AMAZING TEAM PERFORMANCE SYSTEM



WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON IN YOUR TEAM?

A practical guide to understanding team challenges before deciding how to respond

For leaders and those responsible for supporting team performance in organisations

A Zeal Solutions resource

INTRODUCTION

It's tempting to jump straight to the solution

When something isn't working, it's tempting to jump straight to the solution.

- A team isn't communicating, so we schedule more meetings.
- People seem disconnected, so we organise an away day.
- Performance has dipped, so we introduce training.

Any of those things might help. But only if they address what's actually driving the issue.

What we can see (e.g., behaviours, frustrations, tensions or changes in performance) is often only part of the picture.

That's where this guide comes in.

This guide will help you take a more methodical approach to team challenges: starting with what you're seeing, separating what you know from what you're assuming, and considering what you may need to understand before deciding how to respond.

It won't diagnose your team or prescribe an intervention. Instead, it will give you a practical way to think more deeply about what's happening.

How to use this guide

Choose one real team and keep them in mind as you work through the exercises.

This might be a team you lead, or a team within your organisation that you support or have responsibility for.

Allow around 10-15 minutes.

OBSERVE → QUESTION → UNDERSTAND

STEP 1

Start with what you can see

What are you noticing?

Think about the team you chose. For now, don't try to explain why it's happening. Simply focus on what you can see or hear.

Tick anything that feels familiar:

☐ Communication isn't working as well as it should	☐ People seem less engaged or involved
☐ Tensions or frustrations are building	☐ People are working in silos
☐ Collaboration feels harder than it should	☐ People aren't pulling in the same direction
☐ People seem reluctant to speak openly	☐ Relationships feel more transactional
☐ The team struggles when things change or go wrong	☐ Performance isn't where it needs to be
☐ Something just doesn't feel quite right	☐ Something else:

What stands out most?

Of everything you've ticked, which issue concerns you most right now?

These are signals, not diagnoses.
They tell you what you are noticing, but not necessarily what is causing it.

STEP 2

Separate the symptom from the cause

What you notice in a team is often a signal that something is happening. It doesn't necessarily tell you why.

WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE	WHAT YOU DON'T YET KNOW
Poor communication	*What's making communication difficult?*
People working in silos	*What's pulling people apart?*
Low engagement	*What's causing people to disengage?*
Tension or conflict	*What's sitting beneath the tension?*
Falling performance	*What's getting in the way of performance?*

Why does the distinction matter?

Because the same visible issue can have very different underlying causes, and different causes may need very different responses.

The aim isn't to find a solution yet. It's to get clearer about the problem you're actually trying to solve.

SYMPTOM ≠ CAUSE

STEP 3

Challenge your first explanation

Think about the issue you identified earlier.

What do you think is causing it? Don't overthink it. Write down your first instinct.

Now separate what you KNOW from what you ASSUME

WHAT I KNOW

What have I actually observed, heard or have evidence for?

WHAT I'M ASSUMING

What am I interpreting, explaining or filling in?

Example:
I know: People rarely challenge ideas in team meetings.
I'm assuming: They don't feel confident enough to speak up.

How much of your explanation sits in the assumption column?

Assumptions aren't necessarily wrong.
But they shouldn't be mistaken for evidence.

ONE SYMPTOM. MANY POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS.

“This team isn’t communicating.”

It sounds straightforward. But what does “not communicating” actually mean, and what's driving it?

Could it be that...

- People don't feel able to speak honestly?
- Expectations or responsibilities aren't clear?
- Relationships have become strained?
- People are working towards different priorities?
- Important information isn't flowing to the right people?
- Leadership behaviours are unintentionally discouraging discussion?
- People are overloaded, so communication is becoming more transactional?
- People have stopped seeing the value in working things through together?

Same symptom. Different causes. Different responses.

More meetings might help one of these teams. Clearer expectations might help another. Leadership support, relationship-building or a completely different response might be needed elsewhere.

Until you understand what's driving the issue, choosing the intervention is partly guesswork.

Go back to the issue you identified earlier.

Can you think of two other possible explanations for what you're seeing?

1.

2.

