Executive Teams:
An Analysis of Popular Models with a Perspective from the Field

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Abstract:

Since Hambrick and Mason's (1984) seminal piece on executive teams, the interest in such teams has given birth to a number of models explaining what they do and how to improve their effectiveness. This paper examines five popular executive team models and provides an OD practitioner's perspective on how the models have proven useful in the field, what elements they may be overemphasizing, and highlight areas in which more development may be needed.

Keywords: executive teams, effectiveness, models, decision-making

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Hambrick et al. (1996) trace theoretical interest in executive teams back to March and Simon's (1958) behavioural theory of the firm as well as Cyert and March's (1963) theory of the "dominant coalition". However, it is Hambrick himself who is widely recognised as having sparked a wave of research on executive teams in the 1980s with his seminal piece on the topic written with colleague P.A. Mason (Hambrick & Mason, 1984).

Since then, the interest in executive teams - the senior executive group sitting atop an organization which some also call the senior leadership team - has given birth to a number of models explaining what they do and how to improve their effectiveness, although these are less numerous than models for non-executive teams (see Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson [2008] for a review of these models). This may be explained by the restricted access researchers have to executive teams, particularly those in publicly-traded companies, who seldom want anyone eavesdropping on their strategic discussions. Another reason may be that senior executives are not confident their teams are run effectively and are not keen for outsiders to observe this. No matter the reasons for it, restricted access may explain why "so much idealized imagery, prescriptive folklore, and naïve attributions exist about top executives" (Finkelstein, Hambrick, & Cannella, 2009, p.41) and why closer examination of executive team models is warranted.

The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the more popular executive team models from an OD practitioner's perspective. To achieve our purpose, the first section of this paper presents an overview of these models. In the second section, we set out their similarities and differences. In the final section, we provide a practitioner's perspective on how the models have proven useful in the field, what elements they overemphasize, and highlight areas in which more development may be needed.

| 1 - MODEL OVERVIEWS

This section presents five executive team models, those of Lencioni (2002), Wageman, Nunes, Burruss, & Hackman (2008), West (2012), Nadler (1998), and Katzenbach (1998) which were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- They take a pragmatic approach to improving executive team effectiveness. This explains why we did not include models linking executive team demographics and organizational results because, as we've argued elsewhere, such models are not easily used in practice (Neatby & Rioux, 2009);
- They offer a holistic approach to executive team effectiveness rather than focusing on one particular aspect of executive team functioning, such as decision-making;
- They apply to executive teams and have gained a level of notoriety because they were developed by well-known authors.

1.1. Lencioni's Five Team Dysfunctions Model (Lencioni, 2002)

The first model we review is Patrick Lencioni's, presented in The Five Dysfunctions of a Team (Lencioni, 2002) which, despite being published in 2002, still ranks amongst Amazon's top five bestselling "Business & Investing" books. Lencioni's model is predicated on the assumption that teams fall prey to five dysfunctions. He presents these dysfunctions in pyramid form to convey their interrelation and hierarchical nature.

The first dysfunction is an absence of trust which occurs when members are incapable of opening up to each other about their mistakes and weaknesses. The second is fear of conflict because a lack of trust prevents team members from engaging in open debate. The third is lack of commitment to team decisions since these do not result from openly discussing conflicting views. As a result, there is ambiguity about the team and organization's direction or plan of action. The fourth dysfunction, avoidance of accountability, is due to a team's inability to commit to a clear action plan which makes team members hesitant to challenge peers about counterproductive behaviors. Finally, the fifth dysfunction is inattention to results. By this Lencioni means that team members put their own needs ahead of those of the organizations because they are not held accountable for anything.

Trust is at the base of the pyramid because only after steps are taken to establish trust can the next four dysfunctions be addressed. Since it "is often the case" that the team leader is responsible for the trust vacuum (Lencioni, 2005, p.15), he/she must take the first step by showing vulnerability via exercises devised by Lencioni.

1.2. The Six Conditions Model for Senior Leadership Team Effectiveness (Wageman et al., 2008)

Wageman and Hackman are eminent Harvard scholars and widely cited team theorists. They adapted their theories to executive teams in their 2008 book entitled Senior Leadership Teams co-written with Nunes and Burruss both consultants with the Hay Group.

Their model poses three "essential" conditions for effectiveness (see Table 1). One is a clear purpose that an executive team must define for itself. Another is that the team be a "real team", meaning members are interdependent and that its membership must be known and limited because "the more people at the table representing different interests or functions, the harder it can be to define a shared purpose for the team" (Wageman & Hackman, 2009, p.487) . The last essential condition is that the "right people" be at the table as determined by the compelling purpose.

