

# Knowledge Worker

## Six C's of Successful Team Performance

(July 2020)

When it comes to human performance, there are two basic kinds: individual and team. To my way of thinking, there are six major components involved in successful team performance<sup>1</sup>. Each begins with the letter “C” - hence the title of this month’s column. The six C’s are shown in the diagram below:



**Control** refers to the team’s ability to align actual conditions with intended conditions and keep them aligned. Plainly put, control means getting and keeping things the way the team wants them to be. Control hinges on being clear about the goal or result being sought, having the necessary resources and support, and having timely information about the current state of the goal and about the effects of team member’s actions. In short, team performance depends on individual control and that in turn hinges on goal clarity and timely, accurate feedback. Perhaps most important, control hinges on team members’ ability to rely on one another.

**Communication** refers to the sharing of information. Team members need to be fully informed about factors relevant to their jobs and, typically, about the contributions those jobs make to the team’s larger goals and purposes. Information needs to flow freely. Withholding, hiding, and failing to disclose or share information with team members who need it to do their jobs harms team performance. Communication enables control.

**Cooperation** refers to one or more people acting in ways that assist or help other people get their jobs done. Joe has more work than he can handle and is falling behind on a couple of key projects. Joe’s boss asks Josephine to give Joe a hand. Josephine agrees and meets with Joe to see how best she can help. She is cooperating. Think of cooperation as lending a hand when asked or directed, or voluntarily doing so. Is communication also involved? Obviously. Is cooperation essential to control? Absolutely.

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<sup>1</sup> Team performance and unit performance are not the same. Team performance is marked by interdependent roles and assignments. Unit performance can and often does consist of a collection of independent roles and assignments.

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**Coordination** refers to timing or synchronization of activities. Joe again needs some help, this time in the kitchen at home. He has cooked a large pan of pasta and is going to drain it through a strainer. He asks his wife to hold the strainer in the sink. Joe can't pour the pasta into the strainer until it is in place. He and his wife must coordinate their actions. Are communication and cooperation also involved? Yes, but the key factor here is the sequence or timing of their actions; in a word: synchronization. Does coordination enable control? Definitely.

**Collaboration** refers to situations in which two or more people act together to achieve a common goal. Joe and Josephine's boss emails them a draft of an upcoming speech he will be making and asks them to review it and provide him with comments the two of them agree on. Joe and Josephine sit down at Josephine's computer workstation and start reviewing the boss' speech. They compile a list of agreed upon comments and email them to their boss. Are communication, cooperation and coordination also involved? Yes, they are, but Joe and Josephine are working together, on the same thing, at the same time. They are collaborating. Together, they exercise control.

**Contribution** refers to the products or results that each individual or team member produces in fulfilling his or her role on the team. Team performance is comprised of the integrated contributions of the team's members. In examining team performance, we must also look at individual roles and the contributions of those roles. They are the building blocks of team performance. Does individual performance depend on communication, cooperation, coordination or collaboration? Sometimes yes and sometimes no. Does individual performance depend on individual control? Most definitely.

There you have it; the six C's of successful team performance. Ponder them and think of them as a checklist of items to examine the next time you find yourself in a situation where you're trying to figure out how to understand, correct or improve team performance. Here they are again.

1. Control. Clear goals, resources and support, and accurate, timely feedback.
2. Communication. The full, free flow of information.
3. Cooperation. Lending a hand when asked or directed.
4. Coordination. Timing, sequence, or synchronization of actions.
5. Collaboration. Working together.
6. Contributions. Individual results.

### A Seventh C - Culture

It has been suggested to me that there is a seventh C – Culture. I will provide some comments on that score, but I won't add it to the list above.

Culture refers to the norms, values and behavior patterns of the organization, what some refer to as "the way things work around here." Culture can foster or impede team performance. If the culture is one in which "it's every man for himself," or "information is power" (and everyone sits on information as a way of exercising power), or if the culture is marked by severe punishment for minor mistakes, then individual and team performance will suffer. However, keep in mind that "the way things work around here" is kept that way by folks whose interests are served by the existing culture. Moreover, they are powerful enough to keep them in place. To change an organization's culture often requires replacing or

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at least sidelining some key players, which many leaders are loath to do. Generally speaking, there's not much you can do about it if culture is the culprit, but at least you can identify it as such.

### An Eighth C - Conflict

It was also suggested that I add an eighth C – Conflict. Conflict does indeed occur in teams and between teams, and it also occurs between individuals and between units, often having to do with differences regarding results, resources and relationships. It is not my view that conflict contributes to team performance; indeed, more often than not, conflict diminishes team performance. About all I'll say here is that conflict has to be well-managed or it will indeed disrupt team performance.

### About the Author

Fred Nickols has had a long and interesting career spanning more than 50 years in the workplace. He spent 20 years in the U.S. Navy, serving as a technician, an instructor a programmed instruction writer and an internal OD consultant before retiring in 1974 as a decorated Chief Petty Officer. In the private sector, he worked first as a consultant, then held executive positions with two former clients, and then, in 2001, returned to consulting. He is a master problem solver, a solution engineer, a toolmaker, a knowledge worker, a writer, a trainer, and a performance improvement consultant. Currently, Fred is the *Managing Partner* at [Distance Consulting LLC](#). His web site is home to the award-winning [Knowledge Workers' Tool Room](#) and more than 200 free articles, book chapters, papers and columns. Fred writes this column on a monthly basis. All Knowledge Worker columns are accessible on his web site by clicking [here](#).