



HOT TOPIC

# DISCOVER HIGHER PERFORMANCE



High-performance organizations push the limits of growth and quickly adapt to change. They easily attract talent and know how to unite their workforce to outperform the competition. What sets such high performers apart from the rest of the pack? In this paper, we will discuss three sets of drivers that differentiate high performing work groups and the characteristics that are prevalent in their leaders.



## INTRO

We all know high performing organizations – Apple, Toyota, Procter & Gamble and Southwest Airlines – are just a few that are recognized for their innovation and superb leadership. These companies turn their strategic objectives into actions that make an impact in the marketplace and often become the new standard for success.

The hallmark of any high performing organization is making things happen better, faster (and often times cheaper) than the competition. Achieving this requires such top performers to effectively align a number of key drivers that lead to high organizational effectiveness.

In our work with many of today's top companies, we have observed many factors that propel employee work groups to a higher level of performance. These factors can be categorized into three sets of drivers that give form to a model of high performance. The purpose of this paper is to identify those drivers and discuss the characteristics of effective leadership that make it one of the most important factors in generating outstanding business results.



Identifying high performers is challenging for companies. We asked participants in a recent poll to evaluate how well their organization identified high performing supervisors/leaders. While 41% of respondents believe their companies are doing a “good” or “very good” job, the remaining respondents rated their organizations’ ability to identify high performers as “fair, poor or very poor.”

## DEFINITION OF HIGH PERFORMANCE

What constitutes “high performance” can differ by company and industry and be measured by various metrics such as revenue and profit margins, work productivity as well as other measures such as customer satisfaction scores, employee engagement levels and even something as unique as the number of patent applications.

Generally speaking, a high performance organization is one that is intentionally designed to bring out the best in people, thereby producing organizational capabilities that deliver sustainable business results. These results are a combination of:

- Superior products or services of value to customers
- The ability to rapidly adapt to changes in the business environment
- A high quality work life for employees

Of course, high performance at a \$50 million private company would be defined much differently than at a \$50 billion global conglomerate. When establishing a definition, the key is to identify business outcome metrics that are appropriate for your organization’s size, industry and target markets.

## THREE DRIVERS OF HIGH PERFORMANCE

Many might think there is one definitive set of organizational attributes that is the winning recipe for high performance or possibly that a unique set of drivers exists for each industry. Instead, our observations indicate the characteristics of high performance generally fall into three sets of drivers:

1. Organization's unique characteristics
2. A set of common attributes that exist among most high performing organizations
3. Effective leadership

While these organizational constructs were consistently present within high performing groups, the strength of the drivers comprising the three sets differed between and within companies. Among the three sets of drivers, effective leadership was consistently the most powerful group.



HIGH PERFORMANCE WORK GROUP

**ORGANIZATION'S UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS**

**COMMON INVOLVEMENT ATTRIBUTES ARE:**

- Openness
- Innovation
- Employee Value
- Employee Empowerment
- Identification with Group Product
- Group Rewards
- Accountability

**EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP**



## Organization's Unique Characteristics

These are distinct characteristics of a company that help it effectively execute its business strategy. Each organization will have its own set of characteristics – based upon the work culture – that encourage employees to achieve a higher level of performance. These attributes can include things like the physical work environment, fringe benefits or training opportunities. Because these qualities are highly individualized, an organization must conduct a self analysis to identify the aspects of its culture that motivate employees to do their best work.



## Common Attributes

A number of drivers frequently appear among top organizations and are considered common characteristics of high performance. Work groups in the highest performing companies are often driven to outperform because of these attributes. Subsets do exist; however, seven attributes can be clearly identified:

- **Openness** - Employees feel they can speak up without fear of retribution
- **Innovation** - Individuals are encouraged to contribute new ideas to improve their individual performance and/or the performance of their work groups
- **Employee Value** - Employees believe the organization values their experience and training
- **Employee Empowerment** - Individuals are empowered to make decisions
- **Identification with Group Product** – Employees have a strong affinity to the “products” of their groups
- **Sharing in Group Rewards** – Employees share in the financial rewards of the group or company
- **Accountability** – Employees understand the value of identifying problems and learning from them

While not every attribute may be present within an organization, these seven are the ones most commonly identified as the drivers of a higher level of performance.



## Effective Leadership

Clearly the most powerful set of drivers, effective leadership is found in almost all high performing groups and organizations. Undoubtedly, it is extremely difficult to create an environment of high performance without the presence of superior leaders.

Strong leaders generally exhibit the following behaviors within their groups:

- Active involvement with their groups
- Supportive and respectful of all team members
- Ability to effectively allocate resources
- Empowering employees to make their own decisions
- Good facilitation and communication skills

Leaders set company values that shape its identity and their behaviors reveal to what extent those values will or will not drive employee actions. The role of leaders is not only to establish a strategy, but also to shape the culture of the organization to successfully execute that strategy.

# THE TRAITS OF HIGH PERFORMANCE

## Six Traits of Effective Leaders

While there is no silver bullet for creating a high performance organization, an examination of top-performing companies clearly points to the importance of effective leadership in generating outstanding business results. Great leaders know what behaviors are required to create and sustain an environment of high performance and continuously monitor external forces to determine when changes are required to adapt to them.

According to IPAT, a leader in the development and distribution of assessment tools and interpretive reports on personality and behavior, effective leaders share six common traits:



### Strong problem solving skills

Effective leaders can solve complex problems quickly. They have the ability to identify common themes across multiple issues and develop solutions to problems that can have a quick impact.



### Ability to influence

Effective leaders can influence behaviors and direct actions to obtain a desired outcome. In this dynamic, exercising control over processes in an area of purview is important, but influencing others and trusting them to follow through is equally so. An essential aspect of this trait is the ability to be assertive and exercise authority in a manner that is not demeaning to others.



### Emotional resilience

Having the fortitude to withstand the stress and pressures that result from change, effective leaders achieve results and overcome resistance. They are optimistic, perseverant and exhibit a level of confidence in themselves and in others.



### Extraverted

Effective leaders demonstrate a strong desire to connect with other people. They accomplish a mission through the voluntary contributions of others and need strong relationship-building skills; however, individuals must also be able to stand on their own in difficult circumstances and not be overly dependent on the approval of others.



### Practicality

Exhibiting good balance between being practical and visionary, tough and compassionate, and factual and intuitive, effective leaders know which style to apply in difficult business situations.



### Self control

Effective leaders balance the desire for rapid change in addressing business challenges with the need for organization and accuracy before taking action. In their relationships, individuals are conscientious and behave in a consistent manner to establish respect and trust.



## THE IMPACT OF INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP

How does effective leadership drive employee behavior? The one defining characteristic is inspiration or the ability to create an environment where employees have productive energy and are enthusiastic about their work. To accomplish this, leaders must help employees better understand their roles and responsibilities and how they factor into the company's strategy for success. They must also generate a sense of commitment to the company and its customers by encouraging employees to have a personal interest in helping the organization reach its goals.

Inspirational leaders foster a passion for the business that encourages employees to give their best, which at the same time creates a more fulfilling work environment. This inspires loyalty and creates advocates who are willing to go the extra mile to do the right thing over the easy thing.

Inspiration is the one leadership characteristic that can create a higher level of performance in employees.

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