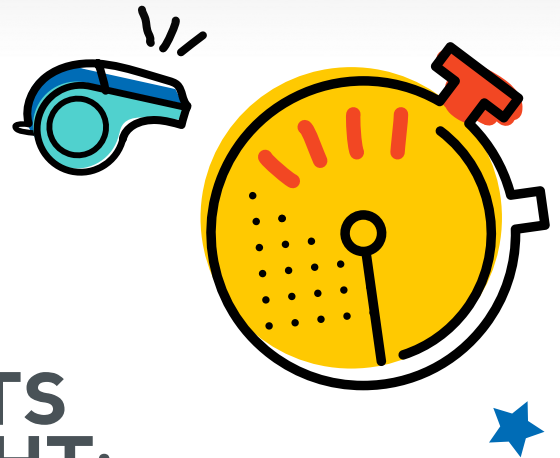




EAGLE HILL
unconventional consulting

Reinventing Change Management in Federal

THE CHANGE AGENTS HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT: **WORKFORCE TEAMS**



A new Eagle Hill Consulting survey shows that according to federal employees, optimizing change is a weak link in workplace teams, which is a missed opportunity for improving mission effectiveness. Only 13 of those surveyed strongly agree that their teammates foster change, and just slightly more (18 percent) strongly agree that their team leader does.

A convergence of forces is intensifying the pressure on federal agencies to improve how they manage change. Citizens are demanding streamlined customer experiences. Mandates are driving transformation to improve efficiency, effectiveness and stakeholder responsiveness. Resource limitations are pushing agencies to do more with less. Emerging technologies are innovating ways of working.

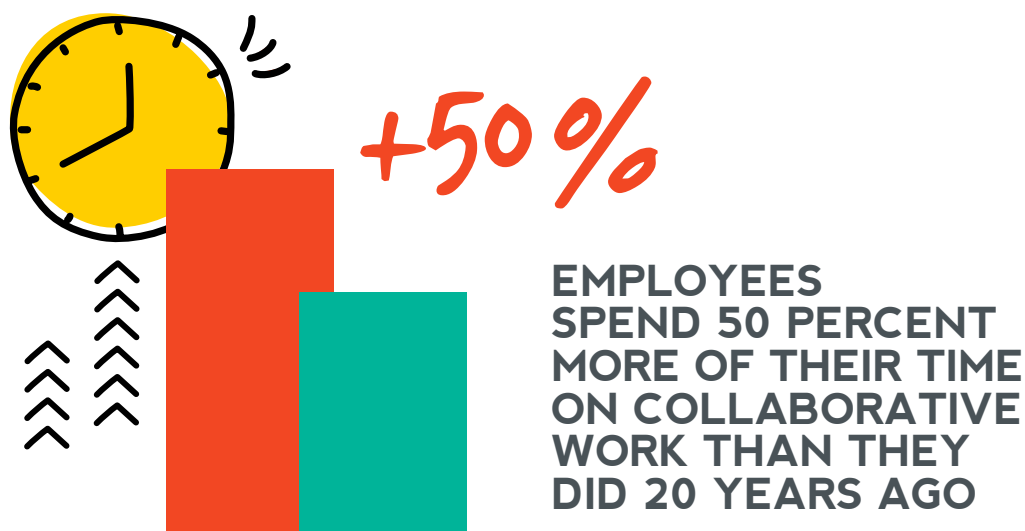
Now more than ever, an agency's ability to deliver the mission hinges on its ability to change.

In this environment, many agency leaders recognize the need to develop more adaptive organizations to deliver the mission, engage federal employees and satisfy stakeholders—from taxpayers to legislators. Many agencies have invested in traditional top-down and bottom-up change management initiatives, but these approaches do not always work. Seventy percent of transformation efforts fail, according to **Harvard Business Review**.