***Table 1**: Wageman et al.'s (2008) Six Conditions for Senior Leadership Team Effectiveness*

The essentials	The enablers
▪ A real team	▪ A solid team structure
▪ A compelling direction	▪ A supportive organizational context
▪ The right people	▪ Competent team coaching

If the essential conditions cannot be met, Wageman et al. suggest that it is not worth forming a team at all. If they can, then one then moves to instituting three "enabling" conditions: a) a solid structure which results in a small team (no more than 10) with meaningful tasks and clear norms of conduct; b) a supportive context including the information the team needs and the 'resources and materials' necessary to achieve its goals, and c) team coaching to build group competence and capability.

It is worth noting that Wageman et al. (2008) define four non-mutually exclusive executive teams: informational, consultative, coordinating, and decision-making. The last requires the most effort to build but Wageman et al. make it clear that this is what CEOs should strive for since it is potentially the most valuable.

1.3. West Executive Team Model (2012)

Michael West is a well-known team theorist who included a chapter on executive teams in his book Effective Teamwork: Practical Lessons from Organizational Research. As with Wageman et al. (2008), a key element of West's model is a limited number of team members chosen on the basis of a clear team purpose, the assumption being that "[o]nce we are clear about the task we can then decide what skills are needed and which individuals have those skills." (West, 2012, pp.251-252).

West (2012) tells us that the elements of his model fit into a classic input-process-output structure (see table 2). The elements he describes in this chapter are taken up in the Aston Team Performance Inventory (ATPI, Aston Organization Development Ltd), a tool to identify problems in team functioning and to measure top team performance which West (2012) indicates can be used with executive teams.

Table 2: *Dimensions of the Aston Team Performance Inventory (Aston Organization Development Ltd)*

Team inputs	Processes	Team outputs
▪ Task design ▪ Team effort and skills ▪ Organizational support ▪ Resources	▪ Team processes - Objectives - Reflexivity - Participation - Task focus - Team Conflict - Creativity and Innovation ▪ Leadership - Leading - Managing - Coaching	▪ Team member satisfaction ▪ Attachment ▪ Team Effectiveness ▪ Inter-team relationships ▪ Team Innovation ▪

1.4. Executive Team Effectiveness Model (Nadler, 1998)

David Nadler has been a reference on executive teams since his days with the Delta Consulting Group, Inc., a consultancy specializing in leadership which has since merged with the Oliver Wyman Group. In the book entitled Executive Teams, a collection of essays co-edited with Janet Spencer and other associates in 1998, he proposes that executive team effectiveness is determined by how three management processes – work, relationship and external boundary management – are addressed (see Table 3). These processes are highly influenced by three team design factors, with the first two resembling Wageman et al.'s essential conditions: 1) "composition" which is the careful selection of team members; 2) "structure" which encompasses many elements including the type of positions on the executive team, its size, its boundaries, and its goals and rewards; and 3) "succession" which centers on the succession scenario created for the team.

All teams must devote time to team design but two contextual factors determine the effort to devote to each of the team processes: the degree of interdependence between units and the nature of external demands.

Table 3: *Dimensions of Nadler's (1998) Model of Executive Team Effectiveness*

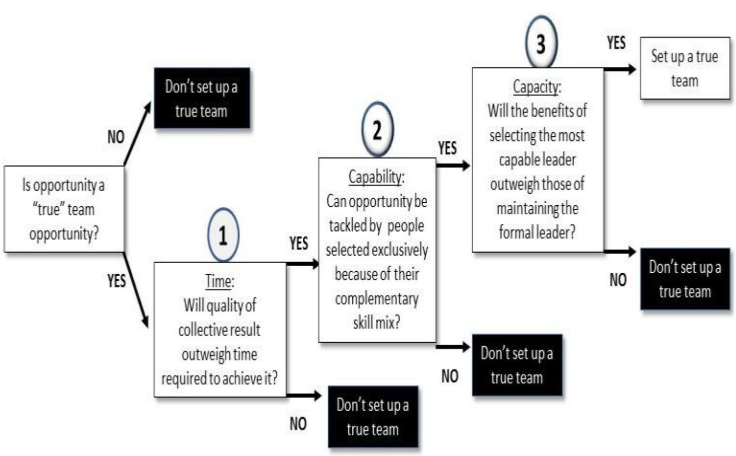
Team design elements	Team processes	Team outputs
▪ Composition ▪ Structure ▪ Succession	▪ Work management ▪ Relationship management ▪ External boundary management	▪ Production of results ▪ Maintenance of effectiveness

1.5. Trade-Off Model (Katzenbach, 1998)

Jon Katzenbach came to prominence by co-authoring the bestselling The Wisdom of Teams (1993) and later work on executive teams. His model presented in Teams at the Top (1998) mirrors Nadler's in that he also emphasizes the conditions in which a true team approach is appropriate (see Figure 1). However, he insists that a CEO should not set up only one executive team but that he/she must move senior executives in and out of team mode as circumstances dictate. This is, notably, when a collective work product is identified such as the need for an organizational structure change (Katzenbach, 1998).