STEP 4

Look for patterns, not just incidents

A single incident can be misleading. Patterns can give you better clues about what might be happening.

Think about the issue you've been exploring and consider:

WHO?

Who seems to be experiencing it?

Everyone, particular people, roles or groups?

WHEN?

When does it tend to happen?

All the time, or in particular situations? When did you first notice it?

WHERE?

Where does it show up most?

Certain meetings, tasks, relationships or ways of working?

WHAT CHANGED?

What was happening around the time it emerged?

A new leader? Restructure? Increased pressure? New ways of working? Changes in the team?

WHAT PATTERNS ARE YOU NOTICING?

Patterns give you clues. They still don't give you the full picture.

Why?

Because you're still looking at the team from your own perspective. What you observe may not reflect what different people within the team are actually experiencing, and some of the most important issues may not be visible at all.

STEP 5

Look at the team from more than one angle

Team challenges rarely exist in isolation. To understand what's really happening, it helps to look beyond the immediate issue and consider the team from different perspectives.

01 - HOW THE TEAM WORKS TOGETHER

What patterns of behaviour are shaping the team day to day?

Think about how people interact, collaborate and work together.

02 - WHAT PEOPLE ARE THINKING & FEELING

What might be happening that you can't directly observe?

What people think and feel can shape their behaviour, even when it isn't openly expressed.

03 - HOW LEADERSHIP IS SHAPING IT

What conditions might leadership be creating or reinforcing?

The way a team is led can influence what people do, say and avoid.

Reflection can give you clues. Diagnosis gives you evidence.

This guide can help you identify useful questions to ask about your team. But answering those questions confidently is harder.

Amazing Team Performance (ATP) takes this thinking further. Developed by psychologists, ATP provides a structured, evidence-based way of gathering perspectives across the team, helping to identify where the team is working well, where challenges may be emerging and where attention may be most useful, rather than relying on what can be seen from the outside or one person's interpretation.

It helps build a clearer picture of where the team is working well, where challenges may be emerging, and where attention may be most useful.

Thinking about the team you've been exploring, which of these layers do you currently know the least about (you can select more than one layer)?

- [ ] How the team works together?
- [ ] What people are thinking & feeling?
- [ ] How leadership is shaping it?
- [ ] I'm not sure

Before you decide what to do...

When a team is struggling, there can be pressure to act quickly. Before investing time, money or energy in an intervention, ask these five questions.

1. What exactly are we seeing?

Can we describe the issue without jumping to an explanation for it?

2. Who is experiencing it?

Is this really a whole-team issue, or does it affect particular people, relationships or situations?

3. What do we actually know about the cause?

What is supported by evidence, and what are we assuming?

4. Have we looked beneath the visible behaviour?

What might we still need to understand about how people are working, what they're experiencing and how leadership is shaping it?

5. Does the proposed response actually address the cause?

Can we explain why we believe this intervention will help with what's driving the issue?

Can't answer these confidently?
You may need to understand the team better before deciding what to do.

Diagnose first. Then decide how to respond.

THE 5-QUESTION CHECK

Use this before commissioning your next team intervention.

WHAT IF YOU NEED A CLEARER PICTURE?

You don't need to have the answer before you talk to us.

If you've worked through this guide and realised there are things you don't yet understand about a team, that's exactly where a conversation can help.

Tell us what you're seeing. We'll listen, talk through what's happening and explore what might be worth understanding more deeply.

How Amazing Team Performance can help

While this guide helps you identify the questions worth asking, ATP provides a structured, evidence-based way of answering them, gathering perspectives across the team to help pinpoint where things are working well, where challenges may be emerging and where attention may be most useful.

This gives you a stronger evidence base for deciding what to do next, rather than relying on assumptions or what can be seen on the surface.

Let's talk about your team

Book a free informal conversation with Zeal

No obligation. Just a conversation about what's happening and whether we can help.

Or visit: **www.amazingteamperformance.co.uk/discuss**

SCAN TO GET IN TOUCH

Not ready to talk yet?

Explore Amazing Team Performance online at **www.amazingteamperformance.co.uk**



Better decisions start with a better understanding of the team.