One reason for these failures is that linear, role-based approaches to change that focus solely on individual adoption do not align with how people work today—in teams. Consider that **Harvard Business Review** reports that employees spend 50 percent more of their time on collaborative work than they did 20 years ago. Like the private sector, federal agencies are tapping into the “collective intelligence” of multi-disciplinary teams to complete both administrative and mission-facing tasks and services.

Federal agencies have an opportunity to address this disconnect between business-as-usual change models and new ways of working to build their capacity for change. Put simply, optimizing an agency for change means optimizing teams—both teammates and team leaders—for change. The key is to make change management more networked, outcome-focused and team-based. Agencies that do this well can improve mission effectiveness, and in doing so, positively influence people's satisfaction, trust and confidence in the federal government.

This dynamic between teams and change plays out in the sports world every day. In team sports, athletes and coaches are part of something bigger than themselves. Their job is in service of the team. The team is the tribe and the touchstone. Sports teams continuously change, and at the same time, they help ground athletes through change, just like federal teams must do. Because when work happens in teams, they become the de facto nerve center of where change happens—or where it does not.

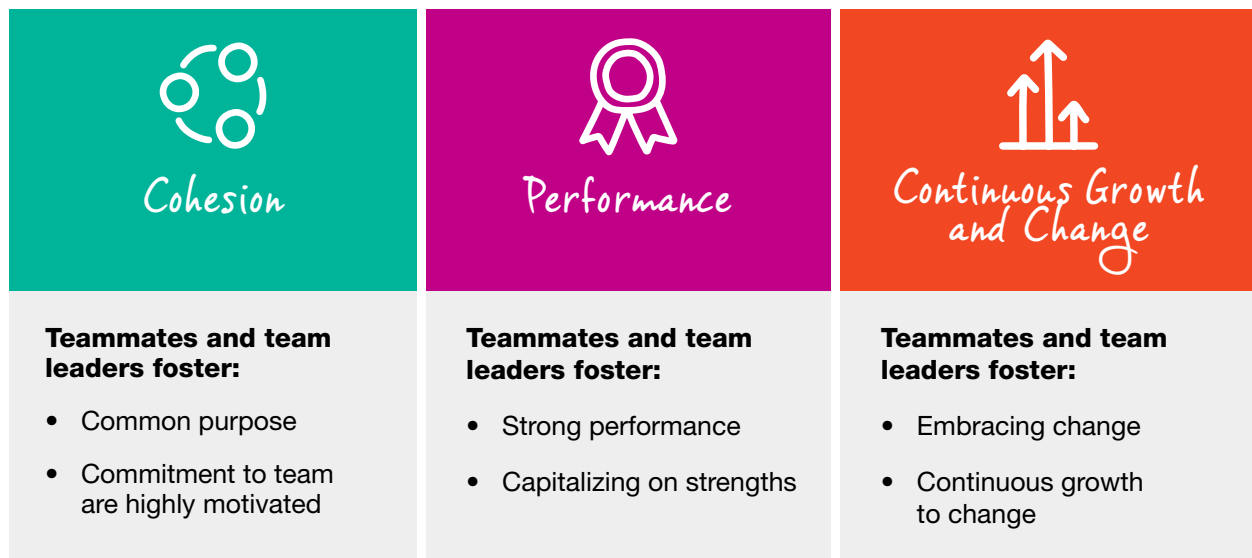


TEAMS IN SPORTS, TEAMS AT WORK: **ABILITY TO CHANGE** **A CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR**

With teams so critical to how federal agencies work today, we wanted to understand how well workplace teams are functioning today in the federal landscape.

Our survey of federal employees completed with Government Executive measures three critical elements of high-functioning teams: cohesion, performance, and continuous growth and change. As Figure 1 shows, each element is made up of key factors related to both teammates and team leaders. Each factor is essential on its own. Together, they set the foundation for a team's success.

Figure 1: High functioning teams have cohesion, performance and continuous growth and change.



