EXTRAORDINARY TEAMS:
How Ordinary Teams Achieve Amazing Results
Presented by Kathleen Ryan and Kevin Coray
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Thank you very much for submitting these great questions. Our responses include references to our book, _Extraordinary Groups_ (Wiley, 2009) as well as our website. In _Extraordinary Groups_, you'll find the Group Needs Model, a resource that is complementary yet different than the model presented in HRDQ's _Extraordinary Teams_ workshop. Our website presents information about both the book and the assessment tool. Here you'll find a Resources tab that includes several articles and practical tools. The guidance we offer is the result of extensive research, the application of the Extraordinary Teams Inventory principles, and our combined experience as consultants. Again, thank you for attending the Extraordinary Teams webinar. We hope you found the information to be helpful and of use in your organization.   ~Kathleen Ryan and Kevin Coray

Q: Is building trust a necessary precursor to discussion of Compelling Purpose? And what truly motivates each? ~Patrick

Kathleen Ryan:
A: No. Actually, a discussion of how a team's purpose inspires each team member is a great way to build trust. When team members share why they find a purpose compelling, they share their values. This helps people get to know each other better and it also builds trust. Click here for a suggestion about how to engage team members in this type of discussion.

Members are motivated by many different values. For many, the chance to make a difference and to accomplish something bold—or something for the greater good—can be very inspirational.

Q: Based on your research, what's the average lifespan of an extraordinary team? My team disbanded after our project was over (mostly contractors and company acquisition). We all keep in touch and agree that that was the best team we've ever worked on. We were together about 2.5 years, 14 years ago. ~Margot

Kevin Coray
A: The lifespan of an extraordinary team can vary dramatically. Project teams are an ideal environment for extraordinariness to be developed. As the team is formed, it often has high expectations, short deadlines, relatively long working hours, hand-picked members, and other favorable conditions that increase Compelling Purpose and Full Engagement. Further, the team can come together socially as well due to the close working conditions, and that encourages Strengthened Relationships. If the team takes the time to focus on the Five Indicators of an Extraordinary Team as it is coming together, it may move toward becoming extraordinary more quickly. On the other hand, we are aware of a few teams that have been together for decades that are extraordinary. Teams do have a cycle. Sustaining the extraordinary level takes work

and commitment. For all extraordinary teams, it's important to remember that not every moment of every meeting is exceptional.

Q: What differences do you find working with executive teams? ~Scott

Kathleen Ryan
A: When it comes to the elements that influence whether or not a team becomes extraordinary, there are no differences between an executive team and any other team. That said a team of executives may include a larger percentage of confident people with large egos who are particularly sensitive to organizational politics. When present, these qualities make it even more important for the team to pay attention to the following:

- Compelling Purpose to frame an inspirational and unifying context.
- Embracing Differences to utilize differing perspectives as a way to move ahead together rather than competing over who is right
- Full Engagement to encourage all to take equal ownership for fulfilling the Compelling Purpose.

Q: Can you offer some suggestions for good questions to use for group check-in? ~Jennifer

Kevin Coray
A: During the webinar we talked about ways to shift the team toward a deeper level of relationship and greater levels of engagement. A few ideas to check-in with the team include:
- At the beginning of the meeting, ask each person to briefly respond to a question or offer an unfinished sentence that has a personal or group focus. Move from one person to another without comment. Suggestions include:
  o What is your mood as we begin today?
  o What is one thing you'll set aside so you can be fully present at today's meeting?
  o What's the best thing that happened to you last week?
  o One thing I hope for out of today's agenda is…
  o When I think of the work we've been doing, the thing I am most proud of is…
- After everyone has spoken, ask the group to center in and be present for the next hour (or however long the meeting is).
- Repeat the overall purpose of the meeting and how it relates to the team's Compelling Purpose. Ask people to keep the purpose in mind as they engage in the meeting.
- Ask people to turn off their computers and cell phones.

