

# The Dynamics of the Factors That Affect High Performing Teams

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## Abstract

The study is focused on reviewing some of the key factors and attributes that support high performing teams, with a view to determining if they could be ranked altogether in order of importance. This called for a survey of project team members from diversity to attempt to rank the attributes and by so doing form a basis of the study conclusion. The survey used a set of questionnaires (administered to 107 respondents) that is compatible with qualitative research. This was direct to rank the attributes from the perspectives of positive and negative impacts of the attributes to high performing project teams. It was also extended to know to which of collocated or virtual teams the factors will weigh more. While Trust stands out as the most important of the attributes, other attributes did not show a consistent ranking. Thus, it is concluded that the attributes do not have structured ranking, and therefore could have different levels of importance in different places. Nevertheless, it was pointed out that virtual project teams could not have the benefits of the attributes as in a collocated project team environment.

## Keywords

Accountability, Commitment, High Performing Teams, Trust

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## 1. Introduction

The search for a high performing team has been the delight of managers and coaches as the desire to always be at the top of performance measure. This has necessitated theoretical frameworks and research into the complex nature of employees (Hassell, 2022) within the dynamics of ever-changing business environment and demands. Several theories and models have been created to identify the factors that can promote high performance (Wong, 2010) from employees as well as those that can hinder a high performing team. In his book “Human

Factors in Project Management” Zachary Wong listed Maslow’s motivational theory, McClelland’s Achievement theory, Vroom’s Expectancy theory, J. Stacy Adam’s theory, etc. that are to be discussed here in addition to some of the other key models and theories, all of which we are concerned with team effectiveness or performance. These words team performance can also be interchanged for team effectiveness towards accomplishing common goals or objectives. The basic assumptions here include the fact that a team as it is used here is not just a group of workers. The context is for a team that is focused on accomplishing a clearly defined goal, a team that is cohesive, and has team norms.

The team characteristics are beyond the basic motivational theories, but into the individual and collective attributes and behavior. It is believed that one of the several models may be appropriate to a particular team’s needs (Team Asana, 2023) and in particular to fine-tune some of the component attributes to boost the performance of a team or to sustain an already high performing team.

A study of some models for team effectiveness seems to suggest that the attributes are ordered or ranked in order of importance. While some may appear more important than others, it is doubtful that there is an ordered sequence of their effectiveness or impact to the team. Accordingly, this paper purposes to find out with an example if there is a sequence of the effectiveness of the attributes on the teams or not. Therefore, the aim is to clear the doubt as to the idea that the factors influencing high performing teams have a structured hierarchy of importance.

**Question:**

Is there a rule that ranks the factors influencing high performing teams?

Assumptions: The 3 models reviewed are assumed to be representative of other models.

## 2. Literature Review

Major models that are globally acknowledged include The Lencioni model, The T7 model, Tuckman’s team development model, and Katzenbach and Smith model (Team Asana, 2023). These models are adopted by leaders to enhance team effectiveness,

The Lencioni model uniquely features as one of the most popular models, having a fixed structure that is laid out in a pyramid in order of their impact. In reverse order the factors are considered to be the undoing of high performing teams when they are lacking or absent in the team. Thus, when they are present the team will be highly effective. At the base of the pyramid is Trust. This signifies that trust is the number one necessity for a team to be effective. This simply put, means that when there is trust among team members and the leader, there is cohesion and sincere support for one another to achieve a common objective. From the concept of dysfunction, it means that the absence of trust in a team is a recipe for ineffectiveness.

The second layer after trust is “mastering conflicts” or having the skill to navigate conflicts. It does not imply avoidance of conflict, but the ability to take

advantage of conflicts to recharge the team while creating that atmosphere of trust that will not breed personal conflict. On the other hand, personal conflicts hinder optimal collaboration, and understanding, and consequently negatively affect performance.

The third layer is “commitment”. If the team members are committed to the team objectives there will be high effectiveness because everyone is united towards the successful outcome of their objective. In the contrary, lack of commitment will render a team ineffective, no matter the individual skills.

The fourth layer represents “accountability”. When the team and the members imbibe accountability, it promotes mutual respect that elicits the best from them. In the contrary the absence of accountability will detract from efficiency.

Finally, the fifth layer represents Focus on the result. It is key that when the team focuses on the result, they will channel all their effort to it efficiently, unlike when the result is not in view, and progress may not be tracked or assessed.

