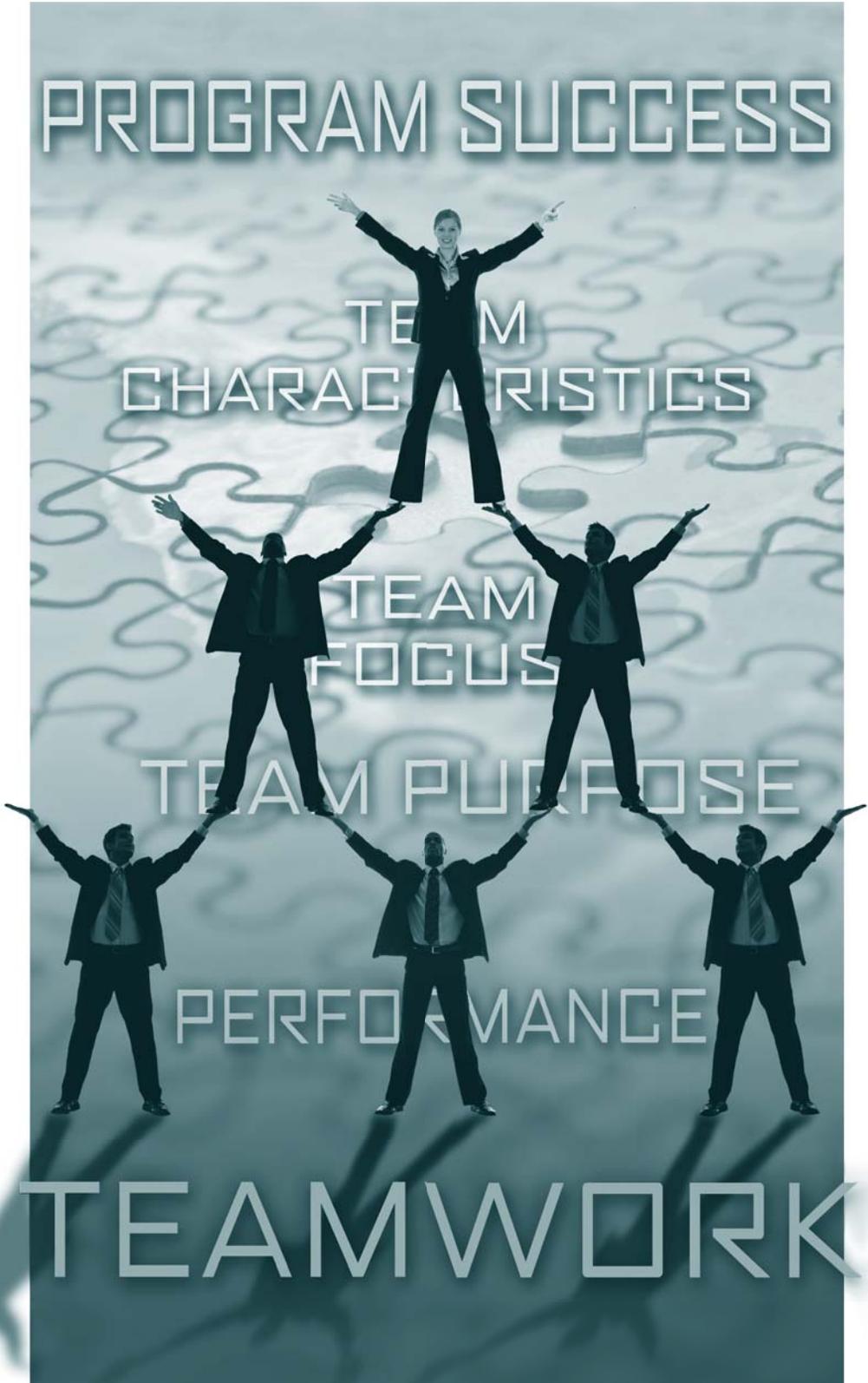


Image designed by Jim Elmore

# DO TEAM GOALS AFFECT TEAM FOCUS AND PERFORMANCE? RESEARCH STUDY OF DAU'S PROGRAM MANAGEMENT OFFICE COURSE (PMT 352B)

*Thomas Robert Edison*

Teams can be a significant resource to business leaders and can help lead to greater program successes. This study was conducted on student project teams in 12 classes of a Defense Acquisition University (DAU) executive-level, 6-week program management class in six different locations. The study not only underscores the significance of team focus on performance, but also highlights how team characteristics affect team focus and performance. Significant direct relationships were found in the study's 15 tested hypotheses between work team strategic intent (the team's purpose, objectives, and strategies) and team performance, as measured by team self-assessments and instructor assessments. The results of this study have applications to the successful use of project teams throughout DoD.

**W**hat is one of the single most potent tools for program managers—readily available to all? The Department of Defense, as with many other defense industry organizations operating in today's complex, changing, and sometimes chaotic work environments, is becoming increasingly more dependent on *work teams* as a means of leveraging maximum creativity, efficiency, and focus from its acquisition workforce. In today's constrained fiscal environment of limited budgets and manpower, identifying, defining, and understanding the initiatives and strategies that lead to team effectiveness represent a management imperative.

One characteristic that has received significant attention is whether teams with a clear focus and a developed purpose are more effective than those teams that are less focused, with less clear goals or purpose.

The Defense Acquisition University (DAU) has embraced teams, and most of the DAU resident courses are taught with students assigned to student work teams. In particular, in DAU's premier 6-week Program Management Office Course (PMT 352B), teams are used throughout the course to highlight the environment in which a DoD program manager normally interacts with work teams. This article highlights a study conducted on PMT 352B teams to determine if focused teams perform better than those teams that are less focused. Does a team with clear purpose, objectives, and strategies perform more effectively than teams with less clearly defined tenets?

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***Tomorrow's competitive organizations will be managed  
and inspired by teams of experts, skilled technicians,  
and team-appointed leaders.***