Once a collective-work product is found, a CEO assesses three trade-offs to establish if the opportunity warrants a team approach. The first relates to time: is the value of addressing the opportunity collectively outweighed by the time required to do so? If so, the CEO must then make a "capability trade-off", choosing who will to address the opportunity based on the specific skill they bring to the table or on their official job responsibility. Lastly, there is a "capacity trade-off": a CEO must decide to hand leadership for the opportunity to the most senior person involved or to the most appropriate person in light of that opportunity.

Figure 1: *A Schematic Depiction of Katzenbach's Three Trade-Offs Model*



| 2 - COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

This section compares the five models along four dimensions: structure, factors impeding effectiveness, purpose and effectiveness standards.

2.1. Model structure: Causal, conditional and decision-tree

Examining each model's structure reveals interesting practical implications, as we shall see. Nadler (1998) and West (2012) offer classic "input-process-output" models: a set of inputs affect an output (i.e. team effectiveness) – via behavioral, cognitive and affective processes. These processes are mediating variables in that they are affected by the inputs which, in turn, affect the output (Hackman, 2012). Both models are causal in that their authors imply that their elements cause team effectiveness. The practical implication is clear: one must implement all their elements (the causes) to obtain team effectiveness (the effect), just as one needs all the ingredients in a cake recipe to obtain a cake. As for Lencioni (2002), his insistence that team effectiveness requires addressing all five of his dysfunctions implies his model is causal as well.

For their part, Wageman et al. (2008) stress that their model is not a causal one. Hackman believes causal models leave the impression that "by pulling the appropriate levers at the right time we really can make groups operate just the way we want them to." (Hackman, 2012, p. 434). Thus the six elements of the Wageman et al. (2008) model are presented as conditions which "when present, increase the likelihood (but do not guarantee) that team effectiveness will obtain" (Hackman, 2012, p. 435). The practical implication is that the six elements are not like cake ingredients: some elements warrant more focus than others, notably the three "essential" conditions. The three "enabling" conditions need not be implemented immediately as they merely "smooth the road to senior team effectiveness" (Wageman et al., 2008, p.xiv).

As for Katzenbach (1998), his model's structure in no way resembles the others because it is not designed to achieve executive team effectiveness. It is thus structured as a decision tree whose output is simply an answer to the question: is it worthwhile to invest effort creating a real team to address opportunity x?

2.2. Factors Impeding Team Effectiveness: Human and Structural

The factors the authors view as impeding team effectiveness are worth exploring because they determine the means they promote to improve effectiveness. We've identified two types of factors: "human" (which cover behaviours, affect and cognition) and "structural" factors (which cover remuneration and other factors which condition team member behaviour). All authors mention both but tend to emphasize one over the other.

We begin with those who place more emphasis on human factors, and thus start with Lencioni (2002) who writes: "The fact remains that teams, because they are made up of imperfect human beings, are inherently dysfunctional." (p. vii). The practical implication is that improving teamwork starts at the team member level: "Like so many other aspects of life, teamwork comes down to mastering a set of behaviors […]." (Lencioni, 2002, p. viii).

West (2012) also emphasizes human factors, characterizing executives as "silverback gorillas beating their chests" (p. 245). However, he also mentions many structural factors, such as the competition for the CEO's position and thus his starting point for improving teamwork is a structural one, notably clarifying the team's task.

Wageman et al. (2008) agree that human factors hinder team effectiveness. For example, they see executives avoiding decisions that maximize organizational effectiveness "because their rewards may be diminished" (Wageman & Hackman, 2009, p.490). Nonetheless, they place greater emphasis on the absence of structural elements as a source of team dysfunction, for example the lack of a clear team purpose which is commonplace since defining such a purpose "is an extraordinary conceptual challenge" (Wageman & Hackman, 2009, p.484). It is thus no surprise that they stress structural interventions including, as West (2012) does, clarifying team purpose.

Nadler (1998), for his part, cites eight reasons why teamwork at the top is a challenge. One is clearly a human factor, notably that executives tend to be very high on needs for power and achievement. However, the other seven are structural, for example the power distance between the CEO and his direct reports. Another is the challenge posed by the external environment with the practical implication that executive teams must focus on "external boundary management" to be effective. We highlight this Nadler model element because it obliges teams to focus outwards, whereas the other models have a more inward focus.