Q: In your studies, how critical was the team leader in creating an extraordinary team? ~Aaron

Kathleen Ryan
A: When there is a designated team leader, it's critical that he or she leads with a facilitative style and encourages the Five Indicators of an Extraordinary Team. Chapter 9 of *Extraordinary*

Groups is devoted to this topic and offers guidance on six different leadership strategies. If a leader is control oriented and does not believe in the notion of shared leadership, it will be more difficult for a team to become extraordinary.

Q: **Though you use teams and groups interchangeably, do you distinguish them in any way? ~Nancy**

Kevin Coray

A: Not really. In the original research that went into *Extraordinary Groups*, Geoff Bellman and Kathleen Ryan used the term *group* to be broader than teams in work settings (school or church committees, book clubs, exercise groups, and volunteer boards, for example). The *Extraordinary Teams Inventory* is primarily focused on teams in a work setting, task teams, project teams, volunteer teams, etc.

Q: **Have you measured "authenticity" of application of the five factors? ~Ron**

Kevin Coray

A: The five indicators measured by the *Extraordinary Teams Inventory* have high reliability and validity. The Facilitator Guide provides all of the technical details about the inventory. In summary, the indicators were developed with factor analysis to maximize construct validity. As such, the indicators are quite independent (low inter-indicator correlations), while the items within the indicators are highly related (construct validity). The indicators significantly differentiate among groups (ANOVA). The indicators have reliability coefficients ranging from r_{xx} equals .79 to .90.

Q: **In your research, have you discovered that some environments are more receptive to being extraordinary than others? ~Jonathan**

Kathleen Ryan

A: Not so much from our research but from our work experience, we've discovered some differences. If the work of a team is more routinized and proscribed (think manufacturing in a highly regulated industry), there are understandably fewer opportunities for creativity, spontaneity, pushing beyond one's current role, and trying new approaches. When an organization's desired results require collaboration and innovation, there is much more room for the dynamics that contribute to extraordinariness. Related to the answers of questions 3 and 5, it will be harder to reach extraordinary if a team's environment includes a top-down, control-oriented leader or members who are more interested in winning arguments than fulfilling a common purpose.

Q: **Can you give examples of questions in the short, personal check-in to ask a group to strengthen relationships. ~Janice**

Kevin Coray

A: Beyond what we offered in the question above, improving Strengthened Relationships is quite personal. Often this particular indicator is improved better in small groups or in workshop settings where deeper sharing is possible. During a check-in, the leader might ask people to pair off and share briefly something important in their current lives and discuss what they are doing to step into that personal situation fully.

Q: **In your experience, how long does it take for a team to move from formation to "solid" or "extraordinary?" ~Jeannette**

Kevin Coray

A: In addition to our response above, the real answer is: *it all depends*. Moving from solid to extraordinary might be very quick if a new team designs the extraordinary team principles into its operations. Or, a team with only one indicator in the low-solid or ordinary category that really focuses and commits to action will move more quickly. For many teams, however, this is a longer process where multiple areas need attention. The good news is that the Five Indicators of Extraordinary Teams are synergistically related. Making real progress in one will make it easier to make progress in others as team members recognize the new playing level that is required to be truly "extraordinary".

Q: **How do you motivate teams when you are losing teammates? ~Bruce**

Kathleen Ryan

A: When teammates leave or join the group, it's extremely important to pay attention to the human dimensions of team dynamics. Take a look at the Group Needs Model in *Extraordinary Groups* (our website provides an overview of these concepts as does Chapter 3 in the book). Create time to appreciate individuals who leave for their contribution and wish them well as they move on. Make sure that those who join are well-oriented and feel welcome. Recognize that the team is a new team at this point. Return to the questions of:

- What is our purpose?
- Why/how is it compelling?
- Given our new membership, how do we employ our strengths in structuring the work?
- How do people want to stretch and grow in this team and how can we help make that happen?