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Warren Bennis (1985) in his book *Leaders, The Strategies for Taking Charge* describes the need for cooperation, communication, and collaboration between individuals in order to achieve greatness—and emphasizes the successful deployment of teams in the last two decades to achieve these same results.

In today's complex and technologically sophisticated society, the most pressing projects require the committed, coordinated, and connected contributions of many talented people. Gone is the myth of the Lone Ranger or a sole champion or larger-than-life hero who can essentially "go it alone." Tomorrow's competitive organizations will be managed and inspired by teams of experts, skilled technicians, and team-appointed leaders. Projects, work efforts, and entire programs will be accomplished by a network of linked, disciplined workers skilled in their own right but connected by their commitment to their team's greater cause, goals, and/or objectives (Bennis & Biederman, 1997).

The Defense Acquisition University and many of its external corporate university partners share the belief that an effective method to enhance product development is through work teams that are focused or intent with the same strategic goals and missions of the corporate leadership. They believe that teams with a significant level of the same strategic focus on the purpose, objectives, and implementing strategies, and that are aligned with the corporate goals and missions, can be an extremely effective tool for enhancing productivity throughout the organization.

For purposes of this study, it was hypothesized that if student team members are aligned in their purpose and objectives to the course goals and learning objectives, then higher levels of student team performance and learning would result. It was further hypothesized that this learning would be more aligned with the learning objectives set forth in the course curriculum and those expressed by the instructors. The team's understanding of and commitment to the purpose, objectives, and strategies of

the course ideally would help the team satisfy its primary reason for enrolling in the course: learning and performing the course's goals and objectives.

Katzenbach and Smith (2003) have accomplished extensive work in the study of teams and their effectiveness. They admitted that no empirical data exist to prove their theories on team effectiveness. This research study provides data to support Katzenbach and Smith's study (2003) and theories on teams: teams can be more effective or perform better if they maintain a Strategic Intent or focus that is understood, and committed to, by all the team members.

## PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to use survey data from PMT 352B student work teams and instructors' surveys to examine the relationship between work team *Strategic Intent* (strategic purpose, objectives, and strategies) and *Team Performance*. The studied work teams were chosen from student work teams attending DAU's Program Management Office Course (PMT 352B). The PMT 352B courses studied were 6-week courses (now reduced to 5 weeks), which teach the concepts and skills necessary to become successful program managers. These courses simulate the conditions and stresses with which senior DoD managers are normally presented in making daily and long-term strategic program management decisions. Team Performance was assessed by surveys administered to the work teams (self-assessment performance) and to the PMT 352B instructors, who were teaching the student work teams (external, instructor assessment).

This research study acquired empirical data from student work team members attending PMT 352B classes. The strategic characteristics of specific PMT 352B student work teams were calculated from information gathered from team surveys. The students attending this technical training course on program management at DAU were generally mature (35 to 60 years of age). The teams' understanding of and commitment to their respective team's strategic management characteristics were measured by surveys administered to the teams in their location of work (the classroom) by the researcher and trained faculty members. The surveys obtained each team member's perceptions of his or her understanding of and commitment to the specific team strategic elements studied in this research—team purpose, objectives, and strategies. These strategic elements helped define the teams' strategic characteristics and were defined in the team survey, so there was an understanding of these variables by the survey respondents. This helped define the strategic elements being studied and the data the researcher was seeking.

Data were collected from each team member on their perception of how similar or linked was their level of understanding of and commitment to the other members of the team's level of understanding of and commitment to the team's purpose, objectives, and strategies. Team similarity was measured both in terms of understanding and commitment to these strategic elements.

The research calculated team data on similarity of team strategic characteristics as measured by understanding and commitment to team purpose, objectives, and

strategies. This research analyzed the relationship or correlation of a team's strategic characteristics (similar understanding of and commitment to team purpose, objectives, and strategies) to the Team's Performance—measured by the team's self-assessment of its performance and by an external assessment by the team's instructor(s).

The larger the correlation (or  $r$  value) is, the stronger the relationship. Any correlation above .3 was considered significant and relevant. The study then analyzed the relationship or similarity between a team's self-assessment of its performance, and the instructors' external assessment of the same team's performance. The researcher theorized that the similarity or alignment of a team's purpose, objectives, and strategies was a strong predictor (a direct correlation) of how well the team members worked together, and effectively communicated in making critical choices vital to the successful performance of the team. Team effectiveness in making decisions and accomplishing the course objectives was theorized to be related to the congruence or alignment of each team member's individual understanding or alignment to their team's goals.

This congruence was measured in terms of the member's understanding of and commitment to the other team members' strategic elements of purpose, objectives, and strategies. How congruent or similar the members' strategic characteristics were, the more effective the team should be in accomplishing its purpose, objectives, and strategies. Accomplishing these team strategic elements would make the team perform better, both as determined by the team's own standards and by the instructors' criteria of learning the course objectives. The flow chart depicts the research model, which helped to visually portray the variables (independent and dependent), research questions, hypotheses, and relationships involved in this research study. The next two sections highlight the two key variables studied, which were Strategic Intent and Team Performance.

## STRATEGIC INTENT

The Strategic Intent of the team is defined and highlighted in the flow chart as consisting of three team strategic elements: purpose, objectives, and strategies. Strategic Intent is further defined as to how each team member was focused or had similarly aligned understanding of and commitment to the team's strategic elements (purpose, objectives, and strategies), as measured by surveying each team member. The actual measurement of Strategic Intent was then computed by measuring the overall average team scores for Strategic Intent from the individual members' scores on the team survey.

One of the basic reasons for using the term "Strategic Intent" to highlight the strategic thinking or focus of the teams in this study was to use the previous work of Hamel and Prahalad (1989) in this conceptual or research area. Strategic Intent captures the meaning and nature of the characteristics most representative of what exists in teams or other groups that highlight what they think and perceive about their future goals, vision, or purpose.