Katzenbach (1998), like the others, sees human factors as impeding teamwork at the top, noting that executives prefer not to be fettered by team accountability because "they excel in settings where they can focus on their individual best results" (p.51). However, like West (2012) and Wageman et al. (2008), Katzenbach (1998) believes that structural factors play a more important part in making team discipline difficult to apply at the executive level. One such factor is that "things are much grayer at the top" (Katzenbach, 1998, p. 43) which explains why a clear team purpose is not easily articulated, as Wageman et al. (2008) also allude to. Furthermore, executives are under tremendous time pressure and the alternative to the team approach – which Katzenbach (1998) labels the "single-leader" approach (p.53). – is not only faster than a team approach, but has also proven to be very efficient. From a practical standpoint, this helps to explain why his model does not seek to condemn or "fix" the factors hindering teamwork at the top, and that doing so is often a waste of time and leads to less, not more, effectiveness. Thus it merely strives to single out opportunities where the effort to override these factors are truly worth it.

2.3. Executive Team Purpose

The assumption in the Nadler (1998), West (2012) and Wageman et al. (2008) models is that an executive team exists to make decisions. CEOs must consult team members before making decisions, but also let them actively participate in a collective decision-making process. This helps to explain the emphasis on reducing team size since, as Wageman et al. (2008) put it: "For teams that must make collective decisions […] the smaller the better" (p. 114).

West (2012) and Wageman et al. (2008) stress that, with the exception of holding companies or companies with highly independent units, organizations should have their executive teams strive to become collective decision-making teams because such teams are potentially the most valuable. Nadler (1998) also believes that more interdependence between units should provoke a push for collective decision-making, and teambuilding more generally, but adds a second impetus: the complexity of the external environment.

Lencioni's (2002) focus on executive team member behavior may explain why he does not specify if decision-making is at the heart of an executive team's purpose. However, it is clearly part of the equation given that his third dysfunction is a lack of commitment to team decisions.

Katzenbach (1998) doesn't advocate that executive teams make collective decisions because this would assume mutual accountability which he deems unrealistic at the senior executive level. Thus, his model sets out the conditions under which an ad hoc subset of the executive team might become a decision-making unit.

Beyond these issues, what do our models say executive teams should be making decisions about? For West (2012), this "seems self-evident" (p. 243). Executive team tasks should include ensuring there is an appropriate strategy in place and corporate social responsibility. The practical implication here is that CEOs who merely consult their teams on such issues, or only involve selected team members, must change their approach. The other four models are far less prescriptive on this front and only indicate in the most general terms in which areas executive teams might focus, as exemplified by Nadler's (1998) rather indefinite statement: "In executive teams, the work is primarily strategy, policy, and operating decisions." (pp. 24-25).

2.4. Team Effectiveness Standards

The standards by which the authors assess executive teams can be analyzed on two levels: firstly by who sets the standards and, secondly, by the nature of those standards. With respect to who sets the standards, Lencioni (2005) infers it is the team itself when he states: "The true measure of a team is that it accomplishes the results it sets out to achieve" (p.11). West (2012) concurs when he defines effectiveness as "the extent to which a team is successful in achieving its task-related objectives" since those objectives are defined by the team itself (p.7). For Nadler (1998), some of these standards are pre-defined organizational outputs such as "earnings, growth, returns and so forth" (p.23) but, whereas Lencioni (2002) believes the team picks the ones by which it will measure its success, this is less clear with Nadler.

Wageman et al. (2008) disagree that organizational outputs should be a measure of team success since they can be attributed to environmental factors or even chance. Consequently, they propose outputs directly attributable to the actions of the team. However, unlike Lencioni (2002) and West (2012), Wageman et al. (2008) don't believe these outputs should only be defined by the team, but also by "people, both inside and outside the organization, who were most affected by the team's work" (p.10) for example board members and employees.

Turning to the nature of the standards to assess executive teams, Nadler (1998) and Lencioni (2002) appear to be the only ones for whom organizational financial results are invariably involved (although this is not to say the others preclude such results being used to calculate executives' individual bonuses). For West (2012) and Wageman et al. (2008), the use of financial results to assess team effectiveness is not excluded but would depend on whether or not the team or the team's stakeholders have decided this.

Team viability is another dimension that Nadler (1998), West (2012) and Wageman et al. (2008) propose be taken into account when assessing a team's effectiveness. For Wageman et al. (2008) team viability corresponds to "how well team members worked together now to enhance – rather than undermine – their capability to work together in the future" (p. 10). These authors would also judge team effectiveness by the quality of the group experience. For Wageman et al. (1998), these dimension corresponds to the extent to which group experience "contributed positively to the learning and personal development of individual team members." (p. 11). This resembles West's (2012) team-member well-being criteria which refers to factors such as the "mental health (e.g. stress), growth and development of team members" (p. 7), as well as Nadler's (1998) "ability of the team to satisfy its members' needs" (p.24).

West (2012) proposes two further dimensions that do not appear elsewhere. The first is team innovation defined as "the extent to which the team develops and implements new and improved processes, products and procedures" (p.7). The second is inter-team cooperation which is "the effectiveness of the team in working with other teams in the organization with which it has to work in order to deliver products and services" (West, 2012, p.7).