Source: The Eagle Hill Consulting Workplace Teams Survey 2019

Winning sports teams have these factors in abundance. However, the survey results reveal this is not always true for teams in federal agencies—and that there is room for improvement:



COHESION: STACKING HANDS

Cohesion is team unity, an ethos grounded in the spirit of “all for one, and one for all.” According to Carron, Brawley, and Widmeyer (1998), team cohesion is “a dynamic process” and multidimensional. One dimension of team cohesion is the tangible fundamentals or rules that underpin how the team functions as a unit. This includes alignment around goals, roles, operating agreements and purpose—and in federal agencies—mission—a North Star for the federal workforce. Even so, only 22 percent of federal employees strongly agree their teammates clearly foster common purpose, and even less (19 percent) strongly believe their team leader advocates a common purpose.

The other dimension of cohesion is the intangibles, the interpersonal and social factors that bind the team together and make it better. These intangibles motivate employees, and as such, are unsung drivers of employee engagement and retention. Take commitment, for example. Just 18 percent of federal employees strongly agree that their teammates clearly foster commitment to the team. Slightly more (22 percent) strongly acknowledge their team leader’s commitment.

Federal agencies should not dismiss the importance of team cohesion, and the role that teammates and team leaders play in creating and sustaining it. Cohesion is not simply a “soft” attribute that reflects whether people work well together or if they like each other. Cohesion affects team performance and ability to change. Sports fans know this. They have watched dream teams of elite athletes fall and cohesive teams with less talented athletes’ triumph. Research published in Sport Sciences for Health confirms a correlation between team cohesion and team performance. More cohesive teams are likely to perform well, and in turn, higher-performing teams are likely to be more cohesive.



PERFORMANCE: SHOOTING FOR THE GOAL

Strong performance is an obvious aspect of an effective team, but team performance is not about a collection of individual performances. It is a coordinated collection of performances where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. It is also about the support structures that individual teammates and entire teams have behind them to help them capitalize on their strengths.

On sports teams, coaches are responsible for orchestrating these supports to get optimal performance from teams. Not surprisingly, the relationship between the athlete and the coach is fundamental in team sports, one that impacts performance. Team leaders are the coaches of federal workplace teams. Yet nearly one in three federal employees do not agree that their team leader fosters strong performance. Equally troubling, 44 percent do not agree that their team leader helps them capitalize on their strengths.

Like athletes, people on workplace teams often look to their teammates as mentors, motivators and guides who can spur their performance. When asked if their teammates foster strong performance, just two out of ten federal employees strongly agree. In addition, only 20 percent strongly agree that their teammates help them capitalize on strengths.