As discussed by Hamel and Prahalad (p. 64), an organization's Strategic Intent or focus is part of the "dream that energizes a company and is more sophisticated

and more positive than a simple war cry.” These two authors highlighted that Strategic Intent implies a sense of organizational direction, discovery, and destiny. They explained that Strategic Intent is more than the implied particular point of view about the long-term market or competitive position that an organization hopes to build over the coming decade or so. It is the stated and vital focus that makes an organization competitive and driven toward a vision, a future direction, or a destiny that consumes its nature and reason for being (Hamel & Prahalad, 1989).

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***Throughout corporate universities and many defense industries, the belief prevails that teams make organizations more effective.***

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This research study embraced a similar meaning and value to team Strategic Intent as developed by Hamel and Prahalad—the committed and understood strategic elements of the team that united or focused team actions and decisions as measured by the team’s commitment to and understanding of the team’s purpose, objectives, and strategies.

It was theorized that adequate controls of the decision-making processes are in place within the focused team, which facilitate it to be more effective and successful as a decision maker in focusing on the team purpose and objectives. Additionally, it was theorized that a more integrated and focused team within the overall organizational structure, would enable or leverage the organization itself to be higher performing in the long term. Properly disciplined, focused, and integrated teams are the ones that become high-performing teams, and they have been considered “the most versatile unit organizations have for meeting both performance and challenges in today’s complex world” (Katzenbach & Smith, 2003, p. xiii).

## TEAM PERFORMANCE

The concept of Team Performance and how to measure it is critically important to the successful deployment of teams in any environment (Kraft, 1996). Throughout corporate universities and many defense industries, the belief prevails that teams make organizations more effective. However, few research efforts have measured team effectiveness with empirical data. The research cited in this study focused primarily on the manufacturing teams that can be assessed using operational measures such as productivity, efficiency, delivery time, defects, and scrap (Beyerlein, 1995). Some of the challenges presented in this research study on measuring Team Performance were similar to many studies that relied upon self-reported assessments, especially when measuring Team Performance. Team Performance has been studied

extensively, and many techniques exist to measure it. However, measuring Team Performance in the classroom or even in a program office environment is a challenge without using self-reported or self-assessed performance measures or data.

The nature of the data used in this research necessitated that to obtain team characteristics on Strategic Intent, the natural source of the information would be from the team members. The team members were the most reliable source of information on what they thought about the Team Performance and how similar they perceived their beliefs to be regarding team purpose, objectives, and strategies (Strategic Intent). It would be difficult if not impossible to obtain “true” unbiased, objective data on teams’ perceptions of their strategic thinking and their performance without using self-reported data.

The effects of self-reported data have been assessed in this research. It was determined that given the nature of the self-reported team member data (aggregated at team level, collected from different sources, locations, and times), the effects of covariance or overlapping data, as highlighted by Podsakoff and Organ (1986), were minimized in this research.

Obviously, the problems of measuring Team Performance are very complex and difficult to pinpoint. The existing performance measurement systems in place in an organization are usually not aligned with new initiatives or changes, such as team development, occurring in today’s workplace. In most of these cases, the measurement systems do not adequately reflect the impact on efficiency and effectiveness of the latest initiatives (Beyerlein, 1995). Because of these many difficulties with the lack of an integrated performance measurement system and the complexities of how teams affect organizations, it is difficult, if not impossible, to effectively measure the value of teams with existing databases or performance management systems. Therefore, self-assessment is recognized as one of the more effective ways to measure Team Performance. The other was from the instructors’ assessment of team performance.

