Strengthening How Teams and Organizations Work Together - 17014

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ASTRACT

Ultimately, strengthening how teams and organizations work together is both a science and an art. A solid understanding of what it takes is developed by studying two types of factors: those that tangible and those that are intangible. This paper discusses both, and it presents a framework to bring them together. This framework makes it possible to identify areas of a project or program that are strong (that support people working together) and areas that are weak (that make it difficult for people to work together).

The tangible factors are presented in three categories:

1. Processes (how work gets done),
2. People (what participants bring to the table), and
3. The project or program (its material characteristics).

Intangible factors are more difficult to describe using concrete descriptions. These are presented, therefore, through the use of a concept — that of the distinction between Power and Force. This distinction helps people put into words and discuss qualities they intuitively feel are present.

Tangible and intangible factors are brought together in the *Halifax Strength Indicator*, a tool those participating in a project use to identify and discuss areas of strength and weakness. The *Halifax Strength Indicator* is useful at three key points in a project lifecycle:

• At the beginning to identify areas to be developed or strengthened,
• During the process to identify factors that contribute to nonproductive conflict, and
• At the end as a lessons-learned exercise.

The ideas in this paper offer a new and expanded framework useful for cross-organizational teams and projects, during times of organizational restructuring or transition, and for partnering and collaborative project teams.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty years, the author has helped teams and organizations work together coming from two distinct vantage points:

1. A focus on tangible conditions such as roles and responsibilities, operating procedures, implementation plans, goals and priorities, scheduling, interpersonal skills, group process skills, and

2. A focus on intangible conditions — the underlying mindset, habits of thought, perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of those involved in or that influence a project or program.

In earlier works (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) the author presented concepts and case studies that focus primarily on tangible factors and how these are managed or adjusted. This paper presents a more holistic perspective that begins to address the intangible factors and provide a means to evaluate both tangible and intangible factors together.

This paper incorporates and extends two important pieces of work:

1. The first is the *Disputes Potential Index* (8) developed in the mid-1990's to predict the likelihood of contract disputes in the construction industry.

2. The second is the work by the late David R. Hawkins, M.D., Ph.D. (9, 10, 11) regarding the distinction between Power and Force. His work makes it possible to recognize and understand the effects of levels of consciousness on a project or program.

DISCUSSION

The following discussion presents seventeen tangible attributes that strengthen how teams and organizations work together. Following this, the distinction between Power and Force is presented as it relates to this subject.

Next, the *Halifax Strength Indicator,* a framework that brings these together, is presented, and a demonstration of its use is provided.

Tangible Attributes - The 3 P's

Seventeen attributes that strengthen how teams and organizations work together are identified and described in Figures 1, 2, and 3. These are the 3 P's: Processes, People, and the Project. These are written in the affirmative, i.e., the ideal state.

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**Figure 1. Process Attributes
That Strengthen How Teams and Organizations Work Together**

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1. **Roles and Responsibilities.** There is definition, clarity, and acceptance as to roles and responsibilities not only within but between parties.

2. **Operating Procedures.** Procedures not only within but between parties and organizations are reasonable, well-defined, understood, and adopted.

3. **Implementation Plans.** Implementation plans are spelled out in writing and adopted by all parties.

4. **Team Building.** Participants engage in some level of team development to understand one another's expectations and appreciate one another's values.

5. **Sense of Fairness.** Processes are fair, inclusive, and transparent.

6. **Emotional Satisfaction.** Participants experience being heard, valued, and respected.

**Figure 2. People Attributes
That Strengthen How Teams and Organizations Work Together**

7. **Experience/Competency.** Participants have experience and/or competency with the type of work being performed.

8. **Character Traits.** Participants are flexible, patient, open-minded, confident, unselfish, persistent, diplomatic, and honest.

9. **Interpersonal Skills.** Participants are good communicators, they listen, and they demonstrate respect for others.

10. **Group Process Skills.** Participants use negotiation, facilitation, collaboration, conflict resolution, and consensus-building as situations require.

11. **Reliability and Determination.** Participants are responsive, reliable, and optimistic that the work can be accomplished.

**Figure 3. Project Attributes
That Strengthen How Teams and Organizations Work Together**

12. **History Together.** Participants have a positive history of working together.

13. **Scope Definition.** The project/program is appropriately defined.