Q: **What about organization culture role? Any effect found in your research? ~Susan**

Kathleen Ryan

A: An organization's or team's culture can be viewed through the lens of 'how we do things around here'. When it comes to whole organizations, two elements are key: 1) the need for collaborative and integrated work, and 2) a commitment from the top to employee and team development. These two elements set the context for aligning systems and processes so that 'the way we do things around here' encourages the elements critical for teams to move toward extraordinary.

Q: **I wonder if this approach is best for a team that is already fairly effective rather than one that is very dysfunctional. Can you verify? ~Denise**

Kathleen Ryan

A: Why is a team labeled as dysfunctional? If it's because the leader encourages fear and competition or team members compete for attention and credit, then don't spend much time thinking about how to help the group become more extraordinary. However, if less-than-effective teaming occurs because the Five Indicators of an Extraordinary Team have been neglected, by all means consider some type of intentional team development effort. We often think of 'moving toward extraordinary' as worthy progress, even if the state of extraordinary is never fully reached. Also, not every team needs to be exceptional. If a great deal of time and effort would be required to help a team become extraordinary, ask: *Do the desired outcomes of the team warrant this type of investment*? If the team's work is mission-critical and depends on collaboration and innovation, it's appropriate to invest! If a team is functioning well enough to accomplish their goals and team development resources would be better applied elsewhere, *not* investing might be the smarter organizational choice.

Q: **Who (culturally) were the teams you studied in terms of nationality, age, industry, and size? ~Jeannette**

Kevin Coray

A: The teams we studied are described in Chapter 3 in the *Extraordinary Teams* Facilitator Guide, along with other aspects of the research. Here's a brief summary:

- Fifty three teams were task teams most of which were in for-profit organizations, although eight were either not-for-profits or more personally oriented.
- Teams came from boards, small businesses, secondary and higher education, very large businesses in health, consumer products and consulting, as well as multi-national and federal government agencies.
- About half of the teams worked mostly face-to-face and half worked from 26% to 75% remotely.

Most of these teams were based in the United States but some included members of different nationalities.

Q: **How could this apply for a top leadership team in a public company? ~George**

Kathleen Ryan

A: By "public", I assume you mean publicly traded. The intention and steps to build an extraordinary executive team are the same you'd consider for any other team. A critical ingredient would be the person who leads this team, whether a President, CEO, or perhaps a COO.

- Does this person see the practical—as well as the philosophic—value in developing his or her team in the direction of being extraordinary?

- Is this person open to fuller levels of engagement, ownership, and share leadership by all team members?
- Is he or she willing to make some type of personal change to support others in making choices that will lead to a more extraordinary dynamic on the team?
- Is there a commitment to setting aside typical c-suite corporate politics?

If the answers to these questions are "Maybe," then some 1:1 work is necessary to help whoever is in charge to become enthusiastic about this new way of leading. It might be wise to engage an external leadership coach, team coach, or team facilitator.

Q: **Do you agree with Ken Blanchard's four stages of a team? And how does this apply to your findings? ~Laura**

Kathleen Ryan
A: Certainly Blanchard's stages happen in extraordinary teams and one could observe his four elements at play. In an extraordinary team, however, progress develops its own way—whether one is looking for Blanchard's elements or seeing how the Five Indicators of an Extraordinary Team show up. Extraordinary teams need an understood—and shared—sense of direction or goals. Once this is in place, the Five Indicators take off, combining in a catalytic way—rather than in a sequential manner. We have tried to convey this highly interactive set of elements in our visual model. Think of the Five Indicators as essential ingredients that combine—as opposed to steps in a process. Additionally, Blanchard's four stage model does not include reference to transformation—which is, along with outstanding results, a critical component of what makes a team extraordinary. Sometimes the 'wow' part of an extraordinary team experience—the trigger for a transformative experience—comes because of the messy, spontaneous, non-sequential nature of the group dynamics.