The Tuckman’s Model depicts the stages of development for team members to go through before they reach their full potential in performance. It is noted that when individuals meet for the first time they have a forming stage, where the members rely on the leader to assign roles, show them the way and guide proceedings. As they get to see each other’s working approach they move into the storming stage. Here they want to exert some power or influence over each other. As they get to focus on their assigned roles and realize the interdependence of the roles and activities it is noted they are in forming stage. It is at this point that they realize the need to achieve, and to collaborate with each other for the synergy that brings high performance. Thus, they move to the performing stage which the leader desires. Accordingly, the leader has the responsibility to apply the necessary skills to navigate the team to the performing stage, and to higher performance level.

The T7 model was created by Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger in 1995. The Ts are as follows.

Thrust, as a focus for the team, has a clear and compelling goal. It is considered a major driver for a high performing team.

Trust here means having the team members rely sincerely on each other with respect to ability and commitment. They know each other’s strength and weakness, and they are comfortable with them.

Talent: possessing the necessary talent to do the job well. It is essential that the employee engaged to carry out the project should possess the necessary talent that makes them fit into the job in the first place.

Teaming skills: to have the ability to operate as a team. The team is not just a group of people. They must have a common purpose and a clear goal.

Tasking skills: this implies that they have the ability to carry out the associated tasks for the job.

Other factors are described as external include.

Team leaders fit the team. A stronger professional relationship with the team

will elicit followership and high level of performance. There is unity of purpose among the team members and the leader to succeed.

The organizational support for the Team (Team Support) implies that there should be management support and enabling the environment to reach its potential.

GRIP Model: Another simple model that tries to lay out a framework for team effectiveness is referred to as the GRIP Model was developed by Richard Beckhard in 1972 (Last, n.d.). The framework is built on 4 components, Goals, Roles, Interpersonal and Processes. The components are considered interdependent and should be leveraged to achieve high level performance in teamwork. They are explained as follows.

1) The “Goals” for which the team is brought together to achieve must be clearly understood and prioritized by the team and individual members above personal goals. The individual goals must be in synch with the main goal to elicit full commitment and trust to ensure optimal performance.

2) The “Roles” must be clearly understood by the individual team members in order to elicit conviction, alignment, and accountability. It ensures that the team members focus on the goals at all times.

3) The “Interpersonal” component includes trustworthy interrelationship among team members that is translated through highly effective communications and all the acts that bring about collaboration in excellence.

4) The “Processes” component of this framework is about the establishment of team norms, procedures, rules, decision making, and the set of steps polices and guide that are consistent with effective team cohesion for better work outcome. The subcomponents of the process should be guided to stay relevant at all times otherwise they may slow down the pace of performance.

Though the 4 components GRIP seem clearly identifiable, they nevertheless are integrated, and the framework has not suggested the superiority of one component over the other.

### 3. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs was originally devoted to motivation (Gerven, 2016) and like many other motivational theories has been realigned towards team effectiveness studies. According to Matthew Channell (2023) the theory which is set up with 5 elements may equally be put into 3 categories, 1 and 2 as Physiological, 3 and 4 as Psychological and 5 as Self-actualization.

The original 5 components of the hierarchy include:

1) Physiological needs include basic needs in life to survive, such as food, water, sleep shelter, etc. These are basic necessities for any human to exist. It is when these needs are fulfilled before human beings will become conscious of their safety needs.

2) Safety needs include the preservation of their lives, protection in the environment where they are, protection at work, protection that implies peace, financial ability to meet the basic needs and a level of certainty for the next day

and after. It is after this is met that the drive for a relatively high level of need comes up.

3) Belongingness needs which is a level of social needs to be accepted to belong in a community, to associate with others, to be identified with others. This is also referred to as love needs. The individual wants to be affiliated, appreciated by others, and be seen as part of them, interact socially with others, accepted, and recognized as a team member.

4) Esteem needs follows belongingness needs. The individual wants to have self-worth based on competency, recognized in the community, recognized at work for competency even as the individuals feel satisfied in their contributions. The sense of fulfillment grows to the level of self-actualization.

5) Self-actualization needs is the component that the individuals derive satisfaction of attaining full potentials in all that they aspire and do. They reach the peak of their learning curve where their skills become automatic (Andreev, 2023) in application. They want to look at their achievements and expect others to recognize those achievements and be respected or even honored for the success.