14. **Goals/Priorities.** Goals and priorities are clearly defined, spelled out in writing, and supported by all participants.

15. **Power Balance.** Participants have a similar level of advantage.

16. **Complexity.** The work is practical, uncomplicated, or typical as compared to complex, particularly challenging or "pioneer" project.

17. **Financial Planning.** Economic considerations have been appropriately addressed.

This list was developed in part using the *Disputes Potential Index* (8) which predicts, for a construction project, the likelihood of contract disputes. It is adjusted here to incorporate the author's experiences with business teams and to address inter- and cross-organizational business teams in general.

The Intangible Attributes of Power and of Force

> *"On some level — call it heart, right brain, gut, collective unconsciousness — we recognize the rightness, even the simplicity, of the principles involved."*
> —- Marilyn Ferguson

The intangible factors, the mindset of those engaged in a project, are described through the use of a concept, that of the distinction between Power and Force developed by the late David R. Hawkins, M.D., Ph.D. (9). A partial list of these attributes based on the work of Dr. Hawkins is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Attributes of Power and Force

Power	Force
Accepting	Rejecting
Agreeable	Condescending
Aware	Preoccupied
Believing	Insisting
Candid	Calculating
Conscious	Unaware
Constructive	Destructive
Cooperative	Competitive
Confident	Arrogant
Democratic	Dictatorial
Determined	Stubborn
Disciplined	Careless
Equal	Superior
Excellent	Adequate
Experienced	Cynical
Flexible	Rigid
Forgiving	Condemning, resenting
Global	Local
Helpful	Meddling
Leading	Coercing
Long-term	Immediate
Open	Secretive
Orderly	Confusing
Privileged	Entitled
Requesting	Demanding
Respectful	Demeaning
Steadfast	Faltering
Taking responsibility	Blaming
Thoughtful, trusting	Gullible

People may use Force, consciously or unconsciously, to attempt to acquire Power. This use of Force or Power changes the dynamics of how teams and organizations work together (Table 2).

Table 2. The Effects of Power and Force on Teams and Organizations

Power	Force
Attracts and unifies people	Repels and polarizes people
Energizes people to do their best	Depletes people's energy
Elicits loyalty and devotion	Creates enemies and false friends
Makes it possible for people to see beyond their own self-interests	Limits people to seeing only what is important to them
Provides a calm, inspiring work environment	Creates a mundane, emotionally taxing work environment
Emphasizes the search for solutions	Emphasizes difficulties, who/what is wrong
Breeds long-term success	Breeds short-term gains
Creates a focus on the present/future	Creates a focus on the present/past
Serves people, their projects, and their organizations	Exploits people, their projects, and their organizations

Evaluating How Teams and Organizations Work Together

Tangible and intangible attributes are brought together in the *Halifax Strength Indicator (HSI).* The HSI presented here (Table 3) is populated with data (scores) developed by a fictional cross-organizational project team of seven individuals. Each individual reviews the seventeen areas and marks an "X" in one of the six columns (in column 5 or 4 where they perceive the project is strong, in column 0 or 1 where they perceive the project is weak, and in column 3 or 2 where they perceive the project is neither strong nor weak). Areas 1 - 6 and 12 - 17 are scored relative to the entire project/program. Areas 7 - 11 are scored in terms of what the individual scoring the HSI personally brings to the project or program.

Columns that describe strength are colored green to signify nature, growth, renewal, good luck, and money. Columns to describe weakness are colored grey (a neutral color) to signify a lack of movement/warmth/growth.

Once participants develop their individual scores, they input these on a "group copy" of the HSI typically presented on poster-size sheets hung on the wall. Individual scores are not combined or averaged so that the HSI reveals the range of scores for each area.