We don't refer to Katzenbach's (1998) model in the above sub-section simply because his focus is not team effectiveness but the circumstances in which a team approach is appropriate.

| 3 - A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE FIELD

Four topics structure this next section: model application, factors impeding effectiveness, team purpose, and effectiveness dimensions. For each, we highlight model elements we find useful in our consulting work, as well as elements we believe are overemphasized. We go on to discuss the elements that might be developed further (see table 4).

3.1. Model Application

Useful: Reducing complexity.

The models presented in this article serve as a reminder that applying a model is essential when consulting because it reduces executive team complexity by focusing on key effectiveness determinants and criteria. There may be hundreds of these and a good model singles out the most critical, thus preventing clients from being overwhelmed.

Furthermore, having an explicit model facilitates discussions with clients by proposing a shared vocabulary, thus allowing them to participate actively in the diagnostic phase. It also allows us to show what we will work on and how to measure success which then makes it easier to explain to clients why the one or two day session they often request may not be enough to address their issues. Having a model thus lessens the risk of a short intervention that has little impact or of one that never ends because no one can say when it should.

Overemphasized: A true team as an answer to all executive team issues.

All models except Katzenbach's (1998) advocate that organizations institute a true team at the top, notably one that has a clear purpose, limited and complementary membership, and mutual accountability. Nadler (1998), as we've seen, adds a nuance by citing two moderator variables that determine when teambuilding efforts are worthwhile: external environment complexity and the degree of interdependence between units. Wageman et al. (2008) also introduce the latter variable but do not afford it as much importance as Nadler (1998), giving the impression their model should be applied in all but exceptional circumstances. As for Lencioni (2002) and West (2013), they don't explicitly introduce any moderator variables which would allow us to determine in which contexts applying their models would be most beneficial.

Our opinion aligns with Nadler (1998) and Katzenbach's (1998) when they suggest that one should not assume that instituting a true team at the top automatically has a positive impact. Our experience leads us to conclude that there are contexts in which "forcing" collaboration between executive team members can be counterproductive, even in some organizations whose units are interdependent. The seeds of this opinion were sown a number of years ago when working with a European multinational whose executives complained that their CEO was ignoring competitive behaviour on the team, resulting in lost cross-unit opportunities. As it turned out, he was not ignoring this behaviour but actively encouraging it. When asked why, the CEO replied that greater effort was required to develop opportunities across units than within them. Thus he didn't want his executives "wasting time" chasing cross-unit opportunities before exhausting those within their own sphere. Whether this approach was a factor in the organization's success can be debated. However, this and similar experiences in other companies with interdependent units, have made us more cautious about prescribing a team approach and wary of executives who complain about competitive colleagues because we've found this can be code for "my colleagues are not helping me achieve my objectives." Further, we've seen firsthand how easy it is to overestimate the synergies that will materialize from a teambuilding intervention. It is also easy to underestimate the opportunity cost of setting up team processes to explore whether such synergies exist at all.

Worth developing: When team models apply and the governance "system".

In light of the above, we would welcome further detail in the models regarding the circumstances in which true team models should be applied. The assumption that interdependence between units necessarily calls for a team approach at the top does not always hold true. This, we recognize, may not be because the assumption is flawed. It may be because measuring interdependence between units is a challenging task. Unfortunately the models we've reviewed do not provide us with much information regarding how this should be done. Thus, we would welcome further development on two related issues. The first is how to select the tasks which determine the interdependence between units since senior executives are responsible for an almost infinite number of tasks. The second issue is one of numbers: is it sufficient that there be interdependence between all business units or simply a few? Assuming, for example, that interdependence is high between 3 of 4 business units, should we exclude the leader of the fourth unit in teambuilding efforts? If we include her, how do we arrive at a team purpose that is relevant for all as Wageman et al. (2008), Nadler (1998) and West would have us do?

Other than interdependence, what other criteria should one consider before promoting a true team approach at the top? The growth potential within business units might be one, as illustrated by our earlier example of the European multinational. Indeed, when opportunities abound within business units of an organization, asking them to collaborate on cross-unit opportunities may not always be the most effective use of their time.