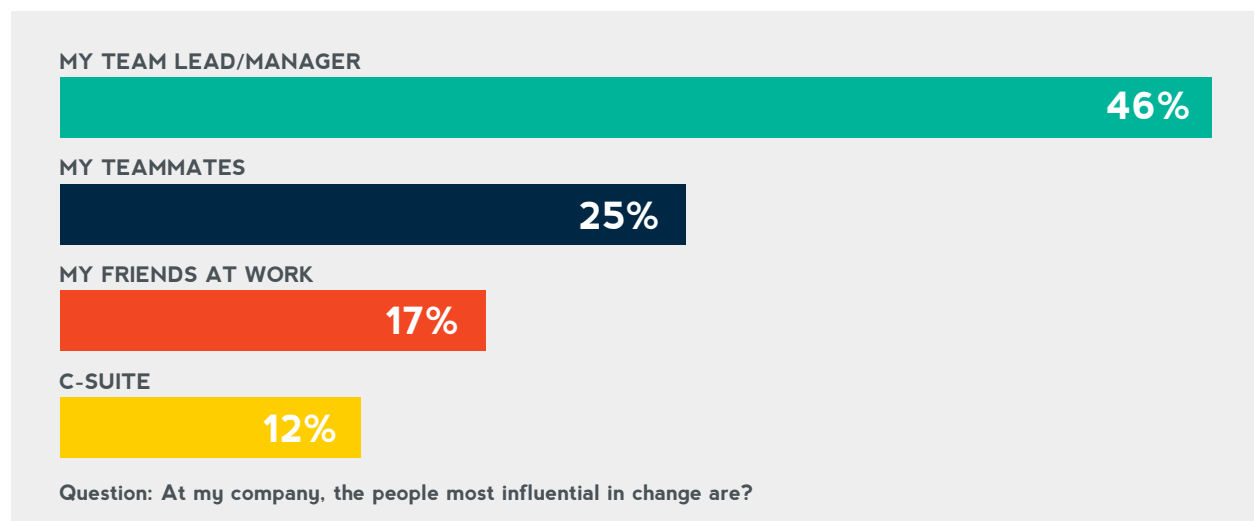
CHANGE: BEING A CHAMPION

There is no definitive answer for why federal workplace teams are not effectively delivering change. However, attitudes toward “embracing change” and “continuous growth,” which are both non-negotiable to a team’s change acumen, offer important context. Half of federal employees do not agree that their teammates foster embracing change. Slightly less (47 percent) do not agree that their team leader does this.

When asked about their team’s ability to foster continuous growth—the essence of change—federal employees have similar views. In fact, 45 percent do not agree that their teammates or their team leaders foster continuous growth.

Federal employees’ views about team leaders and change are especially revealing in light of the results of **The Eagle Hill Consulting Workplace Teams Survey 2019**. When asked who in their company is most influential in change, respondents to this survey overwhelmingly point to their team lead over teammates, work friends and the C-suite, as shown in Figure 2. Yet of all the factors that federal team leads foster for their teams, embracing change and continuous growth rank last, which suggests that the recognized change champion for federal teams is not prioritizing change.

Figure 2: The results of a national survey of the US workforces view team leads as the most important influencers of change at the workplace



Source: **The Eagle Hill Consulting Workplace Teams Survey 2019**

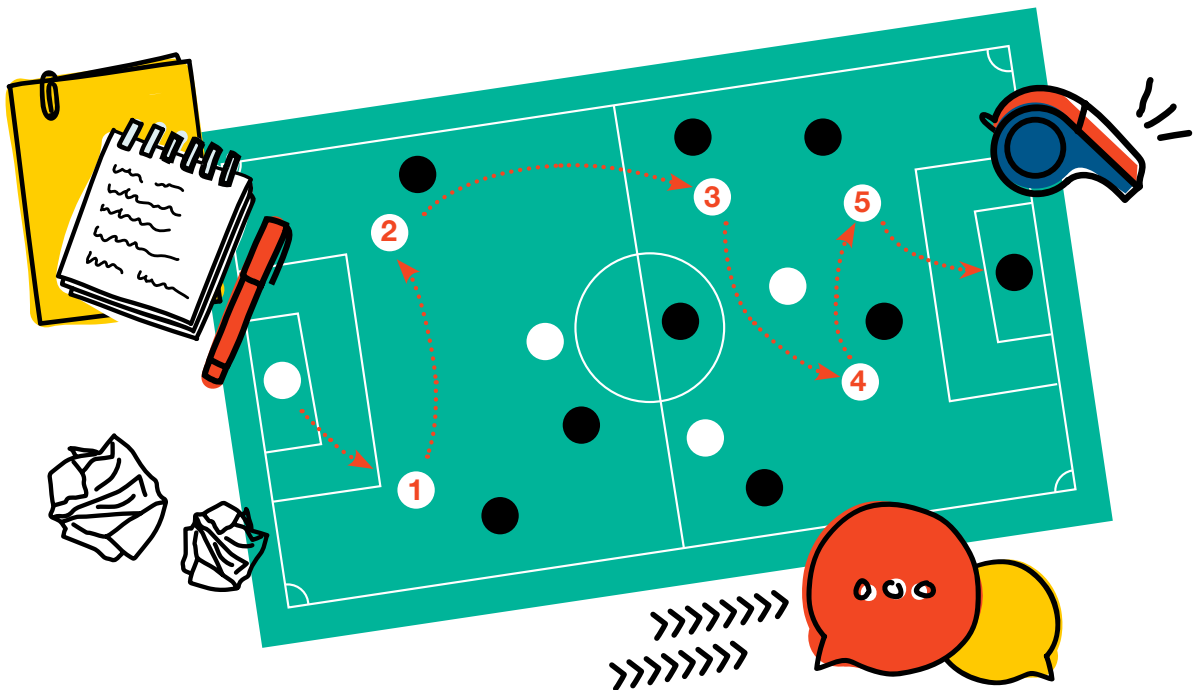
This would not fly on a sports team. They have to get better, change and continuously learn. This drive to improve powers every great sports dynasty from the New York Yankees to the New England Patriots to the US Women’s National Soccer Team. In an article in Fast Company, Tony DiCicco, who coached the women’s soccer team in the 1990s, recalls what he told them when he retired. He reminded them of several memorable moments where the team experienced both extraordinary highs and crushing lows. “Remember all three situations, because each offers incredible motivation’.” He understood that champions do not, and cannot, stand still.