**Table 3. The *Halifax Strength Indicator* -
Areas of a Project That Strengthen or Weaken How People Work Together**

AREA	Attributes of a Project or Program That is Strong (the 3 P's)	Attributes of Power (Strength)	5	4	3	2	1	0	Attributes of Force (Weakness)
P-1: Processes (how work gets done)									
1	**ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES** There is definition, clarity, and acceptance as to roles and responsibilities not only within but between parties.	Conscious Equal Flexible Orderly Privileged			X X	X X	X X X		Unaware Superior Rigid Confusing Entitled
2	**OPERATING PROCEDURES** Procedures not only within but between parties and organizations are reasonable, well-defined, understood, and adopted.	Conscious Disciplined Orderly Ruled by reason/ inspiration		X X X	X X X				Unaware Careless Confusing Ruled by emotions/wants
3	**IMPLEMENTATION PLANS** Implementation plans are spelled out in writing and adopted by all parties.	Excellent Open Ruled by reason & inspiration				X X X	X X	X X	Adequate Secretive Ruled by emotions or wants
4	**TEAM BUILDING** Participants engage in some level of team development to understand one another's expectations and appreciate one another's values.	Cooperative Long-term Personal Unifying				X X	X X X X	X	Competitive Immediate Impersonal Dividing

AREA	Attributes of a Project or Program That is Strong (the 3 P's)	Attributes of Power (Strength)	5	4	3	2	1	0	Attributes of Force (Weakness)
5	**FAIRNESS** Processes are fair, inclusive, and transparent.	Giving							Taking
		Open				X	X		Secretive
		Participative				X	X	X	Dominating
		Respectful				X	X		Demeaning
6	**EMOTIONAL SATISFACTION** Participants experience being heard, valued, and respected.	Aware				X			Preoccupied
		Respectful			X	X	X	X	Demeaning
		Sensitive			X	X	X		Insensitive
P-2:	**People (what individuals bring to the situation)**								
7	**EXPERIENCE/ COMPETENCY** Participants have experience and/or competency with the type of work being performed.	Confident		X					Arrogant
		Natural	X	X					Artificial
		Privileged	X	X					Entitled
		Striving	X	X					Struggling
8	**CHARACTER TRAITS** Participants are flexible, patient, open-minded, confident, unselfish, persistent, diplomatic, and honest.	Diplomatic			X		X		Deceptive
		Flexible		X	X		X		Rigid
		Generous		X	X	X			Selfish
		Honest							Legal
9	**INTERPERSONAL SKILLS** Participants are good communicators, they listen, and they demonstrate respect.	Confident			X				Arrogant
		Respectful		X	X	X			Demeaning
		Sincere		X	X				Deceptive

A R E A	Attributes of a Project or Program That is Strong (the 3 P's)	Attributes of Power (Strength)	5	4	3	2	1	0	Attributes of Force (Weakness)
10	**GROUP PROCESS SKILLS** Participants use negotiation, facilitation, collaboration, conflict resolution, and consensus-building as situations require.	Democratic Leading Preserving Unifying	X	X	X X	X	X	X	Dictatorial Coercing Exploiting Dividing
11	**RELIABILITY AND DETERMINATION** Participants are responsive, reliable, and optimistic that the work can be accomplished.	Disciplined Optimistic Self-aware Steadfast				X X	X X X	X X	Careless Pessimistic Unaware Faltering
P - 3: the Project (its material characteristics)									
12	**HISTORY TOGETHER** Participants have a positive history of working together.	Focusing on the present/future Forgiving Honest					X X	X X X X X	Focusing on the present/past Resenting Legal
13	**SCOPE DEFINITION** Projects and programs Are appropriately defined.	Disciplined Excellent Orderly	X X X	X X X X					Careless Adequate Confusing
14	**GOALS AND PRIORITIES** Goals and priorities are clearly defined, spelled out in writing, and supported by all participants.	Conscious Disciplined Global	X	X X X X	X X				Unaware Careless Local

AREA	Attributes of a Project or Program That is Strong (the 3 P's)	Attributes of Power (Strength)	5	4	3	2	1	0	Attributes of Force (Weakness)
15	**POWER BALANCE** Participants have a similar level of advantage.	Balanced Equal Preserving, enhancing	X	X X		X	X X	X	Excessive Superior Exploiting, using up
16	**COMPLEXITY** The work is practical, uncomplicated, or typical as compared to complex, particularly challenging or "pioneer" project.	Challenging Orderly	X	X X		X X		X X	Impeding Confusing
17	**FINANCIAL PLANNING** All parties have been able to plan for and are prepared to manage economic considerations.	Disciplined Long-term Preserving, enhancing	X X X	X X X	X				Careless Immediate Exploiting, using up

Strengthening How Teams and Organizations Work Together

"We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them."
— Albert Einstein

The HSI, once populated with individual scores, tells a multi-layered story, a story that helps a project team elevate their thinking and shift to a solution-oriented mindset.

