

20 Questions and 6 Indicators of Team Success or Failure

It is well known in every organisation that some teams perform better than others, and in extreme cases some teams succeed and others fail. The real challenge for leaders is to know when it is happening, why it is happening, and what to do about it.

A good place to start is by asking some good diagnostic questions.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry advocates positive inquiry into the best of what is, in order to imagine what could be, followed by design of a desired future state that is compelling and thus creates future change towards a more desirable state, for example improved performance or a more efficient service.

The model is based on the assumption that the questions we ask will tend to focus our attention in a particular direction – in this case a positive direction. Questions are never neutral, they are always value laden and fateful, and social systems (like for example, your business) move in the direction of the questions they most persistently and passionately ask and discuss.

10 Positive Questions

Using Appreciative Inquiry principles, on the next page are 10 positive questions you might ask yourself.

You should also ask them of:

- Your top team
- Senior managers
- Operational Directors
- HR department
- Leadership talent
- Other key players in your business.

10 Positive Questions to Ask:

1.	Which do you think is our highest performing team and why?	<i>e.g. great results, quality of work, repeat business etc.</i>
2.	How do you know they are high performing?	<i>e.g. from internal reputation, colleague's comments, feedback from customers etc.</i>
3.	What specifically do you measure, track or count to identify them?	<i>e.g. invoiced amounts, stock turnover, regional sales growth</i>
4.	What do they do better, how do they operate more effectively than other teams?	<i>e.g. cross selling, understand customer needs, share market intelligence etc.</i>
5.	What do they achieve more of, as outputs or outcomes, than other teams?	<i>e.g. sales data, increased market share, reputation etc.</i>
6.	What is the atmosphere like in the highest performing team?	<i>e.g. fun, energised, quietly business-like etc.</i>
7.	How would you describe the culture in the highest performing team?	<i>e.g. positive, empowering, inclusive, stretching etc.</i>
8.	How would you describe relationships in the highest performing team?	<i>e.g. competitive, friendly, critical, demanding etc.</i>
9.	Do they know they are a high performing team? If so how do they know? If not, why not?	<i>e.g. public statements, award winning, performance reviews etc.</i>
10.	If you could sum it up in one sentence, what would you say to complete this sentence?	<i>"They are the best team we have because..."</i>

Then ask yourself and everyone else what you or they could or should do to create those same positive conditions in all the teams throughout your business. Just asking those questions of your key people and analysing their answers, plus asking for suggestions to apply improvements across your business, will put you well ahead of the competition.

A Failure to Analyse.

That's because in our experience, most organisations don't put much if any resource into identifying what they do exceptionally well or get right. In most businesses success is taken for granted and goes unexamined. There seems to be a fear that self-congratulation might lead to complacency.

All of the evidence from Positive Psychology and Appreciative Inquiry tells us that analysing success in detail and then applying the lessons learnt to new situations is the fastest way to improve performance, increase the quality of what we do, or the product or service we deliver.

Most organisations don't seem to know that. What most organisations spend most of their diagnostic resources on is investigating and analysing faults, problems, failures and complaints. They take a deconstructive approach based on a deficiency model.

They ask questions such as:

"What are the problems?"

"What's wrong?"

"What needs to be fixed?"

Sometimes they phrase the question in terms of "What are the challenges?" which still focuses on negativity, on deficiency, on what needs to be fixed or solved.

10 Negative Questions

If you find this approach more familiar and would like to diagnose the situation in terms of problems to be solved, on the next page are 10 negative questions you might ask yourself.

10 Negative Questions to Ask:

1.	Which is your poorest performing team, and why?	<i>e.g. poor results, low quality work, reducing business etc.</i>
2.	How do you know they are poorly performing?	<i>e.g. from rumours, internal reputation, colleague's comments, feedback from customers etc..</i>
3.	What specifically do you measure, track or count to identify them?	<i>e.g. invoiced amounts, stock turnover, regional sales levels</i>
4.	What should they do better, how could they operate more effectively?	<i>e.g. cross selling, find out customer needs, share market intelligence etc.</i>
5.	What would they be doing if they wanted to achieve more?	<i>e.g. focus on sales, increase market share, develop their reputation etc.</i>
6.	What is the atmosphere like in the poorest performing team?	<i>e.g. negative, depowering, clique-based, frustrating etc.</i>
7.	How would you describe the culture in your poorest performing team?	<i>e.g. negative, depowering, clique-based, frustrating etc.</i>
8.	How would you describe relationships in your worst performing team?	<i>e.g. competitive, unfriendly, critical, demanding etc.</i>
9.	Do they know they are a poorly performing team? If so, how do they know? If not, why not?	<i>e.g. public statements, lack of rewards, poor performance reviews etc.</i>
10.	If you could sum it up in one sentence, what would you say?	<i>"They are the worst team we have because..."</i>

Again, ask yourself and everyone else why this is happening, how long it has been going on, and what you or they could or should do to improve things. Your purpose is to create more positive conditions in all the teams so that they stop failing and start to succeed throughout your business.

6 Indicators of Team Success or Failure.

As a senior leader, there are a number of organisational level indicators you could measure to identify if things are going well or if you have a problem. Because they are negative indicators, they are usually reducing if things are going well, or increasing if things are going wrong. You should be able to ask HR for this information.

For example do you have:

	Good (Decreasing)	Bad (Increasing)
1. Staff Turnover		
2. Serious Errors		
3. Customer Complaints		
4. Internal Disputes and Grievances		

Two other sources of diagnostic information you could use are

5. Staff surveys
6. Exit interviews

All of these indicators should be continuously monitored and analysed by HR for you. For example, what, what does your last staff survey tell you? What does their analysis of exit interviews tell you?" If you don't already survey your staff, we can help you to organise a survey. We can discuss what questions you would like to ask, and more importantly, what you want to do with the answers.

What does the analysis of recent exit interviews tell you? If you don't usually interview staff when they are leaving (exiting) your business, you could identify one or two recent leavers and ask

someone from HR to phone them. We can help you to identify the key questions you want to ask, or we could conduct the exit interviews on your behalf.

What do you do next?

Well that depends on what you want to achieve. If you found this guide useful, and the various analytical questions gave you some helpful insights or food for thought, you could decide that you want to take things further. You might choose to talk confidentially to someone with the experience and expertise to help you to improve team performance in your business. If so, please get in touch now on 0800 840 4122. We are experts in our field, have a successful 28 year track record of working in the private sector and can show you brilliant testimonials from our clients.

You may also want to consider our [Leadership Skills Development Programme](#) and see if a free [Organisational Diagnostics Session](#) would be helpful to you and your organisation. You can also call us to discuss how you can get up to 50% matched funding for this training through the government's Growth Accelerator programme. We look forward to hearing from you and we'll be happy to help you in any way we can.

Together we can fix it!

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