This theory though theoretically set up a hierarchy with logical relationship, has been paired with Lencioni Model (Gerven, 2016), it is developed on seemingly undisputable logical steps. The essence of the theory is that it recognizes that different people may be trapped in any of the component states of needs that may have to be addressed by the leader to free them of the needs. Accordingly, to get the best out of a team the leader should be able to identify their needs and not just assume that only one level of motivation is adequate for a team or the employees of an organization.

#### 4. McClelland's Human Motivation Theory

McClelland theory of motivation is linked with Maslow's theory of needs (Mind Tools Content Team, n.d.) in that he identified 3 dominant needs, one of which is present in every human. The characteristics include the need for achievement, the need for affiliation, and the need for power. Accordingly, it is important to identify these personalities in the team so that assignment of roles and motivation for the members will align to it. By so doing the employees will be enthusiastic about facing their responsibilities.

1) Those that have achievement need personality to take delight in setting goals and pushing to accomplish the goals. They delight in frequent feedback as they progress in their work, and often desire to work alone.

2) Those that have needs for affiliation often follow the flow as they derive enjoy collaboration and teamwork. They thrive in group membership and have a desire to be seen and liked by others.

3) Those that are driven by power enjoy influencing or being followed by others, accorded recognition, and be cheered on every little accomplishment. They want to be the decision makers for groups. A leader should understand these fundamentals to be able to align employees or team members to optimize productivity or team performance.

## 5. Equity Theory of Motivation

Equity theory of motivation was introduced by John Stacey Adams in 1963 as he delved into fairness in reward to elicit equity in performance. According to the theory, as explained by [Mind Tools Content Team \(n.d.\)](#), every employee desires to be fairly treated as others in referent groups. Thus, if an employee aspires to be rewarded, that employees step up performance to obtain that reward conversely if an employee sees that others who perform the same activity at the same level, the employee will tend to lower performance to align with the lower level he or she is perceive. Thus, [World of Work Project \(2019\)](#) ascribes the idea as employee perception. Accordingly, this theory is an opener to leaders to ensure equity in rewarding team members who perform at the same level if they expect uniform level of performance. To motivate a high performing team therefore, the leader should equate whatever expectation for performance with the responsibility that they put on the employees. As within the teams, or within an organization, if the leader wants to achieve the performance level of the team in comparison with another organization or another team, they should ensure that their team is equally rewarded to match those other organizations or teams. The theory could introduce competition to excel, which consequently will support higher team performance.

## 6. Expectancy Theory

Vroom's Expectancy theory is another motivational theory that wraps up the effort put to work, the performance level as a result, and what the individual expects to get. It looks simplistic on the surface but complex to explain because of other accompaniments around effort, and appropriateness of rewards. The employees (including teams) will be motivated to exert more effort to greater performance when they have higher expectations in terms of the reward that will be received. Mathematically, it suggests that the higher the expectations, the more effort the employee will be willing to put, and the more the effort the higher is the performance or productivity ([Nguyen, 2023](#); [TABE Team, 2017](#)). Like Maslow's motivational theory, expectancy theory recognizes that individual expectation or needs may vary, thus, leaders must be able to understand individual perspectives to be able to work out a mix of teams' expectations that will provide sufficient motivation for a team to become a high performing one. When the expectations are low the result will be that of effort withholding that will cause performance to suffer.

## 7. Other Models

Other models **include** The Katzenbach and Smith model, The Google Model etc. There is one commonality in all the models. They all are prescriptive for attaining and maintaining high performing teams. However, the Lincon model went a step further to prioritize the factors as given, indicating their order of importance. While not denying the goodness of prioritization, it does appear that the

priority may not stand in all cases, and perhaps in some fields.

## 8. Hypothesis

Ho: There is no hierarchy of ranked importance for the factors that influence high performing teams.

Ha: There is a hierarchy of ranked importance for the factors that influence high performing teams.