PLAYBOOK FOR TEAM-BASED CHANGE

Federal agencies need a new playbook to improve workplace teams and how they embrace change. The traditional playbook involves identifying stakeholders, doing a current and future state analysis, identifying the gaps, and developing a strategy to mitigate them. All this is done on a role basis, not on a team basis. This approach is no longer relevant given the team orientation of work today. This is why a new approach is so important. While there is no one-size-fits-all blueprint for team-based change—and different strategies work for high-performing and low-performing teams—these are the building blocks to success:

1 CULTURE: CREATE A CULTURE OF CHANGE

Above anything else, culture provides the magnetic pull for change. If an agency's culture does not welcome and cultivate change, everything else ultimately falls flat. This is why it is so critical for agencies to act as their own culture champions and incorporate change readiness into their strategic vision, mission and core values. Codifying culture in this way is non-negotiable to enable organization-wide and team-based change. However, this cannot be a one-and-done process. It must be an ongoing commitment to break the mold on traditional project management. This is an opportunity for federal agencies to support the strategic importance of “we” in ways they have not in the past.



2 LEADERS: LOOK IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

Leaders set the tone; the worst thing they can do is to prohibit employees from changing. Federal agencies should redefine leadership to ground change-ready teams. Leadership can and should encompass more than vertical growth through agency ranks. New programs can help to groom leaders to lead with authenticity, delivering against agency and stakeholder objectives while developing people with diverse backgrounds and project experiences. This is key to enable more agile teams that have the tools and mindsets—and examples from leaders—to anticipate and respond to change effectively. In addition, agencies must dismiss the notion that the best leader is the most senior—or the loudest—person in the room. After all, new tools make it easier than ever to connect to untapped and nontraditional leaders.

3 SUPPORT: PROVIDE A SAFETY NET

Team-based change in the federal environment is unlikely to grow organically on its own. Agencies must put support structures in place to cultivate it. This includes things like building collaborative work environments that naturally influence team dynamics. After all, open workspaces promote collaboration. Agencies can also provide specific resources to help teams develop a change-based mindset. This should include articulating new skillsets and how to develop them, identifying realistic goals and providing training that supports the teams while holding individuals accountable for their personal change agendas. Frequent interaction between all levels of a team ensure teammates understand their role, feel valued by the organization and can give feedback.

4 RECRUITMENT: GET THE PEOPLE MIX RIGHT

Given the change imperative and growing team dynamics across federal agencies, now is an excellent time to widen the aperture of federal recruitment guidelines. Instead of just encompassing specific technical abilities, they could target characteristics that lend themselves to successful team dynamics. These include things like flexibility, creativity and collaboration—all of which promote team-based change within federal. There is opportunity to supplement traditional recruitment pipelines (within the confines of federal hiring regulations) with alternative venues to increase the talent pool and train hiring managers to evaluate applicant change readiness and recruit internally.