The story begins with the recognition of areas where the project is strong (scores of 5's and 4's), where the project is weak (scores of 0's and 1's), where the project is neither strong nor weak (scores of 2's and 3's), and where participants have divergent opinions (scores spread from 5's to 0's).

For example, the fictional project scores are as follows:

- Strong in Areas 7 (Experience/Competence), 13 (Scope Definition), 14 (Goal and Priorities), and 17 (Financial Planning),

- Weak in Areas 3 (Implementation Plans), 4 (Team Building), 5 (Fairness), 6 (Emotional Satisfaction), 11 (Reliability and Determination), and 12 (History Together),

- Neither strong nor weak in Areas 1 (Roles and Responsibilities) and 2 (Operating Procedures), and

- Divergent in Areas 8 (Character Traits), 9 (Interpersonal Skills), 10 (Group Process Skills), 15 (Power Balance), and 16 (Complexity).

Areas that score strong are discussed first. For the fictional project, the team recognizes the composition of their group is sufficient in terms of participants having similar levels of experience and competency in their subject matter (Area 7). They recognize the project scope, goals, and priorities are well defined (Areas 13 and 14). They acknowledge that appropriate financial planning is in place (Area 17).

Areas where scores are divergent is discussed next. For the fictional project, these are Areas 9 (Interpersonal Skills) and 10 (Group Process Skills). A discussion reveals that while some individuals consider they possess these skills, others consider they (personally) lack them. This leads to a discussion as to how these skills might be acquired.

Scores are also divergent in Area 16 (Complexity). A discussion reveals that while team members have the requisite competencies and skills, for some participants (not all) this is a relatively new "pioneer" project. This discussion helps participants recognize the team can benefit if those more experienced in this type of project will mentor those with less experience.

Areas that score weak generally will comprise the most compelling part of the story. In some instances, a recognition of where a project scores weak is sufficient to motivate a team to make improvements. For example, the fictional project scores weak in Area 3 (Implementation Plans). This generates a discussion that reveals there is no substantial, written implementation plan and this, in itself, motivates the project team to develop one.

In some instances, a recognition of areas where a project scores weak is insufficient to inspire change. For example, the fictional project scores weak in Team Building, Fairness, Emotional Satisfaction, Reliability and Determination, and History Together (Areas 4, 5, 6, 11, and 12).

A discussion reveals that something happened in the past that polarized the team, and the conflict was never openly acknowledged or addressed. Lingering negative feelings remain. There has been no interest in team building of any sort, and there is a general lack of respect and sensitivity. This unresolved conflict reduces the team's energy and enthusiasm for working on the project.

Replacing attributes of Force with attributes of Power releases negative energy. One method of doing this is through a "clearing" process led by a competent third party. This begins with each individual of the project team recording on poster sheets their perceptions of what happened that impacted the team, how they felt

about what happened, and what assumptions and perceptions they developed. Each participant then presents (reads out) their responses to the entire project team. There is no discussion or debate. Clarifying questions are directed through the third party.

This method elicits honesty and candidness (attributes of Power). It is orderly, disciplined, and respectful (attributes of Power). Participants become aware (an attribute of Power) why other people behaved as they did. Participants are likely to take responsibility (an attribute of Power) for their part in what happened. These attributes of Power replace corresponding attributes of Force.

While several rounds of clearing may be necessary, once this process is complete, the negative energy is released, and a new level of thinking (a more global view — an attribute of Power) is present. What had been an area of weakness (History Together) now becomes an area of strength. Coming from strength and with renewed energy, the project team is able to discuss and develop improvements to strengthen their project in other areas.

CONCLUSIONS

The development of this paper has evolved the author's thinking as to why certain processes used by Organizational Development specialists work. Simply put, successful processes replace attributes of Force with attributes of Power.

The distinction between Power and Force is useful in that it helps people put into language and discuss what they intuitively feel. In the author's experience presenting this distinction, people immediately "get it" and find it easier to talk about impressions they didn't know how to put into words.

The *Halifax Strength Indicator* makes it easy for a project team to recognize, discuss, and address areas of strength and weakness. This tool recognizes that strengthening how teams and organizations work together is both a science and an art.

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