## 9. Methodology

The study is based on primary research method, with a combined qualitative and quantitative data analysis. The study also adapted survey method that supports primary research by creating and administering questionnaires. It is set specifically to target, project team members both in Construction, Information Technology and Business projects within Ontario, Canada. The emphasis on projects is due to the fact that projects are unique, and the teams do understand their goals from the first day of their assignment, thus, should have clear goals. The sample population targeted over a hundred respondents (ending up with 107 respondents), ensuring diversity of participants from gender and nationalities. Effort was made to ensure that participants are drawn randomly from over 50 teams within Ontario, Canada. The survey method used questionnaires that asked the respondents to rank a set of factors that are generally agreed to impact high performing teams. These factors or attributes are drawn from the Lencioni Model of team effectiveness. Respondents are asked to rank which factor they consider #1 from the list of 5 factors. It is followed in that order for factors ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> The attributes they ranked number 1 at a time, and then number 2, then after number #2, #3, #4 and #5, with all the 5 factors available each time.

## 10. Data Analysis

The analysis is based on respondents' ranking with the highest percentage when each factor is brought up from the Lencioni model list. The list is as follows, A, B, C, D and E, representing, trust, conflicts, commitment, accountability, and attention to result respectively. The analysis looked at the impact of the factors from two perspectives, the first, where the factors are absent, and followed by when they are available.

**Figure 1** shows the #1 ranked negative factors on project team.

The analysis from **Figure 2** indicates that absence of trust has 36.4% responses, with lack of commitment trailing at 29%. It does hold the number 1 position and it is surprising to see that absence of trust does not cover 50% of the entire despondences.

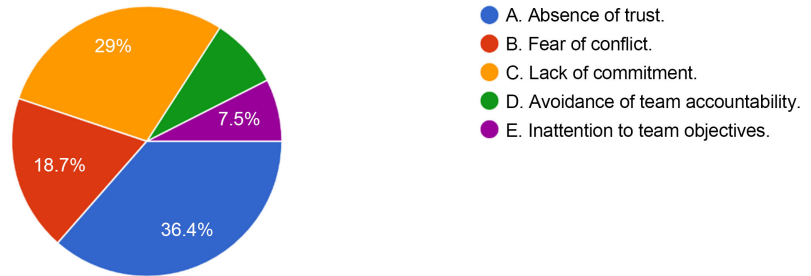
**Figure 2** shows the #2 ranked negative factors on project teams.

The analysis shows that lack of commitment is #2, with 38.3% responses affirming it. In this chart fear of conflict took a distant #5 (the least on the factors) with only 10.3%.

**Figure 3** shows the negative factor that is ranked #3. In project teams, the analysis shows the fear of conflict is ranked #3 with 26.2% as it traded places with lack of commitment. However, avoidance of accountability also made the same 26.2%, placing third in ranking here. This situation is a pointer to the concept of data analysis complexity.

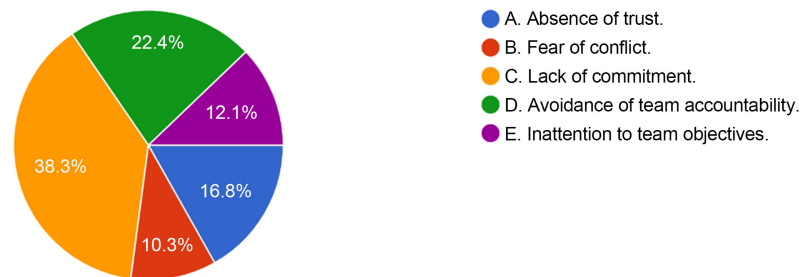
**Figure 4** shows the negative factor that is Ranked #4. In project teams, the

Which of the following negative factors affecting the team do you rank # 1?  
107 responses



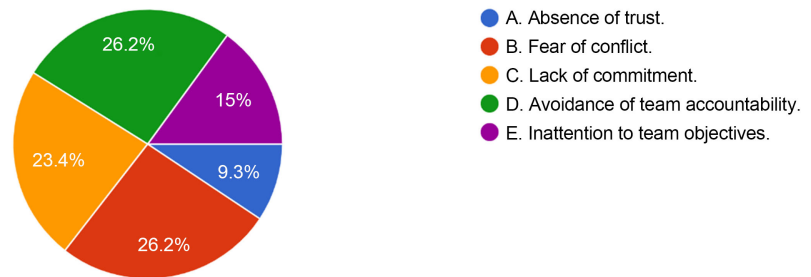
**Figure 1.** The #1 ranked factor supporting high performing teams. Note. Chart created by Joseph Chiejina, the author.