Beyond the circumstances in which true team models apply, we also believe models might benefit from enlarging their scope of application beyond the executive team to encompass what we call the "executive governance system", that is the network of groups comprised of senior executives. This is because true team models don't directly address two questions we are invariably asked by our CEO clients: How often should I convene all my direct reports? and Should I form an executive team sub-committee or "kitchen-cabinet"? True team models sidestep the first question by implying that all a CEO's direct reports should not be convened as the executive team if they are too numerous or if they cannot achieve the team's purpose. As for the question regarding kitchen cabinets, the true team models we've reviewed do not address it. Not addressing these two questions is problematic for a number of reasons. For instance, the CEOs we work with, without exception, feel the need to convene all their direct reports periodically. If this group is not the executive team, its activities and purpose must nonetheless be coordinated with the executive team's since their membership will overlap. The same principle applies to kitchen cabinets. Although many CEOs are loathe to admit they have one (for fear non-members will clamor to be admitted), they are an undeniable reality in many organizations and form a critical link in the decision-making chain. In light of this, defining an executive team's purpose without taking kitchen cabinets into account can also lead to overlaps and inefficiency.

By enlarging their scope to the executive governance system, rather than focusing narrowly on executive team, models might not only close the gap between theory and corporate reality, but also provide a more complete response to the CEO dilemma of how best to deploy their direct reports.

3.2. Factors Impeding Effectiveness

Useful: A wider range of diagnostic factors.

Studying the models has helped widen the list of factors we consider when diagnosing the factors impeding a team's effectiveness because each one reveals biases and exposes blind spots and thus made us more conscious of our own. For example, if one is disposed to look chiefly at behavioural causes when diagnosing a team's ills (à la Lencioni), Wageman et al. (2008) and others make a strong case for focusing on structural elements as well. Another example is Nadler's (1998) model which has exposed what was previously a blind spot by highlighting the competition below the surface on many executive teams due to CEO succession issues. Thus, his model reminds us to be more wary when we see too much collaboration soon after we begin working with a team as this is sometimes a ploy by team members to ensure the consultants leave before any real change occurs.

Overemphasized: Executive characteristics as a source of team dysfunction.

The link some authors make between executive team ineffectiveness and the characteristics of their members appears to us exaggerated. As we've seen, Lencioni (2002) insists that teams are inherently dysfunctional because they are made up of "imperfect human beings" (p. vii) and West (2012) makes a point to characterize executives as "silverback gorillas" (p. 245). Although heavily mediatized corporate scandals have made executives popular whipping boys, linking executive team ineffectiveness to the alleged characteristics and individualistic behaviour of its members is problematic in that it shifts attention away from what we deem to be more critical causes of executive team ineffectiveness.

Worth developing: Appropriate incentives and reconciling an executive's two roles.

What many authors see as individualistic or even selfish behaviour of senior executives who put their unit's interest above all else, may be a rational response to individually-based incentives schemes. Many executives we've interviewed blame these incentives schemes for making it challenging to be "team players". Whether they are right or wrong, such schemes are hardly addressed in the models we've reviewed. Lencioni (2002) and Wageman et al. (2008), for example, do deal with them cursorily. Still, for a subject that weighs so heavily on the minds of the executives, this may be giving the topic short shrift.

That being said, the reasons why executives appear to put their unit's interest ahead of the organization's are complex and tweaking incentive schemes may not be enough. Thus models may need to go further in helping executives reconcile their role as leader of their unit with their role as executive team member. The solution proposed by many– notably that executives simply leave their unit hat at the executive team door - does not quite do the question justice. Indeed, the executives we encounter don't perceive advancing their unit's strategy – a strategy generally approved by the CEO - as selfish, but as something that will truly help the organization. Thus a model that would show executives how they can strike a balance between their two seemingly conflicting roles would be gladly received.

3.3. Team Purpose

Useful: Refining team purpose.

Whether one believes an executive team should become a true team or not, every senior executives group needs to define their purpose for meeting. This may seem so obvious as to hardly be worth mentioning. However, the majority of executives we work with are stumped when asked: What purpose does the executive team at this company serve? Why do you meet? Nevertheless, very few see the point in working on a team purpose. Thus, we've often have had to settle for helping teams define what they will not do (an anti-mission of sorts). Interestingly, this is often enough to significantly improve their effectiveness but we would recommend that teams answer both to provide optimal focus.

Overemphasized: Collective decision-making.

We've made the point earlier that the authors we've reviewed except Katzenbach (1998) assume that executive teams exist to make decisions collectively. After many years of practice, we question this assumption because we've never come across a single team that regularly does so and, apparently, we are not alone (Frisch, 2012; Roberto, 2005). Of course, some might argue that no matter the reality, executives should make decisions collectively. However, whenever seasoned executives do not conform to a theoretical model, we should not immediately conclude that it is the executives who are wrong.

If the fact that many executive teams don't practice collective decision-making regularly is not reason enough to question the assumption that they should, there are reasons to be careful about promoting the ideal of collective decision-making. The first is that we've seen it lead executives to believe they will be involved in every decision. When some are not - which is hardly surprising given the number of decisions to be made - they grow frustrated. Such frustration often morphs into negative behavior which CEOs are then obliged to address, taking them away from more productive activities. The second is that promoting this ideal loses sight of an important principle: that decision-making authority should closely mirror decision-making accountability. Very few senior executives we've met truly feel accountable for decisions emanating from the top (even though their CEOs oblige them to say they are because the top team must present a "united front" to the organization). Until they do, we think one should be careful about promoting the principle that decision-making authority is a team affair.