5 INCENTIVES: REWARD TEAMS

Team-based work demands team-based rewards. In the federal space, it is not realistic to replace individually-based incentive structures. However, agencies can still build informal incentive and reward structures focused on teams. To do this, agencies should begin by exploring the motivations of specific teams and then diversify rewards based on what the team members value. In addition to supporting team-based changes, approaches like this go a long way toward creating and strengthening results-based organizations where rewards are tied to outcomes.

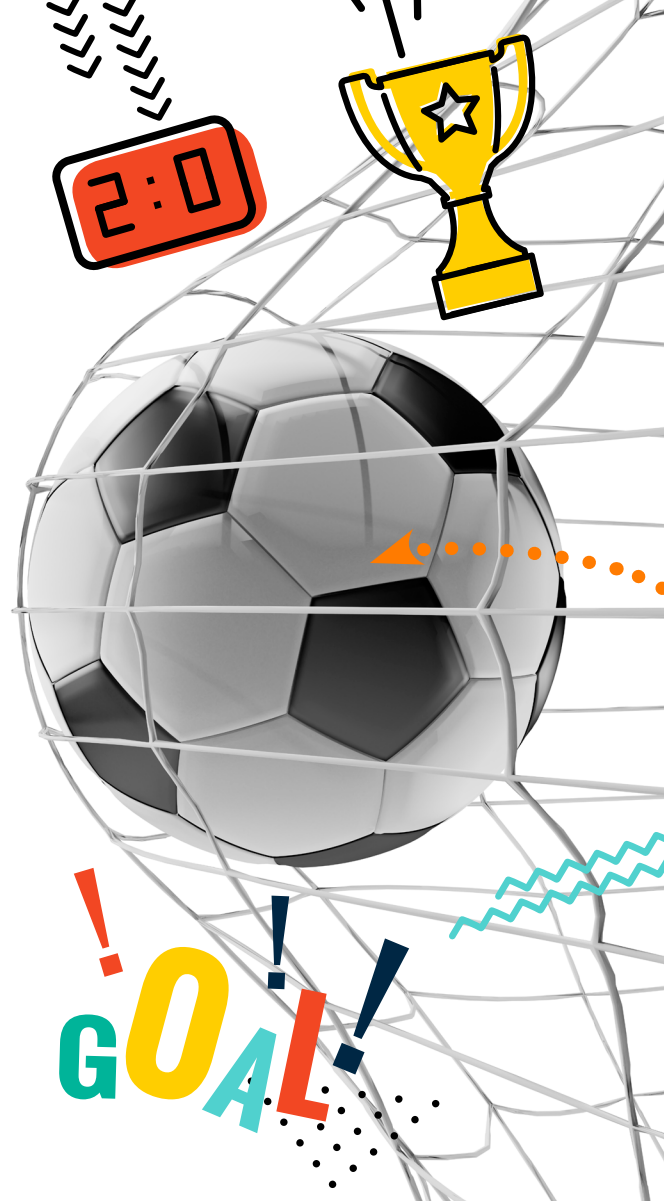
WINNING AT CHANGE *Together*

There is no getting around the fact that federal agencies need the capacity for continuous change, and that change-readiness is only going to become increasingly important at all levels of government. The place to start is with change management grounded in workplace teams. New ways of working demand new ways of teaming rooted in a mindset that sees change as an opportunity, not an obstacle.

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METHODOLOGY

The Eagle Hill Consulting Federal Workplace Culture Survey 2019 was conducted online by Government Business Council between May and June 2019. The online survey included federal workers from a random sample of civilian and military respondents across the United States. The survey polled respondents on aspects of culture including leadership, core values, employee satisfaction, employee experience, and teamwork.

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