Which of the following negative factors affecting the team do you rank # 2?  
107 responses



**Figure 2.** The #2 ranked factor supporting high performing teams. Note. Chart created by Joseph Chiejina, the author.

Which of the following negative factors affecting the team do you rank # 3?  
107 responses

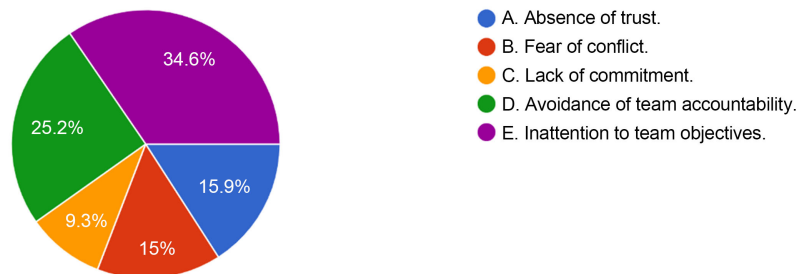


**Figure 3.** The #3 ranked factor supporting high performing teams. Note. Chart created by Joseph Chiejina, the author.



Which of the following negative factors affecting the team do you rank # 4?

107 responses



**Figure 4.** The #4 ranked factor supporting high performing teams. Note. Chart created by Joseph Chiejina, the author.

analysis of **Figure 4** shows inattention to results at #4 with 34.6% response. This again is one step away from where it is ranked #5. The avoidance of team accountability records 25.2% a significant distance from inattention to results.

**Figure 5** shows the negative factor ranked #5 that is affecting project teams.

The analysis of **Figure 5** shows that fear of conflict is 30.8% of correspondence above all, putting inattention to results 27.1%. It raises the question if self-reflection has contributed to the change from fig 4 where fear of conflict tied with avoidance of team accountability.

**Figure 6** shows the positive factor to project team ranked #1.

**Figure 6** analysis confirms that Trusting is ranked #1 with 48.6% while the other 4 factors share 53.4% of all responses. This confirms the earlier position that Trusting is the most important factor.

**Figure 7** shows the positive factor that affects project teams ranked #2.

**Figure 7** analysis shows that team commitment is ranked #2 with 35.5% of the responses, after trusting. Commitment takes one step above mastering conflict.

**Figure 8** shows the positive factors that affect project teams ranked #3.

**Figure 8** analysis shows that team accountability is ranked #3 with 25.2% of responses. This moves it one step above on the setting.

**Figure 9** shows the positive factor that affects project teams ranked #4.

**Figure 9** analysis shows that accountability again is ranked 4 with 31.8 of the responses. This number surpasses the number associated with it at #3, while attention to result with 20.6 respondents came second with managing conflict.

**Figure 10** shows the positive factor that affects project teams ranked #5.

**Figure 10** analysis shows that mastering conflict is ranked #5 with 42% responses and focus on team objectives with 25.2% not recognized to lead any category. This suggests that it is rather taken for granted that the team will focus.

**Figure 11** shows which project environment will be challenged most.

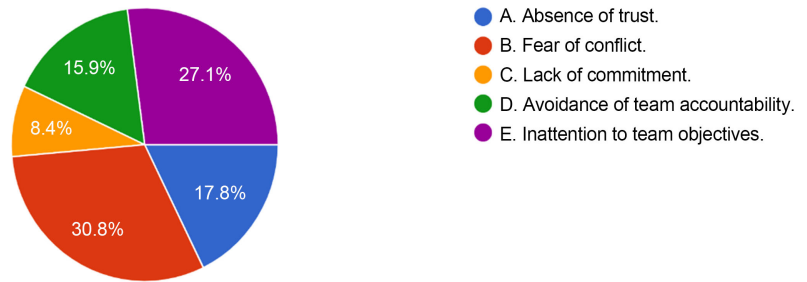
**Figure 11** analysis shows that virtual project environment will be mostly

challenged by the negative factors by 80.4% of responses as to 19.6% for co-located project environment.

**Figure 12** shows which project environment will need more of the positive factors.

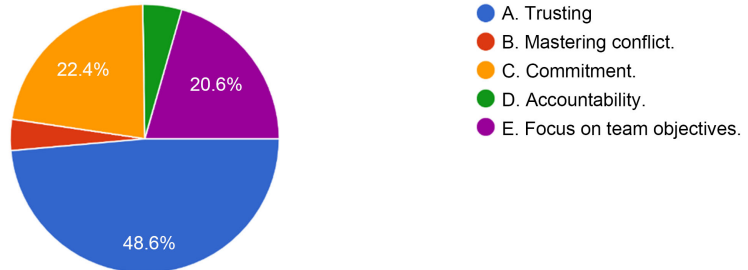
**Figure 12** analysis shows that co-located project environment will need (or rather have) 66.4% of responses, while co-located has 33.6% responses.