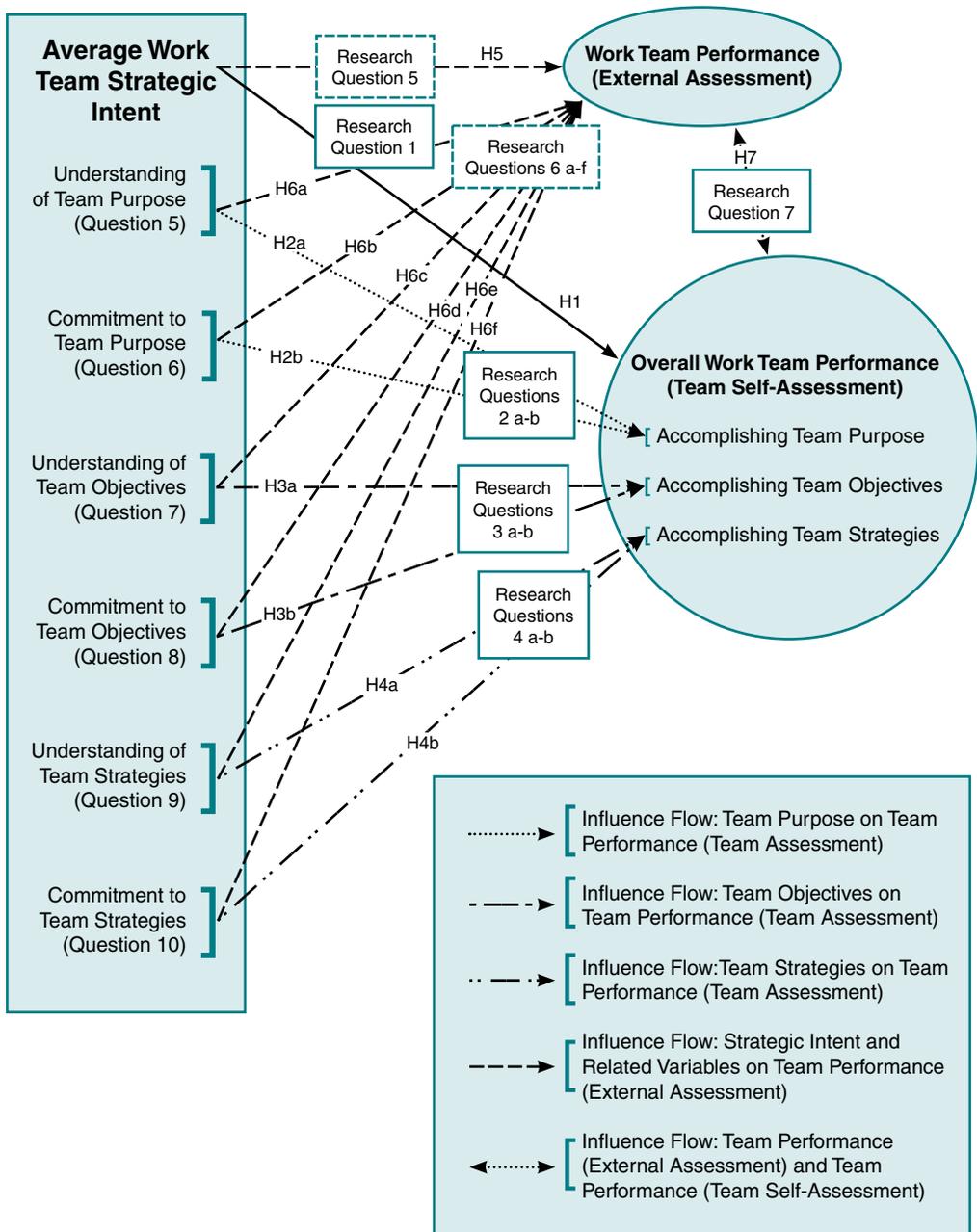
## OVERALL RESEARCH SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

The table shown here highlights the relative strength of each of the correlation or relationship tests that was conducted in the study. The italicized entries below identify the original 15 Research Question hypotheses, which were all supported at the 95 percent confidence level, which is considered high in a correlation study. All but the last entry (Question 9 to Instructor Performance) were supported at a 99 percent confidence level (a very low chance of error). All the tests were supported at the 95 percent confidence level.