Thirdly, promoting the ideal of collective decision-making seems to us problematic for a very practical reason: Time. Authors who discuss poor decision-making tend to focus on a single decision and bemoan "Why oh why didn't the CEO consult his team further?!!" The reality is that CEOs face dozens of make-or-break decisions in any given week and models that promote across the board collective decision-making may not be realistic.

To summarise, we are not saying that CEOs should not involve team members in decision-making, far from it. What we are saying is that the promotion of collective decision-making as the default decision-making mode may not always fit with executive team reality and, in some cases, may have some undesirable side-effects.

Worth developing: When team approach is appropriate in decision-making process.

The emphasis on collective decision-making in many models has displaced a more practical exploration of how and when CEOs should include their executives in decisions. Interesting formulas were proposed by Vroom and Jago (1988) for example, but we've found these are not necessarily well adapted to the fast-paced world of executive teams. We would find it interesting if models broke down decision-making into its component parts and were more precise about the role the executive team might play in each. For example, we often see CEOs jumping into what we call "solution mode" before clearly defining the issue they wish to make a decision about. We see a role for the entire team at this stage as a robust issue definition often requires the many perspectives that an entire team can bring. We also see a role for the team in the phase to generate multiple alternatives when facing an issue as doing so diffuses conflict and prevent teams from polarizing around two options (Eisenhardt, Kahwajy, and Bourgeois, 1997).

Lastly, the emphasis on decision-making has displaced discussion of other activities that executive teams might participate in, for example how to coordinate activities between units, something that is not addressed in any detail by any of the models. Based on what we've witnessed, most organizations could use a lot more guidance on this front. The same can be said for the cascading of information from the executive level to those below. Although many executives we've worked with say cascading is an important part of their role, few are very good at it and few teams spend much time discussing how it should be done. Thus, we would welcome more practical details on both coordination and cascading in the models.

3.4 Effectiveness Dimensions

Useful: Organizational results + stakeholder perspective.

We cannot argue with Wageman et al. (2008) when they claim it is theoretically problematic to use organizational results to assess executive team effectiveness since such results can be attributed to environmental factors or even chance. We must nonetheless agree with Nadler (1998) that, in practice, such results must be part of the equation otherwise the team may not put the required effort in trying to turn the tide when results go south. Thus, whether it is fair or not, we insist that our clients include organizational results in their executive team assessment.

Another element we've picked up is Wageman et al.'s (2008) insistence on involving executive team stakeholders, for example board members and employees, in the assessment process. This makes sense because executive teams should not be both judge and jury of their own effectiveness. More details on how Wageman et al. have involved boards and employees in practice would gladly be received since we guess that many CEOs would be leery of this.

Overemphasized: Quality of group experience as effectiveness dimension.

As we've seen previously, indicators related to the "quality of group experience" dimension are proposed in the Nadler (1998), West (2012) and Wageman et al. (2008) models. This dimension is typically measured by indicators such as member satisfaction with the team, professional development within the team context, absenteeism and attrition. However, we have two reasons to doubt whether this dimension, which has emerged from studies of non-executive teams, applies as currently defined in the executive context. The first is that very few, if any, of the executives we've met express much satisfaction with the team aspect of their job. As for their development, many executives feel this is more the result of facing challenges within their units rather than those addressed with their executive team colleagues. Nevertheless, despite the frustration that working with their peers we and others have noticed (Hambrick, 1994), few we know would consider resigning for these reasons and even fewer consider skipping executive team meetings although they view them as boring and useless.

A second reason we have to doubt the appropriateness of this dimension is because of the way roles are designed on executive teams as opposed to non-executive teams. The roles on the latter teams are often designed to be complementary. On executive teams, roles don't merely complement each other, they often offset each other. In other words, executive teams are designed with institutionalized conflicts. Just a few examples serve to illustrate this:

- HR VPs develop talent for the future, which often requires taking staff away from work; this brings them into conflict with Operational VPs who want to keep staff at work to meet this month's forecast;
- Customer Service VPs are rewarded and promoted for keeping clients happy, oftentimes by customizing service; this can bring them into conflict with Supply Chain VPs who are often rewarded and promoted for standardizing product delivery to clients.

As a result, the dynamics on an executive team appear to us quite different than on non-executive teams, something that the quality of group experience criteria in the models we've reviewed does not take into account sufficiently.

Worth developing: Quality of group experience and competition.