Which of the following negative factors affecting the team do you rank # 5?  
107 responses



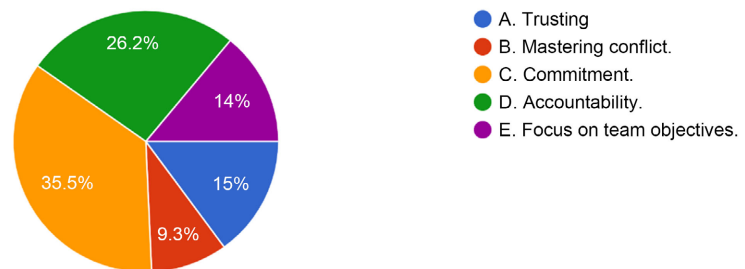
**Figure 5.** The #5 ranked factor supporting high performing teams. Note. Chart created by Joseph Chiejina, the author.

Which one of the following positive factors do you rank # 1 that strengthens a project team?  
107 responses



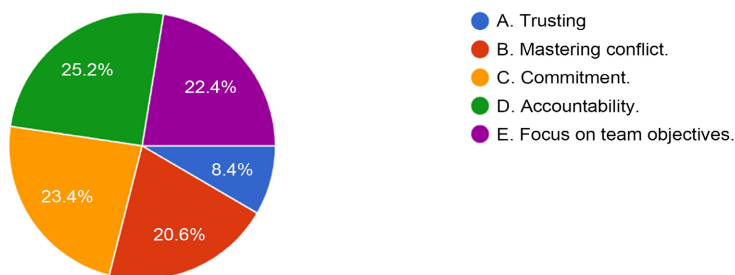
**Figure 6.** The #1 ranked positive factor supporting high performing teams. Note. Chart created by Joseph Chiejina, the author.

Which one of the following positive factors do you rank # 2 that strengthens a project team?  
107 responses



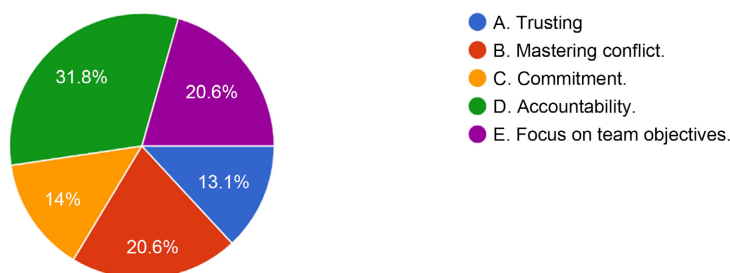
**Figure 7.** The #2 ranked positive factor supporting high performing teams. Note. Chart created by Joseph Chiejina, the author.

Which one of the following positive factors do you rank # 3 that strengthens a project team?  
107 responses



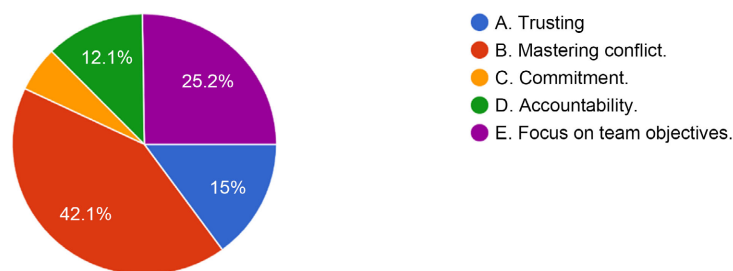
**Figure 8.** The #8 ranked positive factor supporting high performing teams. Note. Chart created by Joseph Chiejina, the author.

Which one of the following positive factors do you rank # 4 that strengthens a project team?  
107 responses



**Figure 9.** The #4 ranked positive factor supporting high performing teams. Note. Chart created by Joseph Chiejina, the author.