For this article, the following strength of the relationship or support was used: correlations greater than .7 are considered a strong relationship; from .5 to .699 is considered a moderate relationship; and from .3 to .499 is considered a modest relationship/support. All the relationships in the study were supported at the modest level (.3).

The first entry in the Table highlights the strength of the relationship between overall Team Strategic Intent and Team Performance at .731 (a strong relationship), which underscores the influence that strategic thinking or developing clear and un-

**FIGURE 1.** DETAILED RESEARCH MODEL WITH HYPOTHESES: WORK TEAM STRATEGIC INTENT AND PERFORMANCE



derstandable strategic elements in a team affects how the team will assess its performance. This is a vital source of information to educators, team and business leaders, and team sponsors/stakeholders. This highlights that a team with a clear set of strategic characteristics of team purpose, objectives, and strategies will more probably develop a strong sense of being a high-performing team. Believing this will empower the team

**TABLE 1.** TABLE OF RELATIVE STRENGTH OF TESTED VARIABLES

Item	Variables	Pearson's r	p-value	Results
1	Overall Strategic Intent TO Overall Team Performance	.731	.000**	Strongly Supported Hypothesis 1
2	Commitment to Objectives (Question 8) TO Accomplishing Team Objectives (Question 12)	.658	.000**	<b>Moderately Supported</b> Hypothesis 3b
3	Understanding of Objectives (Question 7) TO Accomplishing Team Objectives (Question 12)	.643	.000**	Moderately Supported Hypothesis 3a
4	Commitment to Strategies (Question 10) TO Accomplishing Team Strategies (Question 13)	.640	.000**	Moderately Supported Hypothesis 4b
5	Instructor Performance TO Overall Team Performance	.630	.000**	<b>Moderately Supported</b> Hypothesis 7
6	Understanding of Strategies (Question 9) TO Accomplishing Team Strategies (Question 13)	.625	.000**	Moderately Supported Hypothesis 4a
7	TO Accomplishing Team Purpose (Question 11)	.594	.000**	Moderately Supported Hypothesis 2b
8	Understanding of Purpose (Question 5) TO Accomplishing Team Purpose (Question 11)	.513	.000**	Moderately Supported Hypothesis 2a
9	Commitment to Strategies (Question 10) TO Instructor Performance	.486	.000**	<b>Modestly Supported</b> Hypothesis 6f
10	Understanding of Objectives (Question 7) TO Instructor Performance	.466	.000**	Modestly Supported Hypothesis 6c
11	Overall Strategic Intent TO Instructor Performance	.463	.000**	Modestly Supported Hypothesis 5
12	Commitment to Objective (Question 8) TO Instructor Performance	.405	.002**	Modestly Supported Hypothesis 6d
13	Commitment to Purpose (Question 6) TO Instructor Performance	.352	.007**	Modestly Supported Hypothesis 6b
14	Understanding of Purpose (Question 5) TO Instructor Performance	.349	.008**	Modestly Supported Hypothesis 6a
15	Understanding of Strategies (Question 9) TO Instructor Performance	.330	.012*	Modestly Supported Hypothesis 6e

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed test).

\*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed test).

to greater team results and even more focused performance. This should also produce better results for the organizations that sponsor them. The leader of this team also needs to know that a focused, intent team will believe it will perform well.

The strength of the relationship between Strategic Intent (SI) and Team Performance at .731 (a strong relationship) is compared to the same relationship between Strategic Intent and Instructor-Assessed Performance at .463 (modest relationship/correlation). This indicates that team strategic thinking has a greater relationship to or effect upon Team-Assessed Team Performance than its effect on Instructor-Assessed Team Performance. The strength of team Strategic Intent on the instructors' assessment is significant nonetheless and indicates that team strategic thinking not only affects Team Performance, but also how the team's instructors assessed the team's performance.