In light of the above, we think it would be interesting if the models under review were more explicit as to what “quality of group experience” is in the executive team context. Firstly, it would be interesting to find out to what extent the notion of harmony is included since our experience leads us to believe that harmony is not as important for senior executives as it might be for those lower down in the organization. Secondly, we would argue that it would need to be adapted to different cultural contexts, such as that of teams in more hierarchical cultures and in family-owned businesses where team dynamics are very different.

In a related point, what is the place of competition on executive teams? Many models simply assume there should be none while our experience tells us competition is inevitable and that healthy rivalry between members may actually be beneficial. A study involving executives in 32 Europe-based corporations shines an interesting light on this issue (Castilla, 2003). One of its counterintuitive conclusions was that increasing competition on an executive team may sometimes be required before collaboration can be improved. This was the case for executive teams whose members did not view all their colleagues as competent and thus resisted efforts to promote collaboration with these poor performers. Enhancing the latters’ performance was the first step these organizations adopted on the road to more cohesion. Some did this by highlighting the individual performance of members at team meetings, forcing the poor performers to up their game or be replaced. Ironically, this increased inter-team competition and reduced team cohesion for a while. However, interviewees believed this was what eventually enabled them to improve collaboration.

Whether these executives were correct is unimportant. However, their experience raises the question as to what is the right balance between competition and collaboration on executive teams and what mechanisms need to be instituted to ensure neither is overdone.

| CONCLUSION

This paper examined five widely-known executive team models from an OD practitioner’s perspective. We highlighted elements of these models we have found useful in our consulting work and those we thought they overemphasized. We also suggested what elements might be developed further. Doing so enabled us to uncover new principles and reaffirmed some beliefs we hold, notably:

- The importance of having an explicit model to focus on the key determinants and criteria of team effectiveness, set a common vocabulary with clients, and establish a way to measure success. Furthermore, each model reveals biases and exposes blind spots, thus examining them was useful in becoming more conscious of one’s own and taking measures not to fall prey to them;
- Because senior management groups are often called a “team” does not mean all benefit from having a precise purpose, limited membership and mutual accountability. There are circumstances in which this may be the case, but this should never be assumed as it is easy to overestimate the synergies that might result and underestimate the opportunity costs of identifying them;
- All executive teams, whether they are a true team or not, benefit from answering the following question formally: “What is

your purpose as a group and why do you meet?" Few executives find this easy and beginning with what they will not do together may be the better first step and will also significantly increase their effectiveness;

- Promoting the ideal of collective decision-making to the point that team members feel they have a right to be involved in all decisions is a risky proposition, but encouraging CEOs to consult their senior executives whenever possible remains a good idea in many contexts;
- Involving stakeholders in assessing executive team effectiveness is indispensable and brings us back to the importance of having a model that sets evaluation criteria. In our opinion, including organizational financial indicators amongst those criteria is a must in practice, despite the legitimate theoretical arguments against doing so;
- Models may address more of the issues CEOs are confronted with by enlarging their focus to include the executive governance system rather than focusing solely on the executive team.

The above is hardly an exhaustive list of principles with which to address executive team issues. However, our hope is that it, and the comments we've made in these pages, contribute to efforts to advance an understanding of what can be done to support executive teams and the critical role of models in that effort. Our hope is that, given the restricted access authors have to executive teams, that others who do have access will share their stories and experience so that we can continue to build on existing models. However, we must continue improving on models while keeping in mind their limits. Models should not be seen as miracle recipes to be applied indiscriminately, but OD tools which always need to be adapted to the personalities, context and organizational strategies of the teams they are meant to serve.

Table 4: *Model elements that are useful, overemphasized and worth developing*

Topic	Useful in practice	Overemphasized	Worth developing
3.1 Model application	▪ Reducing complexity by singling out most critical determinants of effectiveness ▪ Shared vocabulary ▪ Models as an anchor point for measuring an intervention's success	▪ The application of teambuilding models as the default answer to executive team issues	▪ What criteria should determine the circumstances in which teambuilding at the top should be promoted? ▪ Enlarging the application of models to encompass the entire system of executive governance
3.2 Factors impeding effectiveness	▪ a wider range of diagnostic factors	▪ Personality traits as a source of team dysfunction	▪ What kind of incentive schemes promotes effectiveness at the top? ▪ How can executives balance their role as leaders of their unit with their role as member of the executive team?
3.3 Team purpose	▪ An emphasis on refining what the team will do together	▪ Collective decision-making	▪ How should executive team members be involved in decision-making? ▪ How can an executive team effectively play roles other than decision-making? (e.g. coordination and cascading)
3.4 Effectiveness dimensions	▪ Organizational results as a measure of team effectiveness ▪ Involving stakeholders in the assessment process	▪ Quality of group experience as a criterion of effectiveness	▪ How to define "quality of group experience" in an executive team context? ▪ What is the right balance between competition and collaboration on executive teams?

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