Which one of the following positive factors do you rank # 3 that strengthens a project team?  
107 responses

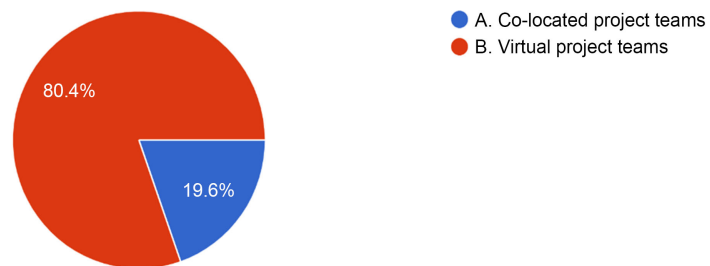


**Figure 10.** The #5 ranked positive factor supporting high performing teams. Note. Chart created by Joseph Chiejina, the author.

## 11. Discussions

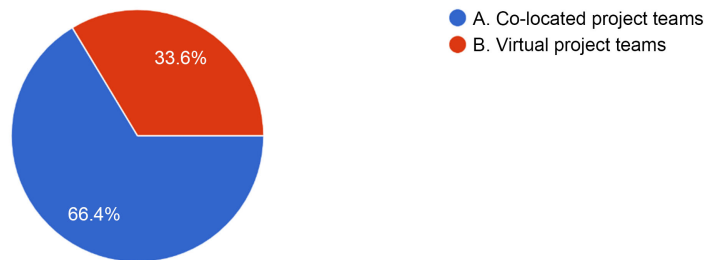
The models discussed in the literature review. Each has unique elements to add to the knowledge area of team development and effectiveness. They all make up the complexities of the dynamics of high performing team management. Every leader strives towards getting their teams better towards improving performance and sustaining it. According to [Zachary Wong \(2010\)](#), the whole effort revolves

Considering co-located (in-person) projects and virtual (remote) projects which one do you think will be challenged most more hit by the negatives?  
107 responses



**Figure 11.** The most challenging project environment by the negative factors. Note. Chart created by Joseph Chiejina, the author.

Considering co-located (in-person) projects and virtual (remote) projects which one do you think will need more of the positives?  
107 responses



**Figure 12.** The distribution of positive factors in project environments. Note. Chart created by Joseph Chiejina, the author.

around three core elements: contents, process, and behavior within the context of work and productivity of teams. While every other model is liberal as to the prioritization of the elements and drivers of the models, Lencioni Model stands out to set rigid order of importance of the drivers. It is this that necessitated the inquiry to determine the stability of the order the model sets. Looking at the dynamics here the only stable element is Trust, as other elements change positions or ranks. The findings that the model may not be stable after all, suggest that leaders should be cautious about the way they use the model, and suggest the need for further investigation into the Model.

## 12. Summary

Trust is the only factor that stands as the most important factor ranked #1 as having the most negative impact on the team when it is absent, and the most positive impact when it is available (Figure 1 and Figure 6).

Conflict that is ranked #2 in Lencioni model fell to #3 and then to #5 as the least impactful negatively on a high performing team. In the same way where it is mastered (on how to navigate it), it also makes the least impact #5 on team

performance (**Figure 3**, **Figure 5**, and **Figure 10**).

Commitment has the #2, second high negative impact level on high performing team after lack of trust, when it is lacking. On the reverse, it is the second most important to impact positively on a high performing team when the team is committed (**Figure 2** and **Figure 7**).

Avoidance of accountability showed the same weight of #3 with fear of conflict at 26.2% when is lacking, and #3 in positive impact when it is imbibed in a high performing team (**Figure 3** and **Figure 8**).

Inattention to result showed the ranking of #4 in **Figure 4** above #5 on Lencioni list, and #2 in **Figure 9** quite above #5 on Lencioni list.

### 13. Conclusion

The foregoing analysis and summary point to the complexity and dynamics of the factors. Besides trusting that appears steady as a leading positive factor when it is available and the most negative influence when it is absent, the other factors here do not align with the list in the Lencioni list.

Thus, we can accept the hypothesis that there may be no structured hierarchical ranks for the factors as they influence high performing Teams.

Following, **Figure 12** indicates that virtual team may be more challenged regarding these factors while collocated project team may be better off with the factors.

Consequently, it is recommended that Leaders should be mindful of the complexities and give attention to their specific environment and their team.

It is also important to learn lesson from this study, as the outcome calls for further studies in this area to help provide more insight into the factors that influence high performing teams

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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