Additional correlation tests highlight that when the individual Strategic Intent questions (5–10) are compared to the overall Team-Assessed Team Performance, significant relationships occur. In fact, the results of these tests are similar in strength to the results obtained on the tests between the Strategic Intent questions to their related individual Team-Assessed Team Performance questions (11–13).

In summary, all but one of the tests was significant at .05 level of significance or .95 confidence level. The tests highlighted that in general, strategic intent of the teams was positively correlated or related to both team-assessed team performance and instructor-assessed performance.

## ADDITIONAL FINDINGS ON DEMOGRAPHICS DATA

Additional tests were conducted on the measured demographic information and its relationship to overall team Strategic Intent, Team-Assessed Team Performance, and Instructor-Assessed Team Performance. Twelve tests were conducted and only 3 tests were supported at the 95 percent confidence level. Two supported tests related Team Educational Level to Team-Assessed Team Performance and to Instructor-Assessed Team Performance. Other correlation tests indicated a positive relationship between Team Educational Level and overall Team-Assessed Team Performance and Instructor-Assessed Team Performance at a 95 percent confidence level. Educational level can make a difference in Team Performance, both as assessed by the team itself and by the instructors. Although not significant at .05, there is also a positive effect or correlation on overall Team Strategic Intent by team Educational Level. Although not statistically significant, there does appear to be some indication that using teams is an effective learning technique in education, and business leaders employing teams in their organizations who want to enhance strategic implementation of corporate strategic goals and initiatives should be aware that teams with higher educational levels tend to have higher Team Strategic Intent (*correlation of .239*), higher overall Team-Assessed Team Performance (*correlation of .296*), and higher Instructor-Assessed Team Performance (*correlation/modest of .441*). Educational Level has a positive effect/correlation on these three research variables. Education has a rather significant effect on Instructor-Assessed Team Performance (*correlation of .441*).

Team age and years of experience have a negative effect on Team Strategic Intent, on overall Team-Assessed Team Performance, and on Instructor-Assessed Team Performance. The strength of the relationships is low, and the significance levels are high. No relationship was supported at the .05 significance level. Although not supported statistically at .05 significance level, this was of interest to the researcher. Age and experience have negative relationships to all the research variables: Strategic Intent, Team-Assessed Team Performance, and Instructor-Assessed Team Performance.

There is a moderately strong relationship between Team Experience and Team Age (*correlation of .643*). This is logical and passed the common sense test. The results do not affect this research but highlight the strength of the survey data to develop conclusions regarding the survey sample.

## CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions in this research follow:

1. A statistically significant relationship exists between the overall team Strategic Intent and overall Team-Assessed Team Performance. Teams that have high overall team Strategic Intent (team purpose, objectives, and strategies) also have high overall Team-Assessed Team Performance.
2. A statistically significant relationship exists between the individual team Strategic Intent questions (5–10) and overall Team-Assessed Team Performance. Teams that have high results on individual team Strategic Intent questions (5–10) also have high results on overall Team-Assessed Team Performance. More focused teams perform better.
3. A statistically significant relationship exists between the individual team Strategic Intent questions (5–10) and individual Team-Assessed Team Performance questions (11–13). Teams that have high results on individual team Strategic Intent questions (5–10) also have high results on individual Team-Assessed Team Performance questions (11–13).
4. A statistically significant relationship exists between the overall team Strategic Intent and overall Instructor-Assessed Team Performance (Question 4). Teams that have high overall team Strategic Intent (team purpose, objectives, and strategies) also have high Instructor-Assessed Team Performance (Question 4).
5. A statistically significant relationship exists between the individual team Strategic Intent questions (5–10) and individual Instructor-Assessed Team Performance (Question 4). Teams that possessed high scores on each individual's Questions 5–10 dealing with team Strategic Intent also had high Instructor-Assessed Team Performance.
6. A statistically significant relationship exists between the overall Team-Assessed Team Performance (Questions 11–13) and overall Instructor-Assessed Team Performance (Question 4). Teams that have high overall Team-Assessed Team Performance (Questions 11–13) also have high Instructor-Assessed Team Performance (Question 4).

7. A statistically significant relationship exists between the overall Team-Educational Level and overall Instructor-Assessed Team Performance (Question 4). Teams that have high overall Team Educational Level also have high Instructor-Assessed Team Performance (Question 4). There is some indication (supported at .05 significance level) that there is also a relationship between the overall Team Educational Level and *both* overall Team-Assessed Team Performance (Questions 11–13) (supported at .05 significance level) and overall Strategic Intent (Questions 5–10) (not supported at .05 significance level). The more educated the team, the higher the team performance.
8. There is some indication (not supported at .05 significance level) that an indirect or negative relationship also exists between the overall Team Average Age and all of the following: (a) overall team Strategic Intent (Questions 5–10), (b) overall Team-Assessed Team Performance (Questions 11–13), and (c) overall Instructor-Assessed Team Performance (Question 4). The older the team, the lower the team performance.
9. There is some indication (not supported at .05 significance level) that an indirect or negative relationship also exists between the overall Team Average Years Experience and *all* the following: (a) overall team Strategic Intent (Questions 5–10), (b) overall Team-Assessed Team Performance (Questions 11–13), and (c) overall Instructor-Assessed Team Performance (Question 4). The strengths of these relationships and significance levels do not allow for statistical significance of these relationships. The interesting aspect of these studies highlights that with more data and research, age and experience may have statistically significant negative effects on the research variables of overall team Strategic Intent, Team-Assessed Team Performance, and Instructor-Assessed Team Performance.

## CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Teams can be a significant resource to business leaders and lead to greater program successes. Using teams can be one of the most potent tools for program managers—readily available to all. Little empirical data exist on what strategic characteristics make teams more effective. Does a work team's success depend on how strategically focused or intent the team is? Do team-developed purpose, objectives, and strategies (strategic intent) have an effect on how well teams perform? This research study hypothesized and proved that work team strategic intent characteristics (team-developed purpose, objectives, and strategies) were directly or positively related to the performance of student work teams.

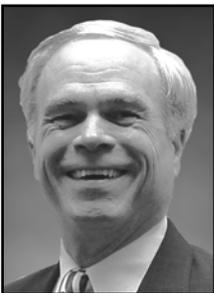
Significant positive correlation relationships were found in all 15 studied hypotheses between work team strategic intent and team performance, as measured by team self-assessments and instructor assessments. Additionally, a positive correlation was found between the team self-assessment of performance and the instructors' assessment of the team performance.

The research provided significant empirical data on the positive correlation relationships between work team strategic intent and work team performance. It

also defined the characteristics that were used to determine the strategic intent of a work team or any work unit. It created empirical support for Katzenbach and Smith's theories from their studies in *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization* (2003) on the success of real teams, based on being committed to a common purpose and performance goals. Additionally, it created a survey to measure the strategic intent of team members and teams in general. Finally, it introduced the study of strategic thinking or use of strategic intent as a method or process for evaluating team performance.

The complexity of team performance and the large number of future potential influences and additional areas of research needed on teams were highlighted in the research. This may help explain why so many organizations using teams in both the public and private sector today are having difficulty as they try to reposition themselves in an ever more turbulent environment, and why teams are often not as effective or successful as possible.

Properly disciplined, focused, and integrated teams are the ones that become high performing teams, and are considered "the most versatile unit organizations have for meeting both performance and challenges in today's complex world" (Katzenbach & Smith, 2003, p. xiii). This study has identified that Strategic Intent or clearly focused team purpose, objectives, and strategies can make teams more high performing and even more versatile and effective in an organization—both in the short- and long-term.



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